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Compassionate Kids



Perhaps you're wondering, "I'm just one kid. How can I make a difference for animals?" Throughout history, the power of one ordinary person has sometimes changed the world in extraordinary ways. The inspiring kids in this chapter used compassion to help combat cruelty and assist homeless animals.

After you read their stories, think about ways you can help to make a difference for animals. The list of Things You Can Do Today at the end of this chapter will give you some ideas.

To the Rescue

Middle school students in Louisville, Kentucky, are showing two Pit Bulls that life can be cushy despite a “ruff” start. In February 2007, dogs were taken from an illegal dog-fighting ring at Bad Newz Kennels, owned by former NFL quarterback Michael Vick. The 22 Pit Bulls were renamed Victory dogs and are being cared for and retrained at Best Friends Animal Society in Kanab, Utah. Now, these battered dogs are learning the joys of playtime and hugs.



When Krista’s class read a newspaper article about the pooches, the kids sprang into action. These students could also be considered underdogs. They have moderate physical and mental disabilities. That doesn’t stop them from volunteering at a local shelter three days per week—a good deed they’ve been performing for six years.

The class decided to sponsor Little Red, a shy male Pit Bull. They also sent a care package to Georgia, a breeding dog who had all of her teeth pulled out. “We would love to send her a care package with toys and soft blankets and cards just to let her know how sorry we are for what she had to endure,” Krista’s class explains. “We want her to know that people all over this country care about her and want her to feel loved and safe.”

Thanks to these special students, Little Red’s and Georgia’s hearts are healing along with their wounds.

Some Class Acts

The students at St. Catherine LaBoure School in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, learned a lesson in kindness thanks to their involvement in Caring Classroom/Helping Hands, a community and service learning project for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The eighth graders decided to adopt an animal rescue group as a pet project. They became animal angels for homeless dogs at Furry Friends Network, a group that rescues animals.

Students collected more than \$1,100 in donations by holding a spare change drive and a pet photo contest. They collected wish list items such as pet toys and treats. And they helped host a very successful dog walkathon. Marissa says, "I learned how fun it is to volunteer. A lot of us in the eighth grade love animals. It's so nice to be able to help them."

Tony, another student, says, "We produce a closed-circuit television broadcast at our school. Sometimes the foster animals from Furry Friends come on our news program. One time I got to hold a puppy when I was doing the weather report. His name was Riley, and he was a Labrador Retriever mix. That's my best memory."

These dedicated eighth graders learned about pet care, pet overpopulation, volunteering, and fund-raising. Now they're teaching their schoolmates about caring for pets, bite prevention, and how to help homeless pets.

Students who attend the Theater Arts Production Company School in the Bronx, New York, are known for their creativity. Just before Christmas in 2006, the school's Tech Squad members used their imaginations to brainstorm a fund-raiser. Students decided to sell a variety of stuffed animals. The Tech Squad wanted to keep prices affordable: \$4 or less. This would ensure that every student could buy a stuffed animal.

Sales of these plush creatures would help real animals. The students suggested donating proceeds to the ASPCA. "We chose to give to the ASPCA because we love animals," say Tech Squad students Amin, Marlon, and Alrinan. "They need homes and they need to be cared for, just like people."





Being theater students, the Tech Squad created a video explaining all about the ASPCA. Their video premiered at the school assembly. It was a megahit! And the fund-raiser was a smashing success. Students sold more than 350 stuffed animals. They donated \$427 to the ASPCA. Bravo, Tech Squad!

A recycling project dreamed up by fifth graders at Fairfax Elementary School in San Bernardino, California, has created ripples. The students learned that the therapy dog visiting their classroom needed therapy herself. Kindra required expensive surgeries to repair torn ligaments.

The kids decided to start a recycling project. Bottles and Cans for Kindra helped make a dent in the dog's \$6,000 vet bill. Then another school wanted in on the action. Third graders at Tokay Elementary School in Fontana, California, heard about the popular pooch and formed Friends of Kindra. They sold friendship bracelets to put another dent in the vet bill.

Others in the community have also pitched in to help pay Kindra's bill. And the incoming fifth-grade class at Fairfax Elementary School is continuing the legacy of Bottles and Cans for Kindra.

In Kansas City, Missouri, a fourth-grade class just had to take action. The students saw a photo in the local newspaper of a group of skinny Foxhounds with sad eyes. These neglected dogs had been seized from a man in Kansas City.

