



How You Can Help

What Teens Can Do: Youth Service within the Animal Welfare Movement

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An Overview

Community service is a great way for teens to get a lot of bang out of a bit of free time. It's an opportunity to learn new things, to make friends, and to help others—people and animals alike (plus it looks really good on college applications). All told, service related activities are a way for young people to help further the causes they're committed to and to have a voice and a presence in their communities. With that in mind, we've put together a primer on how teens with a love for animals can lend a hand within the animal welfare movement. We've also included some profiles of youths and youth organizations that are doing their part to help save animal lives.

Note: Unfortunately, teens may find that some organizations hesitate to offer them volunteer jobs because of their age. SERVENet, a website for service and volunteering, has posted an article, "Service if You're Under 18," on how to surmount this barrier and how

to approach the overall process of volunteering. Please check it out. You'll find it at www.servenet.org in the "News" section.

How to Find Volunteer Opportunities

First and foremost, you should contact one of your local animal welfare organizations (they should be listed in the Yellow Pages under "Animals" or "Humane Society"). Volunteers of all ages are desperately needed to walk, groom, feed, and help care for the animals. You might also want to ask if they have any particular needs (such as pet food, blankets, and other supplies) and design a project around those needs.

You could also check online to see if animal welfare groups have posted requests for volunteers in your area. Here are a few general websites to begin with:

www.volunteermatch.org

www.ysa.org

www.servenet.org

www.craigslist.org

A search for something along the lines of "animal volunteers" or "animal advocacy" should help you come up with additional sites and possibly some national organizations calling for volunteers in several states.

Forming an Animal Welfare Club/ Working Animal Welfare Issues into an Existing Club

The hardest part of forming an animal welfare club is finding a good leader. Again, you might want to contact local animal groups—they may already have a club for teens or be interested in starting a club of some sort. Also, if you know an adult (perhaps a teacher or youth leader) who's knowledgeable about animal rights/welfare, you could ask them if they would be willing to help you start a club. The benefit of having a club to work with, as opposed to volunteering on your own, is that you have friends to support you, keep you motivated, and help you come up with innovative ideas that could really make a lifesaving difference within your community.

That said, if you're already involved in a club such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4H, or another youth group, you may want to try to find a way to work some animal-related activities into your group meetings

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or to devise new awards (i.e., animal service merit badges) to recognize members who are striving to help animals through their volunteer efforts. Similarly, if your school requires that you fulfill a certain community service requirement before graduation, you could propose that the members of your class do something to assist local animal shelters. The main thing is that you get involved and encourage others to do the same. The more people you make aware of the plight of shelter animals, and of the shelters themselves, the more effect you'll have.

Activities that Promote Animal Causes

In the Classroom—

The Best Friends Animal Sanctuary's Schoolhouse provides a variety of ideas and resources for students (and teachers) interested in helping animals. Some of their suggestions for students include:

1. Prepare a report or speech for your class about an animal welfare issue and/or about responsible pet care.
2. Ask your teacher if the class can start a letter writing project. Talk to animal welfare organizations about why most animals are being turned over to shelters. Write letters to your local and state government officials and to newspapers to raise awareness of these factors. Make a bulletin board in a high traffic area of your school to draw other students' attention to these issues.
3. Volunteer to help younger students with reading and focus on stories that advocate helping animals and treating them with respect and kindness.

You might also want to look into having a school-wide animal welfare related assembly, or you could request school field trips to animal shelters or sanctuaries. If a large number of students show interest in and are committed to helping organize such events, school officials should at least be willing to hear you out. Start a petition, draw up a proposal (including suggestions as to how the event might work and reasons why it is of importance to students), and present it to those in charge of setting up assemblies and/or field trips. Get student government and extra-curricular service groups involved.

In Your Community—

As we said previously, one of the best things you can do is to get in

touch (and stay in touch) with your local animal shelter. Shelters are often in need of supplies and more often in need of additional funding. Offer to hold a blanket or food drive or to organize a fundraiser. Have a bake sale, set up a booth at a community-wide festival, put together a miniature golf or bowling tournament, or host a block party aimed at gathering donations. Be creative and make the fundraising process fun for all involved—the results will amaze you. And the money collected can be used to sponsor spay/neuter programs or to meet some of the needs of your local animal shelter. That said, if you host such an event, you should be sure to share your successes by letting those who contributed know just what their money and efforts have made possible.

