

Katelyn Chen

The PAWS Club

Ever since I was four years old, I wanted a dog for Christmas. But every year, without fail, my parents would veto my grand plans of having a furry little buddy. While my attempts at getting a pet for myself may have failed, my passion for animals never died down. Entering high school, I decided to sign up for the Promotion of Animal Welfare and Safety (PAWS) club. However, when the club president quit during the first meeting, no one took her place and I was saddened as my potential future of helping animals was fading away. My passion for animals eventually overtook my hesitancy, and I impulsively volunteered to lead.

Every year, about 6.5 million animals enter an animal shelter across the United States (“Shelter Intake”). Many of these shelters often struggle with funding and finances are an ongoing issue. In fact, around 390,000 dogs are killed per year for various reasons including overcrowding (Jones). With these statistics in mind, I decided to turn PAWS into a club working to help these animal rescues. With no starting point, I sent letters out to local animal rescues to see what a group of high schoolers could accomplish.

Sadie’s Safe House Chihuahua Rescue reached out and asked us to make a blackboard sign they could potentially use at events and fundraisers. With the club mostly made up of females, none of us had woodworking experience. Yet, this was our first opportunity to help one



Figure 1: One of the letters sent out (March, 2019)

of the overall 3500 animal shelters in the U.S. (Jones). We took woodworking tests and used drills for the first time to make the sign.



Figure 2: Making the sign (June, 2019)



Figure 3: Completed sign (June, 2019)



Figure 4: Club welcoming Sadie's Safehouse (June, 2019)

During this time, we also began working with Indigo Rescue, a non-profit working to help animals that are deemed unadoptable (“About Us”). With all of our members under 18, we were unable to do the tradition volunteering at the shelters. So instead, we worked at fundraisers to help raise money for this non-profit. For example, I volunteered at a summer dog wash fundraiser. Although I was baking under the sun, I knew I was helping with dogs like Kringle who needed funding for surgery. Our club also volunteered at Indigo Rescue’s semi-annual jewelry sale. Using jewelry donated from around the country,



Figure 5: Volunteering at dog wash fundraiser (July, 2019)

this fundraiser also helps to raise money for Indigo Rescue (Wogan). While talking to Heather,

one of the founders of Indigo Rescue, I learned that the rescue was trying to raise money for Indigo Ranch. Around 1.5 million animals are euthanized annually, and many of these animals are elderly or health-compromised (Simpson). Heather hoped to create Indigo Ranch as a place for those deemed “unadoptable” to happily live out the rest of their lives. It was stories like these that continued to motivate me to help these local non-profits.

It wasn't easy finding activities for members to do. We were limited by our age and could travel to locations nearby, so I tried to find projects that we could work on during our meetings. I was initially overwhelmed when Bonnie L. Hays Animal Shelter requested the construction of eight dog-training tables, entrusting us with \$350 worth of materials. I had never designed blueprints, proposed a budget, or done such large-scale



Figure 6: Working on dog-training tables With fellow club member (Dec, 2019)

woodworking. But remembering my past projects and the obstacles the club had overcome, I

Westview High School students give back to local animal shelter

▲ Gabby Urenda 📅 February 10 2020

The Bonnie L. Hays Animal Shelter in Hillsboro will be getting handmade training tables from students.



PMG PHOTO - JONATHAN HOUSE - Westview students Eli Ebstein, left, and Ria Aggarwal screw in a leg to make a table that will be used at the Bonnie L. Hays Animal Shelter.

Figure 7: News article recognizing PAWS' efforts (Feb, 2020)

believed this was a task we were capable of accomplishing. To alleviate the cost burden for the animal shelter, I called home improvement stores for discounts. Knowing the tables were intended for outdoor use, we used pressure treated wood and pet-friendly sealant. To ensure the safety of members, I provided operation manuals for the woodworking equipment. Many members had never touched a power drill before, but they were eager to

try as I demonstrated proper usage. Sometimes screws went in sideways and other times the wood was stripped, yet after seven months of hard work, all eight tables were beautifully constructed within our budget proposal.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, things were harder than ever for both animal shelters and the PAWS club. Many people who impulsively got pets during the pandemic began regretting their decisions and returning the rescues to animal shelters. In June of 2021 alone, animal care centers in NYC had over 1300 animals that were returned (Morris). At the same time, school was now virtual so our previous projects during club meetings were no longer possible. I had to find take-home projects that members could do. Every few weekends, I would stand outside the school, rain or shine, for members to drive-by and do a supply pick-up or project drop-off. Some of the projects we did for local animal rescues included dog toys, cat toys, cat grass, cat bags, and fleece blankets.



Figure 8: Members planted cat grass (Nov, 2020)



Figure 9: Pom pom cat toys (March, 2021)



Figure 10: Cat bags for Cat's Cradle (April, 2021)

In the United States, there are 60-160 million feral cats, who are killers of wildlife and have caused over an estimated 50 extinctions. Additionally, some cats carry a parasite that has been connected with memory loss (Meiners). We teamed up with the Feral Cat Coalition to create feral cat shelters and make a small dent in this ongoing problem.



Figure 11: Feral cat shelter materials (Oct, 2021)



Figure 12: Building feral cat shelters (Nov, 2021)

As President of PAWS, I've seen the impact that passion and persistence can create.



Figure 13: PAWS Club (Dec, 2021)

During these past four years, we've worked with a number of organizations to help benefit animal welfare. PAWS members have accumulated a total of 1250 volunteer hours. When I first joined PAWS, I never envisioned myself operating a power drill or sawing wood. But

these experiences have molded my approach

to life, helping me take risks and learn new skills. I'm proud to say that I've made a difference in animal welfare in these past four years, even if I never convinced my parents to get a dog.

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