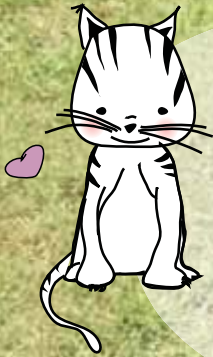


Recruit Them While They're Young!



Children have a natural bond with animals, which makes them natural supporters of your work to save homeless pets. Help keep that bond alive by providing avenues for them to help you—whether inside the shelter or through ancillary fundraising and volunteer projects—and by nurturing it through a strong humane education program. After all, the future is theirs to shape, and you can help them make it more animal-friendly.



Amber Ginter plays with shelter dog Lilac after giving her a bath at the Ross County Humane Society in Ohio.

♥ Kids Rock!

How the young and the restless can bring their energy to your shelter

BY DEBBIE SWANSON

We know: You're tired. You're overwhelmed. There's just too much to do. The dogs are barking. The cats are hungry. The kennels need cleaning. The shelter's Facebook page needs updating. Don't you wish you had the same energy you had when you were a kid? Don't you wish they bottled that vigor and sold it at CVS?

Well, we can't sell you a bottle of Kid Pep. But you can obtain some of that youthful enthusiasm in a very simple way: By recruiting young people—kids, teens, college students—to help your organization and its animals.

Young volunteers can be a dream come true for shelter and rescue folks strapped for time (can you show us any who aren't?). Brimming with energy and compassion, kids will readily embrace a project that's been languishing on your back burner, relieve a busy staffer who needs help with a routine job, or even develop fundraising ideas all on their own.

For many students, just knowing they helped homeless animals is satisfaction enough. But for others, altruism has other rewards: The student can earn academic credit, rack up community service hours, or win scouting accolades, while your shelter reaps the benefit of their efforts—and sends a young person out into the world with some hands-on humane education.

Read on for some heartwarming stories of kids—from children to young adults—who have made a difference for animals, as well as tips on how to put their can-do attitude to use for you.

Scouting Supporters

Both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts can achieve high-ranking awards by spearheading a significant community project.

The dogs at the Connecticut Humane Society don't know much about awards, but if they did, they'd definitely give one to Travis Madore, of Southington, Conn. Madore approached the shelter in the winter of 2011 to discuss projects he could do to earn his Eagle Scout award, the highest honor for a Boy Scout.

"We worked together on an idea," says Alicia Wright, public relations director at the shelter. "We suggested an agility course, which he discussed with his troop and then settled upon."

Madore, along with his peers and troop leaders, spent more than 100 hours planning and constructing the outdoor obstacle and agility course for the Newington shelter's fenced-in dog play area. Madore's efforts have kept many a dog fit and busy while awaiting a new home.



Regan Malinzak and Emma Sznawajs of Michigan (ably assisted here by Betsey the dog) formed their own charity, K9 Club Cares. The girls make felt chew toys for dogs, which they sell, donating the money to animal welfare groups.

In Houston, Girl Scout Lindsey Connors earned the Girl Scouts' top honor by making sure foster animals got off to a good start. Connors was honored with a Gold Award after she spent 100 hours overseeing and creating care packages for foster caregivers with Citizens for Animal Protection, a Houston animal shelter. Packages were laden with food, hand-sewn toys, and blankets.

Citizens for Animal Protection embraces such scout-driven projects, reports volunteer coordinator Darci McFerran. "The Girl Scouts are amazing. I have the benefit of working with them throughout the year, and it's touching what they do for us. They're always trying to go one step beyond, so we receive tons of food, treats, and packages. Honestly, I wonder if we could even function without the projects they do for us."





In 2010, college student Catherine Scheuch developed a fundraiser for the Griffin Pond Animal Shelter in Pennsylvania; the silicone bracelets she sold raised around \$1,700 for the animals.

Other scouting badges and accolades require lower levels of involvement from scouts, ranging from conducting a one-time effort such as a food drive, to a weekend project, such as helping with landscape improvements.