Here are some other ideas to get you going:

1. If you know an elderly person or someone with an illness who may need help caring for their pet, volunteer your services. By helping to feed, walk, groom, and pick up after their dog or cat, you may enable them to keep a pet they might otherwise have to send to a shelter.
2. Create a bulletin board for your grocery store, school, library, or other popular area with pictures of adoptable animals and contact information for the shelters at which they can be found. "Adopt" a specific shelter and give frequent updates on the animals they're housing.
3. Make fliers and/or posters about the importance of spaying and neutering, adopting rather than purchasing pets, or other important animal welfare issues and about how to help stop the killing of healthy, adoptable animals in our nation's shelters. Ask to post them in neighborhood stores, in vets' offices, and/or on community bulletin boards.

In Your Home—

Get your family involved in your volunteer activities. Invite your relatives to visit their local animal shelter or sanctuary and encourage them to lend a hand with the daily tasks involved in keeping it running. Ask them to help you with some of the classroom or community activities listed above. Comb through the "How You Can Help" section of the Maddie's Fund website, particularly the articles "[Projects for Kids and Moms](#)" and "[A 9 Step Program for Saving Lives](#)," and set a few goals that the group of you would like to meet. Through working together and spreading the word as a family, you can accomplish a lot.

Youth/Teen Volunteer Profiles

Several encouraging stories have recently come to our attention, and we thought they might give you a sense of just how much you can accomplish if you set your mind to it.

In December, SERVENet, a website devoted to service and volunteering, featured three teens who are attempting to make a difference through their volunteer efforts. One of the teens, Lindsey Walker, a fourteen year old from North Branford, Connecticut, created a website to draw more attention to the adoptable pets in her area. Each week for two years running, she's gone to the pound to take pictures of the animals, in hopes of helping to bring in more prospective adopters. So far, she's managed to help more than 200 animals find loving homes. To check out Lindsey's website, go to www.petspal.com.

Eryn Wisdom, a middle school student living in Omaha, Nebraska, hoped to volunteer at the humane society shelter near her home. But the shelter made it clear that it wouldn't make any exceptions to its policy that volunteers must be at least 15 years old. Not one to be deterred when so many animals are in need of loving homes, Eryn came up with another way to help the shelter—she's going to be writing a regular column about its animals for the "Voice for Teens" page of Omaha's *Morning World Herald*. As the shelter's Director of Public Relations pointed out, whether or not the featured animals are adopted, the stories will inspire more people to visit the shelter and to consider adopting, rather than purchasing, their next pet.

This past holiday season, John Muir Middle School's 4-F (Fur, Fins, Fangs, and Feathers) Club held a pet food drive for the Friends of Fairmont Animal Shelter in San Leandro, California. They collected dozens of cans of cat food and boxes of dog biscuits for the shelter, hoping to bring people's attention to the needs of shelter animals and to involve them in a special form of holiday gift giving. The 35-member club meets twice a month to learn about responsible guardianship of animals and to garner valuable pet-related insights from different animal professionals in their area.

Actually, the last story is about a fourth grade class in Kansas City. Now, we know that teens don't like to be lumped in with younger kids, but we wanted to include this story to demonstrate that 1) sometimes youth can work to your advantage and 2) a group of fourth graders may be making you teens look bad (you wouldn't want that, would you?). In any case, the class saw a newspaper photo of a group of

neglected foxhounds that were rescued from a local man. Saddened by the picture, the fourth graders decided they wanted to do something to help. Through their "Give Money for Food for Those Tail Waggin' Dudes" campaign, they were able to bring in over nine hundred dollars for the shelter caring for the dogs. How did they do it? They handed out fliers, made announcements over the school intercom, and set up a table to collect money each day of their five-day campaign. They received money from everyone from kindergarteners with piggy banks in hand to neighborhood people who didn't even have children at the school, and they brought in four and a half times their initial fundraising goal. For the full article, go to

<http://www.kcstar.com/item/pages/local.pat.local/37750bae.111,.html>.

Teens can make a difference. Simply by talking to people about animal welfare issues, you're helping. And getting out there and doing your part to help save animal lives is a way of taking that a step further and showing people that you're really devoted to advancing those issues. In fact, it sends them a message that maybe they should give animals some more thought. As fourteen year old Lindsey Branford said in regard to her website, Pets Pal, the toughest part was getting people to believe her. "Every week for the past two years, I've gone to the pound to take photos," she said. "I think now I'm finally being taken seriously." Follow Lindsey's example and don't let anybody tell you that your age prevents you from contributing to the animal welfare movement. After all, you're its future.

Join the All-Maddie Team!

If you're a teen volunteer working with animal organizations, write an essay describing what you're doing and how you're doing it and [e-mail](#) or [snail mail](#) it to us. For doing your bit to help animals, we'll make you an official member of the All-Maddie Team and send you a genuine All-Maddie t-shirt free of charge.