

Making a Pawsitive Impact

Growing up with an innate respect for nature, if I accidentally stepped on a snail, I would mourn that small, but meaningful loss of life deep within my toddler body. I went snail searching, and marked the sidewalk where the slugs were most likely to cross in an effort to protect the helpless from the unaware. My crayon family portraits included my three dogs, hedgehog and rabbit, two which were taken in from the street. I knew, from the moment I rescued my first orphaned baby bird, that my passion for wildlife would evolve into a lifelong dedication to animal welfare. When I entered high school, I desperately wanted to expand my knowledge and join an organization that shared my love for animals. To my disappointment,



there was no club that mirrored my passion, and so as a sophomore, I founded my school's original PAWS Animal Club, which attracted over 45 official members within its first month! As President, I sought to end the suffering of both wild and domestic animals, yet decided to focus primarily on canine negligence and abandonment, an issue that is especially prevalent in South Florida.

A shocking eight million dogs enter U.S. shelters annually, a tragedy due mainly in part to uninformed owners that fail to spay or neuter their pets (Curb Pet Overpopulation and Make Your Pet Healthier). In the urban streets of Miami, homeless dogs are abundant, and when a pet accidentally runs off and impregnates a stray, chances are high that the innocent pups will end up vagrant. If the pet dog births a litter, the four to six puppies are usually dropped at the nearest shelter, further contributing to the overpopulation dilemma. Furthermore, many caregivers have misconceptions about fixing, believing that the surgery is painful, expensive, or emasculating



(Myths about Spay-Neuter). To combat the viscous cycle that leaves dogs stranded, I volunteered at the Humane Society of Broward County for three months, educating prospective and current pet owners on the facts and gravity of spay and neuter. The shelter shared this view, and altered every dog that was adopted at no

additional charge.

To spread the spay and neuter message further, club members attended a seminar and toured the pound, gaining applicable information that could be passed along to our school of future pet owners. One member had a Golden Retriever that her mother was going to put up for adoption, and after realizing the heartbreak and confusion that shelter dogs must endure for months at a time, she convinced her family to reconsider and ended up keeping her dog in their loving home!

Moreover, PAWS Club and I urged adopters to research their potential dog's breed, temperament, size, and possible health issues in order to reduce the chances of the dog returning because he "was not what the owner expected." For instance, many Jack Russel Terriers see their way back to the shelter due to their hyperactivity, while Labrador Retrievers return once they grow larger than originally anticipated (Dog Breed Center). Sadly, by far the leading victim of



ignorance is the American Staffordshire terrier, commonly known as the Pit Bull. Haunted by a heartbreaking history of dogfighting and bias media coverage, the breed suffers the devastating consequences of exaggerated rumors and

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unjustified fear. Discriminatory laws, such as those in Miami-Dade County, prohibit the ownership of any breed that is lumped into the Pit Bull category and fine anyone found in possession of the animal, which leads to a huge influx of the breed into shelters (Pit Bull Law).

At the Humane Society, I worked hard to shatter the Pit bull stereotype by constantly playing fetch with the Pits, allowing them to jump on my legs in excitement, and lick me with joy; visitors would walk by and be completely enamored with the dogs' sweet nature. On social media, PAWS Animal Club as well as my personal account supported and shared the



“Don’t Bully my Breed” campaign that advocated for the bullied breeds, including the Pit Bull, Doberman, and Rottweiler, to over 900 followers.

Once again using technology as an outlet for social reform, the club took to Twitter to inform our community on the dangers of leaving dogs in hot cars, especially in Florida where temperatures can spike. We even posted flyers on vehicles at our local supermarket!



Additionally, I gave a video presentation to over 50 classmates enlightening them on outdated and inhumane cosmetic animal testing and how it affects Beagles, a naturally docile breed that is unlikely to retaliate aggressively (Dogs in Animal Testing). The video was also uploaded to YouTube and Facebook to catalyze the message and received positive feedback. Furthermore, I wanted PAWS to take an active role in our city, thus I used social media to help owners find lost dogs and dogs to find

forever homes. On multiple occasions, over 50 people shared the club's pictures and propelled our mission.

Part of the club's objective was to fundraise for organizations that aided canine welfare,



thus we collected over \$600 to donate to the Humane Society's annual "Walk for Animals". To raise money, we did an activity we titled "Coins for Critters," in which we painted cardboard

boxes to encourage donations around

school. The most rewarding contribution, however, was organizing a shelter supply drive for a local nonprofit group, Grace and her Furry Friends, which takes in stray dogs, finds them foster homes, and pays for all medical bills.



Now, over two years later, we continue our mission of educating the public, depopulating shelters, and rescuing homeless dogs. Those who have graduated perpetuate the philotherianism and attest that PAWS has come to represent more than a club- it embodies a mindset of respect, consideration, and appreciation for animals, a pact to propagate the awareness that can help safeguard them, and a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves.

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