



## Raising Humane Beings

Five ways to inspire kids to become animals' heroes

**The Chattahoochee** Nature Center is not far from Atlanta's hustle and bustle—a private school is across the street and a few houses can be seen from the trails. But young hikers entering the woods may feel they've landed in a remote jungle.

Even a bird swooping into the path might give these city kids a scare, says Rebecca Gilbert, the center's community programs director. Asked which animals they expect to encounter on their rustic journey, they often list the most exotic: tigers, monkeys, and lions.

But with a little enlightenment, their perspectives begin to change. If Gilbert finds a millipede under a log, kids' first in-

stinct is often to "freak out" and smush the critter. So she sprinkles some dirt on her hand and picks him up. "I let them see that it's walking around, and it's a living thing and it's pretty cool." Soon enough, the children clamor for the chance to have the critter crawl on them, too.

Such experiences typically make for healthier, smarter, and more creative kids, says Cheryl Charles, president and CEO of the Children & Nature Network. And connections with nature help them "grow up with a care for the environment, with a care for other species, for all life," she adds.

Firsthand encounters with the animal kingdom can include anything from a hike

through the woods to a visit with cats at an animal shelter to a trip to watch rescued chickens clucking and canoodling. Often a protective instinct kicks in: After attending a public ceremony to see a rehabbed pelican being released back into the wild, one child might organize a family beach outing to pick up trash. While fostering a pet from an animal shelter, another might decide to distribute literature about puppy mills to local businesses or vet's offices.

Adults shouldn't underestimate what kids can achieve. When Maya van Rossum of Bryn Mawr, Pa., told her daughter, Anneke Walsh, about the confinement of egg-laying hens in cages so small they can't spread their wings, the fourth-grader decided to educate her classmates. The following year, van Rossum encouraged Anneke to write the superintendent and school board about switching to cage-free eggs in the cafeteria. During a second presentation, Anneke narrated a slideshow on battery cages, while her mom helped field questions from the audience.

Though victory took several years, the school district eventually committed to purchasing most of its eggs from cage-free sources. In the meantime, van Rossum held practice sessions to quiz Anneke about the issue. She avoided crafting letters and slideshows herself because "it would have taken away the joy and power and independence, and the self-confidence that she was building up," she says.

It's little wonder that van Rossum—herself a Delaware Riverkeeper who fights the environmental destruction caused by factory farms—has drawn strength and inspiration from her daughter. "If you set your mind to something, you can get it done," says Anneke, now 14. "It doesn't matter how many times somebody puts up a block or tries to push you down. You just get back up and show them, 'Hey, I'm here and I'm not backing down.'"

A family-style advocacy project can be as sophisticated as lobbying for policy reform or as simple as distributing posters about the dangers of leaving dogs in hot cars. Here are five ideas for getting started.

## 1 | Sit. Stay. Learn. Recruit a pint-sized dog trainer

Allowing a child to teach is empowering, especially when the students are beloved family pets. “The kids live with the dog as much as the parents do,” says pet trainer Paula Zukoff, “and everything goes better if the dog will also respond to the cues of the children in the house.”

During Zukoff’s classes at the Animal Humane Society in Minneapolis, children learn about positive reinforcement training alongside their parents, calmly calling the animals’ names and rehearsing other techniques. “They’re learning how animals learn—that you don’t have to be mean to them to teach them something,” Zukoff says. The coaching flows in both directions; Zukoff walks the kids around to each dog, practicing commands such as sitting for a greeting.

The children love showing off new tricks they’ve taught, she adds, and completing each training level boosts their self-esteem: “A lot of kids will coach their parents on how to do it.”

## 2 | Give Them a Home Foster shelter pets and promote adoption

Kitten fostering became a family affair for an Illinois household four years ago, after Vicki Manthei agreed to care for a pregnant cat from the Aurora shelter where she volunteered. “We got to name all the kittens and watch as they became more interactive and playful, and see the different stages they went through,” Manthei says.

