

THE

Latham Letter

VOLUME XLVII, NUMBER 5

Winter 2026

PROMOTING RESPECT FOR ALL LIFE THROUGH EDUCATION

GRANT REPORTS ON TEEN EMPOWERMENT



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MANDATE

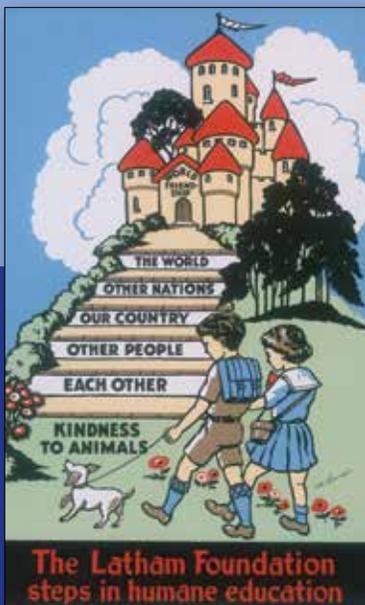
Edith Latham's **MANDATE:**

"To promote, foster,
encourage and
further the
principles of
humaneness,
kindness and
benevolence to
all living creatures."



WELCOME BACK, BROTHER BUZZ!

Brother Buzz, star of Latham's
Brother Buzz films and our former
Spokesbee, marks the end of articles.



The Latham Letter

Balanced perspectives on humane issues and activities

Search the Latham Letter archives by topic and learn
more about all of our resources and grants at
www.Latham.org or call 510-521-0920.



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Promotion of Humane Education

The Latham Letter

Volume XLVII, Number 1, Winter 2026

**BALANCED PERSPECTIVES ON
HUMANE ISSUES AND ACTIVITIES**



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The Latham Foundation is a 501(c)(3) private operating foundation
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Latham welcomes partnerships with other institutions and
individuals who share its commitment to furthering humane
education.

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THE LATHAM FOUNDATION



*Dr. Annie Petersen, Secretary/
Treasurer, The Latham Foundation*

A COMMITMENT TO STRENGTHENING THE BOND BETWEEN HUMANS AND ANIMALS

It is with deep gratitude and excitement that I introduce myself as Secretary/Treasurer for The Latham Foundation to this esteemed community of advocates who share an unwavering commitment to strengthening the bond between humans and animals.

For decades, my life's work has centered on a simple yet profound belief: that nurturing compassion toward animals in our youngest learners creates ripples of empathy that extend far beyond the classroom. As Founder and President of the Association for Human-Animal Bond Studies, I have dedicated my career to exploring and advancing the intersection of education, early childhood development, and animal welfare - three fields that, when woven together, hold transformative power.

My journey began in the classroom, where I witnessed firsthand how children's interactions with animals could unlock profound lessons in responsibility, kindness, and respect for all living beings. This observation sparked a lifelong mission to develop programs and curricula that integrate humane education into the fabric of early learning. Over the years, I have had the privilege of collaborating with nonprofit organizations to design evidence-based initiatives, secure funding through strategic grant writing, and conduct research that demonstrates the measurable impact of human-animal bond education.

This work has taken me across continents and cultures. I have shared findings and methodologies

with educators and researchers at the University of Vienna in Austria, the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, and the University of California, Davis. Each presentation has reinforced a universal truth: regardless of nationality or background, people recognize the inherent value of teaching compassion and the critical role animals play in that education.

My academic foundation reflects this interdisciplinary commitment. I hold a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Management, Master's degrees in Education and Educational Counseling Psychology, and specialized training in Early Childhood Education. More recently, I completed a Graduate Certificate in Mental Health Recovery and Trauma-Informed Care, recognizing that the healing presence of animals extends into therapeutic contexts as well.