The kids started a campaign called Give Money for Food for Those Tail Waggin' Dudes. They publicized the Foxhounds with fliers and announcements over the school intercom. Kindergarteners broke open their piggy banks, and other students and neighborhood folks dug deep into their pockets. The class raised more than \$900 to enable the local shelter to care for the Foxhounds. They deserve an A+ for awesome achievement!



Saving Strays

Sadly, homeless cats and other creatures roam neighborhoods searching for food and shelter. Four siblings rescued a feline family and offered these streetwise strays a second chance. Joanne, Malcolm, Jay Frye, and Nevaeh discovered the cats in their Philadelphia backyard. There were three tiny kittens huddled in a cinderblock while their mother hunted for food.

The siblings hatched a plan. If they could catch the cats and get them to a shelter, then the feline family could be put up for adoption. The kids didn't count on the kittens leading them on a wild goose chase!

One frisky feline zoomed out of the bush, hissed and scratched, then jumped off a ledge into a trash can full of rainwater. The kids raced to save the kitten from drowning. Soon he was snuggled in a sweater.

It took an hour, but the siblings caught the entire cat family. They reflected on why the rescue was such a big deal.

Nevaeh, 5, says, "I help save cats because I love them." Jay Frye, 12, and Malcolm, 13, both explained that they save animals because they don't want to see them struggling to survive on the streets.

Their big sister, Joanne, 24, who was in charge of the rescue operation, says, "I see so many people mistreat their animals, and I wish I had the authority to do something about it. I think that one person really can make a difference, and one day I hope that's me."

These kids have already made a difference. They adopted one of the kittens they rescued.



ASPCA Day

On April 10, animal lovers around the world dress in orange to celebrate the anniversary of the ASPCA. Even the Empire State Building in New York City is lit up in orange—the society’s official color—to celebrate its founding way back in 1866.

In Añasco, Puerto Rico, an entire school went orange on ASPCA Day. Students of Parcelas Marias Elementary School learned about the ASPCA’s mission to save animals. The young animal lovers read a story about a boy who adopted a homeless puppy. They discussed animal cruelty and agreed that people need to be responsible by protecting animals around the world.

Then students showed their true colors. The kids tied orange yarn around their wrists. They created anticruelty signs and dipped their hands in paint to decorate the signs with oodles of orange handprints.

In Red Bank, New Jersey, Shaylyn went all out on ASPCA Day. The teen showed her spirit by wearing an ASPCA T-shirt and wristbands. She decked out her dogs in orange bandanas and enlisted her brother’s help. They paraded around the neighborhood wishing everyone a happy ASPCA Day.

The day before, Shaylyn had hand-delivered letters and wristbands to neighbors so they could celebrate the special day too. She also held an ASPCA fund-raiser at her school, passing out more wristbands to those who donated. “Most girls my age are more concerned about clothes or boys,” Shaylyn says. “I am concerned about the animals.”



Justine, 10, celebrated the 142nd birthday of the ASPCA in 2008 by giving gift bags of goodies and information about animal welfare to her class. She then delivered an informative talk about the ASPCA.

That evening, Justine held a fund-raiser and collected \$285. People also signed pledges against animal cruelty. The star of the night was a stuffed dog named Bruno, displayed alongside a poster outlining different types of animal abuse. Justine empowered her fellow animal lovers by including information about organizations to contact to help fight animal cruelty in their neighborhood.



The Business of Helping Animals

Molly might be young, but that hasn't stopped her from starting a business to help animals. The Pittman, New Jersey, 6-year-old started Molly Knox Pet Socks. Her rhyming venture recycles old socks into catnip toys.

She sells her cat toys at craft shows and donates dozens to homeless cats. With the money she makes, Molly buys animal oxygen masks and gives them to local fire departments. Her generosity ensures that animals have a chance to survive a fire.

This young businessperson has inspired adults to donate oxygen masks—ranging from kitten-sized to big enough to fit a Bull Mastiff—to fire departments in other towns. This small girl has had a big impact!

After Sharlynn heard about a therapy pooch who needed surgery, she channeled her creative talents into helping this distressed dog. Sharlynn has always had a big heart and a generous spirit. When the 12-year-old visited a local humane society in California, she saw a badly injured dog. She donated a box of pennies to help pay for medical expenses and promised to raise more money.

Later, Sharlynn learned that Havoc, a Rottweiler who is both a therapy dog and a reading assistance dog, needed costly surgery. The dog had a tumor and her surgery would cost more than her family could afford.