Connors was in high school when she conducted her project; other scouts may be in elementary or middle school. But you don't have to turn younger kids away: Even if your shelter requires on-site volunteers to be over a certain age, you can steer younger volunteers toward a project held mainly off-site: food, toy, or towel drives; or fundraisers such as a raffle or bake sale. To avoid squelching their enthusiasm, your volunteer coordinator or humane education manager can maintain a list of several off-site ideas to propose to younger volunteers. At the Connecticut Humane Society, younger volunteers have held "Pennies for Pets" collections, asked for shelter donations in lieu of birthday presents, thrown bake sales, hosted lemonade stands and food drives, and biked and walked for charity events, says Wright.

If younger scouts are intent on doing an on-site project, they might team up with a staffer, parent, or troop leader who can supervise their efforts. A responsible adult should sign paperwork and fulfill any volunteer prerequisites, as well as accompany the kids on visits.

Go Back to High School

Many high schools require students to fulfill a certain number of community service hours as a prerequisite to graduation. But beyond that, high school students may come forward looking for a teambuilding project, to get a taste of a career with animals, or simply to enjoy some furry companionship.

The Griffin Pond Animal Shelter in Clarks Summit, Pa., frequently takes on projects with high school volunteers. Kate Andrews, assistant director at the shelter, says her shelter is grateful for the energy and enthusiasm of the area's young people.

"We've seen an amazing number of things that students have come up with: a golf tournament run by the golf team from Lakeland High School; a karate school in Abington held a Kick-a-Thon, collecting pledges per kick," says Andrews. "We've also benefited from student-run art shows, volleyball tournaments, spaghetti dinners, pet photo contests, a flea market, and more."

Typically, Andrews says, "the students approach us with their ideas all worked out. Usually they handle everything, from having tickets or fliers printed, running the sign-up, to overseeing the event. They learn professional ways of dealing with others and getting things done."

While most student groups will work on their project independently, don't hesitate to offer support. Offer to spread the word on your website, social media, or bulletin board. Allow them the use of your office equipment, supplies, and storage areas, if needed—and, as with all volunteers, remember to thank them. Support and gratitude will go a long way to inspire other students!

College Students in a Real Animal House

College students may be the most ambitious young people your shelter will encounter. They are typically dependable and focused, and most will be at least 18. You can put their skills to work while also creating rewards that will serve them in their careers.

When Keystone College student Catherine Scheuch needed to complete a community service project as part of her honors program, she thought of the shelter where her family adopted their own beloved pets. The business and marketing major from Dunmore, Pa., spearheaded a fundraiser to create and sell colorful bracelets emblazoned with "Support a Paw" to benefit the Griffin Pond Animal Shelter. What she didn't know was how welcome her efforts would be: At the time, the shelter was battling a debt of \$200,000.

"Once I started approaching stores and veterinary hospitals, sales really took off. People were very receptive, and my confidence grew," says Scheuch, who eventually raised \$1,700. "It was great to help them out when they needed it."

"The students who purchased bracelets have something tangible to show that they support a good cause," says Andrews. "To the animals, it means a real improvement in comfort and quality of life—when we see 'pep in the step' of the injured dog that was able to receive emergency vet care after being hit by a car, or the cat that gets relief from sore teeth or infected ears and begins to eat and play normally."

Older kids—like this volunteer at the Richardson Animal Shelter in Texas—can often be great help around the shelter facility as dog walkers or cat socializers. And you may get lucky enough to find someone with photography skills, a major boon for your shelter's adoption listings!



Keeping Kids—and Your Shelter—Safe

Always check into your state and local regulations for specifics about working with volunteers. In general, shelter experts offer the following guidelines:

- On-site volunteers under 18 should be accompanied by an adult.
- Obtain a photo and name release before publishing information about any volunteer's efforts.
- A parent or guardian should sign paperwork (including waivers) for volunteers under 18.
- Provide frequent training sessions to bring new volunteers up to speed.



None of this, she adds, could have happened without the assistance of Scheuch and other young folks like her, who've found creative ways to help.

Internal Assistance

Internships provide another opportunity to work with college students. A student intern gains hands-on experience and classroom credit while working on a regular basis at your shelter. Requirements vary by college, but a student intern may commit anywhere from 10 to 30 hours per week, usually for an entire semester, and you can often find work that caters to their field. A computer science major might help with your website or Facebook presence, a marketing student can help with outreach and branding, and pre-vet and veterinary students are a natural fit as well.