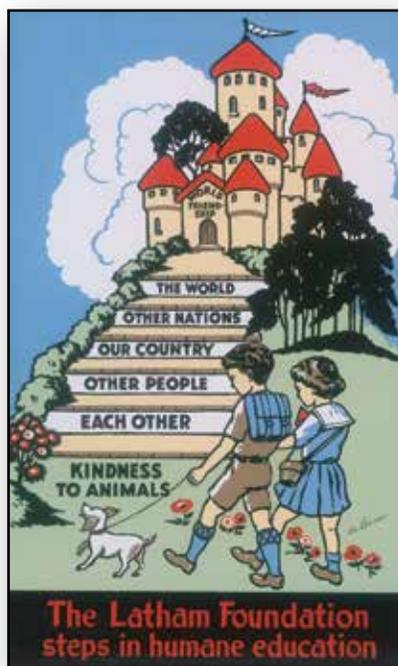
Yet credentials alone do not define this work. What drives me is the vision of a world where every child grows up understanding that animals are not merely resources, but sentient beings deserving of dignity and care. Humane education is not an afterthought, but a cornerstone of childhood development, where the human-animal bond is celebrated as essential to our collective well-being.

The Latham Foundation has championed these ideals for generations, and I am honored to join this legacy. Together, we can continue building bridges between education and advocacy, research and practice, knowledge and compassion.

With sincere appreciation for your partnership in this vital mission.

- Annie

Dr. Annie Petersen serves as the Secretary/Treasurer for The Latham Foundation, President and CEO for the Association for Human-Animal Bond Studies, and is Host of [The Resilient Animal podcast](#).



EVERY WEDNESDAY WE DO A SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT ON ONE OF OUR GRANTEES!



Welcome to #SpotlightWednesday 🐾 This week The Latham Foundation is proud to feature New Life K9s as one of our 2025 #grantees. We are proud to highlight their important milestone - New Life K9s is now accredited by the Association of Service Dog Providers (ASDP). 🐾

Both nonprofit organizations are dedicated to serving military Veterans and First Responders living with PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and military sexual trauma. Their focus is on high standards service dog training and reinforces their mission to provide reliable, life-changing service dogs to those who have served our communities and our country. 🇺🇸

Together, they are continuing to change lives—one service dog at a time.

Check them out in our award winning film *Hope Unleashed*: vimeo.com/manage/videos/445392203

#LathamGrantee #NewLifeK9s #LifeChanging #Veterans #FirstResponders #PTSD #HumaneEducation #ServiceDogs #Compassion #KindnessToAnimals #Empathy

<https://www.newlifek9s.org/> <https://servicedogs4vets.org/>



windingbranchranch and mattaversa • 6d
Winding Branch Ranch



53 2

windingbranchranch Just a few weeks ago, we partnered with Animal Care Services on an urgent bird rescue involving animals living in inhumane and cruel conditions. In total, 15 birds were taken in for care, and 19 birds were successfully rehomed, including several who were still available for adoption here at the sanctuary.

Rescue work is often quiet, urgent, and emotionally heavy. But every safe landing and every new beginning makes it worth it.

We are grateful to Animal Care Services, our adopters, fosters, volunteers, and this community for showing up when it mattered most.

#WindingBranchRanch #RescueReviveRehome

CONGRATULATIONS AND GOOD WORK TO PREVIOUS GRANTEE NEW LIFE K9S AND CURRENT 2025 GRANTEE WINDING BRANCH RANCH!
IF YOU WOULD LIKE US TO SPOTLIGHT YOUR PROGRAM PLEASE CONTACT US

THE REDROVER READERS ON-DEMAND COURSE IS NOW FREE FOR EVERYONE!

The RedRover Readers online course, previously \$35, is now completely free for everyone! This self-paced, approximately five-hour training introduces educators, librarians, humane educators, counselors, and volunteers to the RedRover Readers program, which uses animal-themed children's books to help youth ages 7–11 build empathy, compassion, and social-emotional skills.

Learn at your own pace and bring kindness toward animals to your program. Get a free program book and access to the full RedRover Readers curriculum for over 20 books, all at no cost to you!

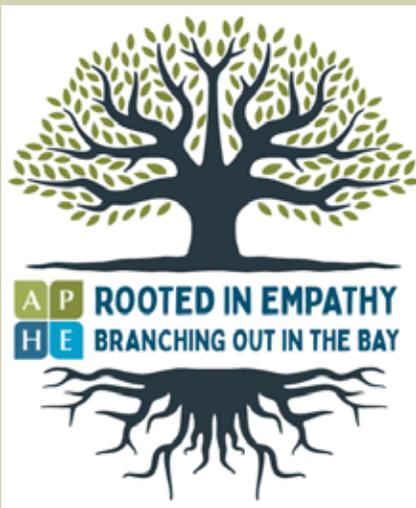
Participants learn how to:

- Lead thoughtful, non-judgmental discussions
- Use language intentionally
- Foster critical thinking and perspective-taking through storytelling
- Implement the RedRover Readers program in their community



After completing the training, participants receive access to the full curriculum featuring more than 20 diverse titles, a free program book, a free classroom set of Kind News™ magazine for one year, a certificate for up to five hours of professional development (where applicable), and ongoing support from the RedRover Readers team.