This spurred Sharlynnne to start Crosses 4 Critters. She designed and created beaded crosses and other jewelry, raising \$200. But she didn't stop there. Sharlynnne inspired her community to raise more than \$14,000 for Havoc's surgery. Recently, Havoc celebrated her 10th birthday and is back at work.

Crosses 4 Critters continues raising money to help creatures in need of veterinary care. Sandy, the cat of a 92-year-old woman, got the surgery she needed, thanks to Sharlynnne's efforts.

Jillian celebrated her Bat Mitzvah in a delicious way when she turned 12 years old. She decided to raise money for EmanciPET, a nonprofit spay/neuter clinic in her hometown of Austin, Texas. Jillian began baking and selling yummy treats for people and their pooches.

Orders poured in, and the young baker didn't stop until she made 70 bags of cookies and 54 bags of dog treats! "I had to be diligent in order to raise the funds to achieve our goal," Jillian says. "One of my sponsors, Nora Lieberman, helped out by eating all the rejected cookies."

Perhaps Jillian's pooch, Feebee, ate the rejected dog treats. A photo of Jillian and Feebee graced the label on her treats. She raised nearly \$5,000 to help combat the pet overpopulation problem in Texas.

"Jillian is a great example of how anyone can make a difference for animals, and how young philanthropists are changing the world," says Amy Mills, executive director of EmanciPET. "Her story shows that it's not your age or the size of your bank account that matters—it's your creativity and passion for helping animals."



When Disaster Strikes

When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, it turned into a double disaster. The wind and rain did terrible damage. Then the local lake flooded and residents had to leave their homes. Many were forced to leave their pets behind.

Many kids worried about the thousands of lost and injured pets roaming New Orleans after the hurricane. Isabelle wanted to help the homeless animals, but what could an 8-year-old in Washington State do?

Plenty, it turned out. Isabelle got a local store to donate boxes of dog biscuits. Then she partnered with Cingo, her Labrador Retriever–Blue Heeler mix, to sell the treats. Together they raised \$200 for the ASPCA Disaster Relief Fund. Four paws up for this team!

Math, science, and drafting were put to the test when students in the Design and Challenge program in Charlottesville, Virginia, decided to help dogs who lost their homes after Hurricane Katrina. Fifth through eighth graders took a professional approach. First, they learned about the weather in Mississippi and Louisiana. Then they enlisted the help of local carpenters, architects, and other construction professionals. Finally, the students designed and built 125 dog houses.

The kids coined a new word—*barkitecture*—to describe their unique creations. One resembles a bright red fire truck complete with wheels and ladder. The Princess Dog House is a castle fit for a female canine. The Sphinx is pyramid shaped. There's even the Thomas Jefferson Monticello, updated with solar-powered lights and heat sensors for a pooch with political aspirations!

All of the dog dwellings were donated to animal rescue groups on the Gulf Coast. The students say, "We're very proud of our work and we would like to keep helping dogs in the future."



Animals with Special Needs

Many rabbits are dumped in the weeks following Easter because, unlike a chocolate bunny, real rabbits require special care. Shoji, 19, discovered an abandoned domestic rabbit in his Torrance, California, backyard. When he caught the brown bunny, Shoji discovered that his rear legs were paralyzed.

Shoji decided to adopt this bunny with special needs and named him Roger. The teen lovingly cares for Roger, exercising his hind legs and giving him what rabbit caregivers call “butt baths.” He even goes home between classes to change Roger’s bunny diaper! Roger’s veterinarian praised Shoji’s dedication, saying he is more dedicated than some parents.

Shoji explains why he is so devoted to Roger. “If you decide to accept living things into your home or family, you should take care and never ever abandon them for being who they are. Take responsibility. If you are thinking of getting a rabbit or any animal, adopt them from a local animal shelter.”



RabbitMatch, a shelter that rescues and finds new homes for house rabbits, featured Roger’s story in its newsletter. Two women from Heartland Rabbit Rescue in Oklahoma read it and called Shoji. Their disabled bunny, Murphy, had died recently, and the women wanted to donate his wheels to Roger.

The women had bought a tiny cart designed to help paralyzed dogs walk. Shoji's dad helped adjust the miniature cart, guaranteeing that Roger will be able to zip around faster than a jackrabbit. This big-spirited bunny won the rabbit lottery when he hopped into Shoji's heart!

Did you know that cats with white fur and blue eyes may be born deaf? When Erika adopted 3-year-old Snowflake from the Rescue House in San Diego, she knew her new pet faced a special challenge. Deaf cats can be scared, confused, or grouchy. However, they learn to rely on their super senses of smell and touch (especially with their whiskers) to get around.

