



To choose what is best for the near future is easy. To choose what is best for the distant future is also easy. But to choose what is best for both the near and distant futures is a hard task ...

—E.O. WILSON

Humane educators have a chance to reach kids with multiple animal-friendly messages, including the one about shelter adoptions. Sisters Karla and Teresa McNiece found Biggles at a cat adopt-a-thon in Florida.

## Investing in Humane Education

Children are the future—and the future of our communities' animals

BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL HUMANE EDUCATORS

**“Lightbulb moments.” “Planting seeds.”** These are expressions humane educators often use to describe their work, explain its rewards, and capture the essence of their commitment to the education of children as a vital component of the solution to animal homelessness, neglect, and cruelty.

They think of moments like the one Carol Everett, a certified humane education specialist who volunteers at the Kauai Humane Society, recalls: A middle school student came up to her after a presentation on puppy mills, a spay/neuter activity, and a tour of an animal shelter and said, “We got a puppy from the pet shop last year and I am so sorry we didn’t get one from the humane society.” Carol told her, “Don’t be sorry. Love your puppy as much as you can. You will have many more opportunities in your life to get another dog here when the timing is right.”

Jennifer Self-Aulgur, humane education coordinator for the Humane Society of West Michigan, regularly presents programs at a juvenile detention center, where

more than 60 percent of the youth have seen a dogfight. During a program she presented on dogfighting, one youth was initially combative, insisting there was nothing wrong with dogfighting and saying, “They’re just dogs.” A few weeks later, after he’d gone through more of Self-Aulgur’s program, the youth revealed during a counseling session that he had thought about the issue and realized how wrong dogfighting is. He was actually in tears because he felt bad about how he and his family had treated animals.

When she used to teach, Stephanie Itle-Clark—now of Humane Society University—used to take her dog, Kasey, to her middle school classroom three days a week so students could practice reading to her. A seventh-grade boy ran up to Stephanie on the last day of the school year and exclaimed, “I am going to miss you and Kasey! I thought I hated reading until this year.” The boy had struggled with numerous reading concepts, but developed a relationship with Kasey that helped him grow





### Three Components of Successful Humane Education Programs

#### 1 INTEGRATION

Ideally, humane education is incorporated into every part of an animal welfare agency. “Humane education is part of the daily life for those who work in animal welfare. Not a moment goes by when you are not educating,” says Steven McNall, president and CEO of the Pasadena Humane Society and SPCA.

Familiarizing all staff, volunteers, and board members with the humane education department’s role in the agency, and involving experienced education staff in agency trainings about handling teachable moments with the public, can go a long way in unifying an agency and projecting a consistent message to the community.

“The public will ask questions,” adds Rick Aiken, executive director of the Humane Society of Northeast Georgia (HSNG). He notes that the organization’s staff should be prepared to answer them and be able to describe the scope of the different kinds of work your agency is doing to combat animal cruelty and pet overpopulation in the community.

#### 2 INVESTMENT

Investing in staff and resources are vital components to successful humane education programs. After spending 11 years in zoos and with Boy Scouts, where education is a primary focus, Aiken feels it is “common sense” to incorporate education in animal sheltering. In fact, the first thing he did at HSNG was to hire a former teacher to give programs in schools.

Providing humane education departments with adequate resources is important. Staff at the Humane Society of West Michigan regularly attend seminars on animal welfare issues for continuing education, reports Culp. If you use some creativity and make an effort to forge community connections, the result may be unique partnerships, donations, and sponsorships. Businesses may donate space, supplies, or provide dollars to support specific programs. Other public or nonprofit agencies may collaborate on special projects.

#### 3 AUDIENCES

With the ongoing emphasis on mandated curricula in schools, it is important to be creative when it comes to securing audiences. Aligning your agency’s programs with the school district’s curriculum is a good start. (Find state and national standards, as well as Common Core Standards, at [educationworld.com/standards](http://educationworld.com/standards).)

Strategize about whom to approach about your programs by understanding educational leaders’ roles and interests. Depending on the program’s focus, in traditional schools, the best contact might be a principal, parent organization, health teacher, or guidance counselor.