Learn more and Sign up at: redrover.org/readers/take-the-training/on-demand/ and share this resource with educators you know.



2026 APHE CONFERENCE APRIL 29TH - MAY 1ST

ROOTED IN EMPATHY: BRANCHING OUT IN THE BAY

Join us for APHE’s annual national conference, featuring speakers from around the world. This year’s conference will provide participants with professional networking opportunities and presentations that will motivate and inspire our work in this important field. This is the national conference for humane educators!

SEE YOU IN OAKLAND!

The 2026 Conference of the Association of Professional Humane Educators (APHE), will be taking place in the heart of downtown Oakland, CA, at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center (OACC) April 29th - May 1st, 2026.



centered in animal welfare, environmental sciences and conservation. Each conference I have attended since with APHE has been an opportunity of growth and networking with professionals from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives that share in the common goal of connecting

Based on member feedback, we will be kicking off the conference with optional pre-conference Learning Labs and Panel Discussion on Wednesday,

and Restaurant, conveniently located within walking distance of the hotel!

Visiting Oakland for the first time? Get ideas for what to do in [Condé Nast’s 2025 #1 “Best Food City.”](#) or visitoakland.com/inspiration-guide/



April 29th, followed by our popular conference mixer that same evening. Additional registration required for Learning Labs and Panel Discussion; lunch provided for attendees.

From previous attendees:

“When I attended my first conference 3 years ago, I didn’t know what to expect. I didn’t know anyone and it was my first time traveling alone so far from home. What greeted me was an entire conference full of the most welcoming individuals from all over! After attending the incredible conference sessions and talking to countless people I thought “I have found my people!”

people with animals and the natural world by building empathy and stewardship.”

Our annual APHE Dinner and Nathania Gartman Heroes Award presentation will take place from 6-9pm on Thursday, April 30th, 2026, at The Fat Lady Bar

“That first conference made me realize that Humane Education transcends into a variety of fields

The Latham Foundation is proud to be a sponsor once again!
<https://aphe.org/2026conference>



APPLY TO THE ASPCA VETERINARY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS

The ASPCA Veterinary Scholarship Program is a bold new national initiative supporting veterinary and veterinary technician students who are committed to building careers in animal welfare.

Through financial support and sustained engagement with the ASPCA, this program aims to strengthen the veterinary workforce at shelters and mission-driven organizations, expand access to veterinary care and cultivate a community of professionals dedicated to improving the lives of animals.



The ASPCA Veterinary Scholarship Program is intended for veterinary and veterinary technician students who are committed to working for at least three (3) years post-graduation in the animal welfare field. This could include working in non-profit or municipal shelter medicine, community-centered medicine, for a HQHVSN (high-quality, high-volume spay-neuter program), with at-risk equines, or in the field of pasture-based or humane agriculture.

Application Deadline: March 3, 2026, 11:59 p.m. PT.

<https://www.aspcapro.org/apply-aspca-veterinary-scholarship-program>

Human Animal Interaction (HAI) Webinars

POLYVAGAL THEORY AND THE HUMAN ANIMAL BOND: A THREE-PART SERIES IN THE SCIENCE OF SAFETY, CONNECTION, AND EXPERIENCE.

Session 2: Neuroception and the Human–Animal Bond: Helping the Nervous System Lean into Safety with Intention

February 25, 10:00-11:30AM MT, 1.5 CE credit
Presented by Alison Leslie

This session will explore neuroception—our body’s subconscious ability to detect safety or threat. Participants will examine how trauma can shape neuroceptive responses and hinder regulation. We will discuss how animals can support the restoration of healthy neuroception by positively influencing all three domains: exteroception, proprioception, and interoception.