The Connecticut Humane Society offers internships to students in a veterinary program, or in public relations and marketing.

"Many student interns have been brilliant," says Wright. "We've had student veterinary technicians work under the supervision of our veterinary staff, [doing] duties that fall under the general job description of a professional veterinary technician. Interns in the public relations department have assisted us in many of our regular public relations duties like issuing press releases, compiling pet-of-the-week information for the local papers, or event coordination."

Knowing what you're getting into is key to working with interns, Wright says. "Do your research to make sure you're getting a good fit." She suggests checking a range of references, from professors to previous employers, to get a feel for how the student reacts in different situations.

Student hours, responsibilities, and requirements are usually set by the school, so expect to review the details carefully. Once all parties have come into agreement, you may be asked to sign a contract prior to the start. If you



Subhiya Hadzic, a volunteer at Richardson Animal Shelter, carefully carries a shelter “fat cat,” who weighed in at 27 pounds. (The cat was adopted and is now on a diet; he’s been suitably renamed Maximus.)

are not presented with written details of everyone’s commitment, ask for them.

You may occasionally need to reshape your ideas about what an intern can do. If it turns out that allergies (or a weak stomach!) keep them from cleaning kennels, you might get them to help out with event publicity or with your social media platforms.

Remaining flexible is another key to success, Wright says. College students are often busy—not only with school, but with work—so if you can provide working options that have some flexibility in their hours, you may get more interest. Even those students who are too busy for an internship

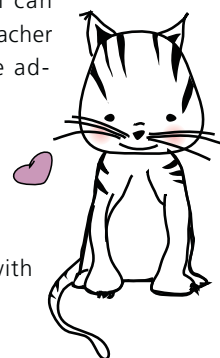
often miss their pets at home, and these young people can make excellent dog walkers or cat visitors.

Reaching Out

Many shelters are lucky enough to have a steady stream of student volunteers. But those in more remote areas—or, conversely, places populated with many worthy organizations—may not get as much interest. If that’s the case, take steps to draw some attention your way. Check with nearby high schools, colleges, and universities to see if they need outlets for community service hours, teambuilding projects, or internships.

Maintain an active presence on social media sites—they’re where a lot of young folks live these days. Frequently broadcast shelter news: longtime residents eager for a home, older or convalescing animals that would benefit from special attention, or cats wishing for a cozier bed. Keep your local paper informed, and use your current younger volunteers as resources: They may know the coffee shop or bar where a flier would catch a lot of young eyes.

Contact your local branches of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, or other clubs such as the 4-H Club or church groups. Invite leaders to bring in their group for a tour and to meet some of your friendliest animals—and remember, your humane education program can work both ways, acting as both a teacher and a recruiter for future humane advocates. Most young people love animals, and learning how to work with their energy and enthusiasm can bring new opportunities to your shelter, and help you build a group of young supporters who may be with you into adulthood. **AS**



Tips on Working with Students

Here are some tried-and-true tips for making the most of your student volunteers:

- **Safety first.** Require your on-site volunteers to attend a training session, suggests the Connecticut Humane Society’s Alicia Wright. “Young people often don’t have much fear. Provide a training course to teach them about animal body language, safety, and animal handling.”
- **Provide focus.** If a student is focused on a need that doesn’t need filling, gently redirect them. “We had a young man very motivated to gather donations of dry dog food, of which we were presently overloaded. We had to convince him to focus
- on some other, less donated, but greatly needed items,” says Kate Andrews of the Humane Society of Lackawanna County.
- **Include flexibility in scheduling.** “Today’s kids are overscheduled, juggling school, sports, jobs,” says Wright. “Asking them to commit to a set schedule can be difficult.”
- **Consider potential hurdles.** Point out your busy season or calendar conflicts. “When I first started selling my bracelets around campus, it was Thanksgiving, and I was competing with food drives,” recalls Catherine Scheuch, a college student who raised nearly \$1,700 for the Griffin Pond Animal Shelter.