Agencies with a broad reach seek out new and nontraditional audiences. An effective networking effort can yield connections with home-school networks, after-school programs, adjudicated youth, seniors, clubs, and more. Agencies may also become involved with community service, service learning, or vocational mentoring. Your audience can be as diverse as your community.

to enjoy reading, and learn about the human-animal bond. He went on to describe how “cool” Kasey was and said that he was going to adopt a dog and go to obedience classes when he was older.

### The Concept

Humane education encourages empathy and promotes understanding of the need for compassion and respect for people, animals, and the environment. It emphasizes the connection between all living things. Children are often the primary target audience for formal humane education programs—think of school presentations, camps, and clubs. However, humane education opportunities for adults abound, from formal pet care classes to adoption counseling to outreach events.

Ideally, children exposed to the messages of humane education will take what they learn and teach their parents and model behaviors to their friends, thus helping the message spread and creating more compassionate communities.

In a strained economy, it may be tempting to focus on endeavors that provide immediate, tangible outcomes. However, we have all heard the cautions against focusing on short-term gains to the detriment of long-term goals. Spaying and neutering, and rescuing animals from cruelty, abandonment, and other dangerous situations are laudable goals—but a well-crafted and thoughtful humane education program has the potential to effect social change, thus reducing the need for animal welfare services in the future.

“What better way is there to end animal abuse and achieve a future of humane care than to promote humane

education?" says Steven McNall, president and CEO of the Pasadena Humane Society and SPCA. This California agency provides presentations to all ages in settings from schools to service clubs, facilitates scout and youth projects, and runs summer workshops. "No organization, city, county, or nonprofit organization can afford one day without humane education. An organization that does not promote humane education is failing."

### The Payoff

Humane education departments have the capacity to directly and indirectly benefit their agencies. "Our educators visit classrooms during the school year, run children's camps in the summer, and organize open houses and adoption events," says Sue Ann Culp, CEO of the Humane Society of West Michigan. "Humane education dispels myths about various breeds, helps people become more responsible owners, teaches children how to treat and care for pets, and motivates adoptions of our shelter animals. Our educators are truly the ambassadors to the community for our animals who need to find their forever home."

In addition to providing valuable teaching opportunities, humane education programs have the potential to produce revenue (both monetary and in-kind donations), increase your organization's visibility, and foster positive community relations. The latter two effects may yield further revenue through the cultivation of adopters and donors.

Community members may become more involved with their local agency as a result of attending a humane education program. Children who attend a scout badge program may return to do larger projects. Camp participants may become part of the agency's pet club or come back to serve as junior volunteers. And down the road, they may adopt or donate.

Education efforts can yield positive media coverage, as well. For example, the press may do a feature when your agency and the local library team up to promote literacy with a reading program. Pitch the idea to your local newspaper several weeks in advance, explaining how a story would be of interest to the parents and animal

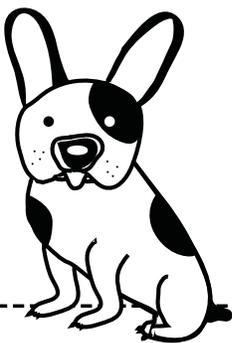


In a culture that's often casually violent, humane education encourages empathy and promotes understanding of the need for compassion and respect for living things—from humans all the way to guinea pigs.

lovers among its readership. With increased awareness and understanding of your agency, individuals and businesses are more likely to respond to requests for support.

And let us not forget the long-term rewards of an investment in humane education: a more humane community, where the public takes proper care of its companion animals and does its part to minimize pet homelessness and suffering. It is a positive loop, a cycle that builds in size and momentum with maintained investment.

We strongly encourage animal welfare agencies to make a long-term commitment to humane education, whether by starting a new program or investing in an established one. A mind you help shape today is one you won't have to change tomorrow. **AS**



### Resources

See our "101" on creating humane education curricula on p. 41.

For a more in-depth discussion of these issues and a broad action plan, see "Is Humane Education an Endangered Species?" in *The Latham Letter*, Vol. 32, No. 3; available at [latham.org/archives.asp](http://latham.org/archives.asp).

**APHE is a nonprofit corporation that provides professional development opportunities and networking for educators who promote humane attitudes toward people, animals, and the environment. The group welcomes individuals, organizations, educational institutions, and businesses that wish to work together to preserve—and expand—humane education's reach. For more information, please visit [aphe.org](http://aphe.org) or contact [aphe@aphe.org](mailto:aphe@aphe.org).**