[Sign up HERE](#)



Session 3: Building Connection through Sentient Relationships: Enhancing Safety and Autonomic Regulation through Choice

March 26th 10:00-11:30AM MT 1.5 CE credit
Presented by Alison Leslie

Sentience is foundational in ethical and effective animal-assisted interventions. In this session, participants will consider the role of sentience and mutual respect in co-regulation and healing. We will explore how honoring the agency and choices of animal partners not only enhances their wellbeing but also deepens therapeutic outcomes for clients by modeling safe and reciprocal relationships.

[Sign up HERE](#)



THE ANIMAL CONNECTION: RURAL NEW MEXICO TEENS LEAD CHANGE FOR ANIMALS

By César Díaz, Animal Protection New Mexico

Thanks to the support of The Latham Foundation, Animal Protection New Mexico (APNM) brought its humane education program, The Animal Connection, to two rural communities in New Mexico. Compassionate action projects for teenagers were developed in the towns of Grants (Cibola County) and Las Vegas (San Miguel County), reaching 128 middle and high school students and equipping them with the tools to address pressing animal welfare issues in their own communities.

The Animal Connection and Compassionate Action Projects

APNM expanded The Animal Connection to two remote areas in New Mexico's northwestern and northeastern regions—areas long identified as having a high need for humane education and animal welfare advocacy. Over the past several years, the organization has helped forge meaningful partnerships between teachers, local leaders, animal care professionals, and businesses to support youth-led projects that engage communities.

APNM's mission is to help rural teens understand the real-world challenges animals face in their communities and to empower them to take compassionate, solution-focused action. Through The Animal Connection—a 10-week curriculum—teachers guide students in building empathy, accepting responsibility, and taking action, preparing them to collaborate with their communities on solutions that benefit animals.

Working from a “solutionary” mindset, students at Los Alamos

Continued on next page



The Grants Animal Care Center director discusses shelter dog behavior during the students' visit.

Middle School in Grants and Robertson High School in Las Vegas engaged deeply with issues that directly affect their communities. They examined the root causes of local animal welfare problems, such as animal overpopulation, dog chaining, and dog bite safety; explored ethical and effective responses, including reviewing local animal ordinances; and then designed and implemented their own “compassionate action projects” in collaboration with

local organizations. At both schools, these projects captured public attention and sparked excitement about youth who are community-minded, thoughtful, and ready to lead.

Los Alamos Middle School Students Help Adopt Long-Term Shelter Dogs

Catherine Habiger, a 7th-grade Life Science teacher and former animal control officer in Cibola County, turned a lifelong passion

for improving animal care in Grants into a science unit that became a far-reaching community initiative. Partnering with APNM, the City of Grants Animal Care Center, the local police department, and nine area businesses, Ms. Habiger’s six life science class periods (112 students in all) organized a letter-writing campaign to promote the adoption of dogs who had been at the Grants shelter for more than eighty days. Their efforts paid off as the community came together to find eight long-term shelter dogs a home.

“I want my students to see life science through the lens of compassion and kindness,” says Ms. Habiger. She began by grounding her classes in The Animal Connection lessons. But as the lessons progressed, Ms. Habiger adds, “Students began sharing personal experiences with animal cruelty and processing ways to care for and advocate for animals.”

Bonnie, one of the shelter’s long-term residents, was adopted as part of Ms. Habiger’s class community project.



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Robertson High students present their 'Animal Care and Bite Safety' presentation to Sierra Elementary 4th graders.

The parents also reached out to Ms. Habiger to express their pride in their children contributing to a project that would genuinely help their community.

The learning extended well beyond the classroom. Ms. Habiger's classes visited the Grants Animal Care Center to learn about animal overpopulation, shelter dog behavior, and the daily realities of animal control. Ms. Habiger demonstrated how loose dogs are transported to the shelter, while the shelter director led a tour and described the history and behavior of each long-term dog.

Back at school, students turned intake notes into personalized letters written on behalf of each dog. These letters were distributed by local businesses and the police department to many Grants residents, becoming central to their adoptions.

And the community took notice! The Cibola Citizen featured the project as a "Community Highlight," and the editor is interested in following the shelter and advocacy project in 2026. The Grants Chief of Police highlighted Ms. Habiger and her students' efforts at a recent city council meeting, and the local school district superintendent also spotlighted the project as a "school project that [helps] amplify its reach and impact." Next school year, Ms. Habiger's project will expand to include the entire 7th-grade cohort.

