

Baby Love wins hearts, help

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Though 3-month-old Baby Love cannot see light, she has certainly felt love.

As the runt of a litter of nine in which three puppies did not survive, this red heeler puppy was born at Justin Animal Control Center. After a few weeks, Suzanne Cole, Justin's animal control officer and animal services supervisor, noticed that Baby Love was lagging behind her siblings developmentally. Besides being unable to see and making strange movements, she contracted ringworm, which persuaded Cole to go above and beyond the call of duty.

"I took Baby Love home for some special attention and to help her heal," Cole said. "She was around so many other animals [and] her immune system wasn't built up enough to stay at the kennel. I needed to take her out of her environment."

Cole's intention was to get the puppy healthy enough to take her back to the shelter.

Cole began as a volunteer with the Justin Animal Shelter when she and her husband, Steve, moved to Justin from the Dallas area nearly five years ago. In 2006, she became a full-time city employee. With the help of a part-time employee and volunteers, she takes care of numerous dogs and cats that become lost or are dumped. She has even picked up a rooster or two. She uses every option available to reunite animals with their families.

"The city is very lucky to have her," said Virginia Blevins, Justin city secretary. "Suzanne has done a great job. She's also added many new programs with opportunities for the community to get involved with the shelter."

At six weeks, Baby Love's five brothers were adopted, so Cole didn't want to return her to the shelter. She decided to add to her own brood of five dogs. With husband Steve's understanding, the Goles became Baby Love's adopted family.

"I always say that Steve allows me to pursue my passion, and [taking care of animals] is my passion in life. My maternal instincts go to the dogs," said



SUZANNE COLE, PHOTO CORRESPONDENT

Fans of Baby Love, a sweet puppy with hydroencephalus, are raising funds for the surgery that will cure the pup's malady.

Cole. "They are like our children ..."

Cole spent countless hours researching Baby Love's behavior and calling specialists. She took the puppy to a local neurological specialist who told her that the dog was indeed blind and having seizures. The veterinarian thought she might have hydrocephalus, often referred to as "water on the brain," which can be corrected by surgery.

First, Baby Love needed to get a brain MRI to confirm the diagnosis.

"Once I found out that it might be possible to reverse [her condition], I needed to do it," Cole said. "Not doing it wasn't an option." Then she learned that the MRI would cost nearly \$3,000.

"The only thing I could do was to find a way to gather the funds, get the MRI and hope for the best," she said.

She designed a blog that presented Baby Love's story.

"I got the idea for a blog plea from Gus' adoptive mom," she said. Gus is one of Baby Love's

brothers. "It reached so many people that we raised \$1,300 and the majority was from strangers."

Cole is humbled by those who gave so much.

"In a way, I knew that this would happen," she said. "Call it karma, but I knew people would reach out."

Then, she came upon Animal Imaging in Irving, who provided her with a cheaper MRI. Now that the test has confirmed that Baby Love is suffering from hydrocephalus, Cole is updating the blog to raise \$3,500 for the puppy's brain surgery.

To make donations, you may visit any Wells Fargo Bank and tell them it's for the "Baby Love Fund." Go to www.helpbabylove.blogspot.com and learn more about Baby Love and her condition. Make checks out to the "Baby Love Fund" and mail them to: Baby Love Fund, P.O. Box 692, Rhome, TX 76078. For those who have a PayPal account, go to the Web site, select "Send Money" and send it to Serrers7991@yahoo.com.