Her two youngest children—12-year-old Sarah and 8-year-old Emily—provide food and water and build kitty playgrounds from boxes. Sarah cleans the litter box and does her homework in the foster room so new charges get used to being around people. Emily practices the proper way to hold the animals. “She wants to be a kitty doctor when she grows up,” Manthei says.

Through the experience, her daughters have learned pets require serious commitment. “All of the work we put into

taking care of them and making sure they’re happy and healthy ... is going to make them very adoptable,” Manthei tells them, adding that each adoption makes room for more fosters.

Creative young animal lovers can devise other projects to help pets find adoptive homes. Rory Ramaliu and daughter Kiera enlisted Kiera’s Girl Scout troop on Long Island to walk black shelter dogs, using homemade bandanas to draw more attention to animals who all too often fade into the crowd. They’ve also distributed cardboard boxes—decorated with pictures of adoptable dogs and lists of needed shelter supplies—outside schools, vet’s offices, and stores.

“I don’t like seeing dogs getting hurt or put down,” says 11-year-old Kiera, “and I like putting smiles on people’s faces.”

## 3 | Life Lessons in the Backyard Celebrate Mother Nature

Jackrabbits, birds, squirrels, skunks, opossums, and the occasional coyote aren’t the only visitors to Bill and Mindy Hanks’ 2 ½-acre property in Riverside, Calif., designated an HSUS Urban Wildlife Sanctuary. Almost every weekend, their four grand-

children join the throngs delighting in this wild adventure zone.

The kids explore miniature waterfalls and a bridge that spans a gully. On the Hanks’ nature trail, “they’ll take a bucket or a bag, and go around the yard and collect whatever they can find—sticks and rocks and leaves,” says Mindy. They investigate their treasures with magnifying glasses and paint rocks with animal designs such as ladybugs. They thumb through birding books, decorate birdhouses, and hang orange slices from branches—a favorite feast for orioles—as well as pinecones covered in peanut butter and birdseed.

Kids can make their own backyards more inviting to wild creatures through small-scale housing projects. During spring nesting seasons, they can fill a netted onion bag with human and pet hair, twigs, and bits of cloth. Hung from a tree with some of the materials peeking through the openings, the goodies will be free for birds to take.

A plastic flowerpot, with a “ribbit”-sized entrance cut into the wide end, makes a cozy abode for toads when placed upside down over loosened soil topped with a layer of mulch and soggy leaves. Even stacked rocks can serve as habitat where small critters hunker down below while snakes, toads, and lizards sun themselves on the surface.



A walk through Bill and Mindy Hanks’ backyard yields a treasure trove of wonders for their grandchildren.



Dan Fiske hangs out with his buddy Clover, a resident of Winslow Farm Animal Sanctuary in Norton, Mass. Such visits can inspire kids to help create a more compassionate society for farm animals.

## 4 | Down on the Farm

Visit a sanctuary, then cook up some kindness

At Winslow Farm Animal Sanctuary, some children encounter species they know only from storybooks: Enthusiastic greeter Waterford, once taken home by the young winner of a local fair's pig racing contest, was brought to the Norton, Mass., haven when he grew to be nearly 300 pounds. Apricot arrived after her former caretaker moved; she hangs out with other goats by day but prefers bedding down in the feral cat shelter at night. And Paco the llama, once induced to move with an electrical prod, enjoys walking on a halter and lead rope.

With ample space and fellow castoffs to befriend, the 200-plus animals reveal their diverse and complex natures. Helping them along are young visitors who've been invited to dive right into the chores. They can rake manure into a pile, then watch as it's turned by a tractor to make compost, says president and founder Debra White. They can view hoof-trimming sessions for the goats, help hold animals during medical

treatments, and brush their coats. And they can marvel at the nests birds weave from materials they've picked up around the property: horse hair, emu feathers, burlap scraps, and even sheep wool that White hangs on fences for pigs and goats to take as bedding.

To celebrate these visits, families can return home and cook up an animal-free meal. Cooking author and blogger Dana Villamagna involves her wee ones in the kitchen with special kid-sized tools and a "learning tower" that safely elevates the child to counter level. The family's favorites include smoothies, yellow curry with coconut milk and garbanzo beans, and meatless tacos topped with the works: lettuce, tomatoes, olives, hot sauce, jalapenos, and vegan cheese and sour cream. When it's too hot to cook, their "French picnic dinner" consists of toothpicks threaded with slices of meatless Italian sausages, rounded out with French bread, hummus, grapes, strawberries, watermelon, sliced veggies, and olives—proving that compassionate diets can be fun and delicious.