Robertson High School Students Led Humane Education Elementary Workshops

The Robertson High School National Honor Society (NHS) students from 10th through 12th grades piloted a service-learning

and peer-learning project addressing the town's high rate of dog bites involving children. Using The Animal Connection and guidance from APNM and the Animal Welfare Coalition of Northeastern New Mexico (AWC), the NHS students followed the Institute for Humane Education's Solutionary Mindset to create a children's workshop titled "Animal Care and Safety in Las Vegas." They then delivered this workshop to 95 4th-grade students at Sierra Vista Elementary.

The workshop included several stations that taught children about bite safety and animal care and responsibility. The student participants then applied what they learned to a "Decorating Your Darling Pet" activity. "Students got to share stories of the companion animals they love and [ones] they plan to care for in the future," said NHS Sponsor and Assistant Principal, Daniel Whalen. "Students [also] got to create cool companions based on real and imagined companion animals," added Mr. Whalen.



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Robertson High students present their 'Animal Care and Bite Safety' presentation to Sierra Elementary 4th graders.

Mr. Whalen believes in the importance of workshops and activities, such as those created by National Honor Society students, because they address essential social-emotional tenets for 4th graders, including perspective-taking, and introduce a sense of social responsibility, which is crucial for being proactive members of their community.

The impact went beyond the classroom for NHS students. They learned firsthand about animal overpopulation, dog chaining, and the prevalence of dog bites involving children. During a guided presentation by APNM's Education & Outreach Director, César Díaz, students learned about New Mexico's veterinary shortage and why youth animal advocacy through education is crucial to enacting systemic change in the state. According to Mr. Whalen,

the NHS President, a high school senior, the experience inspired her to pursue a career in education.

The "Animal Care and Safety in Las Vegas" workshop sparked interest in humane education at Robertson High School and in the community, and the school is interested in adopting the project model to continue youth advocacy through education. Mr. Whalen has expressed interest in expanding the project to include a civic action component-such as advocating for state-level legislation on behalf of animals.

Ms. Habiger (left) with some of her 7th-grade Life Science students after their visit to the shelter.



The project model is now a key part of APNM's education strategy, according to APNM's Chief Policy & Program Officer, Judy Wolf. She calls it a "powerful way to advance humane education goals." Wolf notes that the strong results and positive community feedback are helping APNM reach remote areas, demonstrate through youth advocacy that animal welfare is vital to community health, and encourage communities to support student-led civic and legislative efforts on animal welfare.

To learn more about APNM's The Animal Connection program, visit: theanimalconnection.learn-worlds.com/ 

Teens visited the Pittsburgh's National Aviary to learn about conservation.



EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ANIMAL ADVOCATES

by Kelly Spanos, Humane Educator, Animal Friends

In 2025, Animal Friends witnessed something truly inspiring: a growing wave of teens ready to lead with compassion, curiosity and courage. Thanks to the generous support of the Latham Foundation, our teen education programs expanded in both reach and depth, engaging more young people than ever before and equipping them with the tools to advocate meaningfully for animals.

At the heart of our teen programming is a simple but

powerful goal: to help young people understand the complex challenges animals face and to empower them to use their voices, values and talents to drive positive change. Throughout the spring and summer, teens took part in immersive, hands-on learning experiences that blended animal care, ethics, advocacy and leadership development. From thoughtful discussions to real-world action, participants discovered not only how to help animals but also who they could become as changemakers.

The year began with our spring Solutionaries Mini Apprenticeship, where teens explored pressing animal welfare and environmental issues and developed creative, solutions-focused advocacy projects. Over the summer, we introduced two new Cooperative Care Mini Apprenticeships, giving teens hands-on training in positive, evidence-based animal handling techniques. Participants learned to read body language, respect animal choice and build trust while working closely with dogs, rabbits and cats,

Continued on next page



Teens learned about caring and sheltering large and exotic species.

gaining practical skills grounded in behavioral science.

Younger teens joined our three-day Compassionate Changemakers Mini Apprenticeship, where they tackled big ethical questions about how humans interact with animals.

Developing vegetarian cooking skills with Chef Brian Naughton.



Through guided conversations and reflection, participants examined moral responsibility, humane practices and the role empathy plays in creating a kinder and more just world.

