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If they had a million dollars: What NJ charities could do with a Mega Millions windfall



It had us humming the Barenaked Ladies song “If I Had \$1000000,” when the Powerball jackpot reached \$1 billion this week.

Then it hit us: We can all dream about striking gold – the private jets, the trips to Tahiti. But another thought came to mind: Back here, in the real world, there's a lot of need. So what could the neediest do with that kind of windfall?

Ahead of Friday night's drawing for a \$720 million Mega Millions jackpot, NorthJersey.com posed a question to local charities: What would you do if you were given a million dollars?

Not surprisingly, the answers had more to do with shelters, scholarships, animal rescues and other nuts-and-bolts needs than champagne and caviar. Here's a look at some of the answers we received:



loving homes,” said Communications Director Diane Ashton.

In addition to providing adoption counseling, St. Hubert’s works to “help animals stay with their families” by providing pet food banks and emergency pet boarding.

“We also host free vaccination clinics and arrange for free spay and neuter services to assist underserved pet owners in their own communities. If our organization had a million dollars, we would love to expand these programs to help more pets and people in New Jersey communities,” said Ashton.

Stop wasting food

Saddle Brook’s Table to Table says it’s New Jersey’s first food rescue organization. Its volunteers retrieve healthy and fresh perishable food from grocery stores, food distributors and restaurants that no longer need it and then delivers it to hundreds of organizations like food pantries, senior centers and schools.

Since its inception in 1999, Table to Table says, the group has rescued and distributed the equivalent of more than 214 million meals and saved nearly 107,000 tons of potentially wasted food from landfills.

“If Table to Table won the Powerball, we would deliver more food to hungry neighbors in need, expand our app, Table to Table I-Rescue, and collaborate on solutions to alleviate food insecurity throughout New Jersey.” Denise Andersen, the organization’s executive director, told us.

Serving those with 'visible and invisible disabilities'

Easterseals New Jersey is “deeply committed to enriching the lives of individuals with visible and invisible disabilities,” said Anysa Holder, chief advancement officer in its Jamesburg office.



independence with our assistance,” Holder said.

Easterseals offers a range of programs such as disability services, medical rehabilitation, autism services and veteran support.

“Additionally, we would invest in our work centers, expanding them to include trade-specific areas. This expansion would provide adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities the opportunity to acquire new job skills, preparing them for success in the workforce,” Holder said. “Our aim is to empower them with the dignity and independence that comes from meaningful employment.”

Her wish list continued, no surprise for a group that helped more than 4,000 New Jerseyans last year.

“We would allocate additional funding to a scholarship program, specifically for our trip and travel initiatives. These programs offer adults with disabilities the chance to experience the joys of travel and exploring new places. Given the extraordinary high levels of isolation often experienced by individuals with disabilities, these activities have a profound impact on their quality of life and mental well-being.”

A helping hand for seniors

At \$22,000 a month, food is the biggest expense for Meals on Wheels North Jersey, a nonprofit that delivers 54,000 meals a year to seniors in 30 Bergen County towns and villages. That work requires 500 volunteer drivers, making insurance the organization’s second largest expense.

“I would have a fund for people who could not afford their meals,” said the group’s executive director, Jeanne Martin, who added that visits from her drivers often serve as a “safety check.” Volunteers watch for signs of depression, abuse or other problems that can arise with seniors living in isolation.



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