## 5 | Party Animals

Raise money or collect supplies for an animal care facility

Birthdays present the perfect cause for celebration: animal shelters and sanctuaries in need of support. In lieu of gifts, kids can host parties to collect donations and supplies. Some shelters even invite kids in for the purpose; at the Naperville Area Humane Society in Illinois, humane education manager Terri Hancock leads tours and animal-themed games.

In between bites of cake and pizza, partygoers write fan letters to hang on cages—drawing potential adopters' attention to animals who've been waiting for a home for too long. "Sometimes it's a dog who isn't showing very well in the kennel," says Hancock, "but if they can see that this dog has won the hearts of 20 kids, it's really showing a different side to the animal and really showcasing it."

Budding entrepreneurs may undertake more elaborate enterprises. Brandon Wood of Kissimmee, Fla., started his "Make a Chimp Smile" blog to raise money to move a chimpanzee named Boy from a former New Mexico laboratory to a Florida sanctuary. Brandon especially wanted to see Boy reunited with his son. "Elway was apart from his father like me," he says. "My dad has been in Iraq and is now in Afghanistan. He has been gone for five years."

Boy was moved to Florida before Brandon reached his fundraising goal, so the 10-year-old has turned his attention to raising \$25,000 to move 10 other chimps still in New Mexico. He attends events, passes out bookmarks promoting his cause, and assembles chimpanzee care packages containing nuts, dried fruit, peanut butter, and blankets.

"I think everyone should have pride in what they are doing," says Brandon. "Also I have learned that you shouldn't give up and that it is OK to ask for help because lots of people have helped me speak out for the great apes."

## RECIPE BOX

### Spicing Up the Holidays

**You know the drill:** Susie brings her own vegetarian entrée to Thanksgiving. Jim won't eat anything without meat. Karen insists on making duplicate dishes to satisfy both—one with chicken stock, another with vegetable stock; one with turkey, another with seitan.

Maintaining this splintered family affair is a lot of work. Instead of toiling away on separate menus, why not cook up something appealing to tastebuds of many stripes?

This festive, tangy appetizer will kick things off with a bang. Vegan cream cheese mellows the spice and is so tasty that dairy devotees won't know the difference.

HSUS staff of all culinary persuasions became enamored with the recipe after California state director Jennifer Fearing customized a friend's version. Like many modern-day holiday recipes, it's a tradition now handed down through the Internet: A Google search attributes the original version to Oregon librarian Carol Reich, who won a contest with it in 2001. Reich, in turn, had gotten the recipe from a library volunteer. She's amazed by its staying power, she says: "Thanks for continuing the trend."

Find more HSUS staff favorites—including holiday recipes created by Damon Brasch of Tempe's Green restaurant in collaboration with HSUS Arizona state director Kari Neinstadt—at [humansociety.org/magazine](http://humansociety.org/magazine).

#### Cranberry-Jalapeño Spread—Serves 6 to 8



- 1 bag fresh cranberries** (remove the soft ones; wash and coarsely chop remainder in food processor)
- 4 green onions**, chopped (about ½ cup)
- 2 small jalapeño peppers** (or 1 large), seeded and chopped (about 2 tablespoons)
- ½ cup sugar**

- ¼ cup fresh cilantro**, minced
- 2 tablespoons fresh ginger**, finely chopped or grated
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**
- 8 ounces of vegan cream cheese** (e.g., Tofutti)
- Crackers**

1. Mix the first seven ingredients together in a large bowl. Store in the fridge in an airtight container for at least four hours to allow flavors to mellow.
2. Scoop vegan cream cheese onto a serving plate, and pour cranberry mixture on top. Serve with vegan crackers.

▶ FOR MORE recipes, visit [humansociety.org/recipes](http://humansociety.org/recipes).

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