Twelve-year-old Erika relied on vibrations to communicate with her new cat. "Snowflake doesn't hear, but she feels vibrations. When I enter the room, I slam the door very hard. She feels the vibration, turns around, and sees me coming. Stomping my feet also works," she says. "If Snowflake is sleeping on my bed, I slowly enter the room and gently rock the bed. She then wakes up and sees me."

Erika is also teaching Snowflake hand signals. "She's learned that if I hit my leg, she should come." It will be interesting to see what else Snowflake can learn.



Penning a Protest

When was the last time you were passionate about preparing for an exam? When Fiona Paterna prepared her seventh-grade classes for writing persuasive essays, she switched on the television. Students in West Deptford Middle School in New Jersey watched *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. The April 2008 episode investigated the secret world of puppy mills—commercial farms where puppies are bred in large numbers for sale in pet stores.

The shocking conditions the mother dogs endure as they give birth to more and more puppies for pet store profits upset Paterna's students. "It's just not right," says Summer. "They don't get fed enough or walked on grass, and they're skinny as anything."

Thomas agrees. "It was sad how they treated these dogs. I was like, 'Wow, how could they do that?' It should change."

All 36 students tried to change things using the power of the pen. They wrote letters to state officials demanding that changes be made to the state law to make it tougher on puppy mills.

The seventh graders didn't stop there. They made T-shirts with the slogan "Stop Puppy Mills." Then they put on the shirts and filmed their own segment for Oprah Winfrey, mailing the tape along with a T-shirt. Give those students an A+ for a great group effort!



Learning More

Twice a year, a new generation of animal advocates can spend a week at the ASPCA Mini-Camp for Kids. Kids ages 7 and up gather at the Staten Island Children's Museum. There they discover how to harness kid power to benefit animals in New York. Campers learn about the role of animals in our lives, being prepared for disasters, shelter animals, pet training, and more.



Special guests at a recent camp included the Smile Retrievers—four Golden Retriever therapy dogs who helped comfort victims of the World Trade Center terrorist attack. Dogs Jake, Jesse, Mattie, and Macie demonstrated how wagging tails have the power to heal broken hearts.

In fact, Victoria and Christina spread a lot of cheer with their smiling Goldens. Instead of hitting the mall on weekends, the sisters visit sick children and grieving families with the Smile Retrievers.

The Delta Society, an organization that tests and certifies therapy animals and their human partners, certified both girls as junior dog handlers. This allows them to participate in pet partner programs with their four dogs. Victoria, 11, and Christina, 13, say that seeing their Goldens bring smiles to sad faces “is a wonderful thing.”

Victoria and Christina say they plan to continue community service with their dogs “forever.” They hope that their enthusiasm about volunteering inspires more of their friends and schoolmates to also get involved. Now that’s a lesson those campers won’t forget!

Things You Can Do Today to Make a Difference

- Brainstorm a fund-raiser with your class. How about a Dog Day Afternoon in a local park with fun activities such as a pet and person look-alike contest, a doggy relay race, or a paw-paint art gallery? Sell tickets and donate the profits to a humane society. Don't forget to advertise well in advance by hanging posters and contacting the media.
- If there's an animal shelter or sanctuary near your school, ask school officials if your class can tour it during a field trip. Set up a donation box a week in advance to collect food and toys.
- Celebrate ASPCA Day throughout the year by reading books about animals to younger students. Go to www.asPCA.org/bibliography for a list of hundreds of books about animals that the ASPCA recommends. Pick stories that emphasize treating animals with respect and kindness.
- Partner with your well-behaved pet to visit patients in hospitals and nursing homes. Join a visiting pet group to get involved. (People and animals who participate in pet therapy need to be tested and registered through the Delta Society, www.deltasociety.org, Therapy Dogs International, www.tdi-dog.org, or another group.)
- Invite a humane educator or other animal welfare official, such as an animal control officer, to give a presentation at your school. Find out how you can help prevent and report cruelty to animals. (See www.asPCA.org/cruelty to learn how to report animal cruelty in your area.)
- Speak up for animals. Make posters encouraging people to adopt a homeless pet from the shelter. Design a bulletin board featuring photos and brief bios of adoptable pets (remember to update it weekly). Set up an information table with ideas (such as these!) about things your classmates can do to make a difference for animals in your community. Write letters to your school newspaper about animal issues.