The summer concluded with the Teen Animal Advocacy Summit, a four-day experience that brought together teens from across the region for immersive learning and collaboration. Throughout the week, participants engaged in hands-on activities such as bunny yoga, enrichment-making projects and a vegetarian cooking class, while also learning

from a variety of guest speakers. Teens met with journalists at KDKA to explore how media can support advocacy efforts and attended a live taping of Pittsburgh Today Live, where Animal Friends and its teen advocates received an on-air mention. The Summit also included educational visits to the National Aviary to learn about bird conservation and to Kindred Spirits Rescue Ranch, a local animal sanctuary, to explore the care of large and exotic species, giving participants a broader perspective on animal welfare in practice.

A highlight of the Summit was the presentation of teen-led advocacy projects. Each participant selected an issue they felt passionate about, including wildlife conservation, breed discrimination, pet product safety, humane livestock treatment and the urgent need to shut down puppy mills. Teens shared their presentations with local lawmakers and animal welfare leaders, including State Representative Arvind Venkat, Aaron Gray from



Visit to KDKA to watch a live broadcast of Pittsburgh Today Live

State Representative Abigail Salisbury’s office, Assistant District Attorney Annie Birdsong and Pennsylvania State Director

Continued on next page

at Humane World for Animals Kristen Tullo. These conversations gave participants invaluable experience engaging with decision-makers while strengthening their confidence and public speaking skills.

In total, 47 teens in grades 7–12 participated in our programs, a remarkable 370% increase from the previous year. Youth came from a diverse mix of urban and suburban communities throughout Pittsburgh and the surrounding areas, bringing varied perspectives that enriched discussions and collaboration. To ensure equitable access to these educational opportunities, we awarded five full scholarships, one partial scholarship and provided transportation support for a participant who needed it.



Youth participants working with Annie Birdsong and Kristen Tullo

Program impact was measured through pre- and post-program assessments, and the growth was striking. Understanding of cooperative care rose from 69% to 96%, while awareness of animal advocacy issues increased from 62% to 99%. Beyond the data, teens developed empathy, confidence and leadership skills, and many began to see themselves as



active agents of change. Several participants expressed interest in future careers in animal welfare, veterinary medicine and related fields, demonstrating a strong desire to continue learning and make a meaningful, lasting impact. The animals these teens encounter will benefit directly from this growth, as will the broader community as participants step into their roles as emerging leaders.

Support from the Latham Foundation was truly transformative, giving us the resources to reach more teens

than ever, launch innovative new programs, deepen hands-on learning experiences, and create lasting connections between young people, the animals they care for, and the broader community. The curiosity, compassion and commitment we saw throughout the year make it clear these young people are ready to lead, creating lasting impact for the communities and animals they go on to serve.

We are deeply grateful to the Latham Foundation for believing in the power of youth and helping us nurture the next generation of animal advocates. 🐾





SPCA WESTCHESTER'S HUMANE EDUCATION PROGRAM

By Lisa Fello, Volunteer and Community Outreach Manager

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal (SPCA) Westchester's Humane Education (HE) Program offers transformative, hands-on learning experiences that cultivate empathy, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility. Through meaningful interactions with animals, children witness the realities of animal welfare firsthand. These experiences nurture compassion, spark curiosity, and encourage ethical decision-making, laying the groundwork for a lifelong commitment to kindness.

At SPCA Westchester, we believe humane education is critical to

animal welfare. By nurturing empathy in young people, we are shaping future generations of compassionate citizens. That's why we are committed to continuously evolving our programs to engage more children, deepen the impact of our lessons, and broaden our reach.

SPCA Westchester has offered HE programs in Westchester County, a community of over one million people, since 2007. To reach more children, we launched two initiatives: Camp Critter, a week-long summer camp for younger children, and Junior Veterinarian Science Camp, an immersive

one-day program for older students interested in veterinary medicine and animal welfare.

CAMP CRITTER

Camp Critter is a weeklong summer experience for children ages six to nine that empowers them to connect with animals who have faced neglect or abandonment. Through educational, interactive, and age-appropriate activities, campers explore pet care and compassion in a fun and supportive environment. Activities include animal care demonstrations, crafts, and games that promote kindness and empathy.

Continued on next page

Children participate in interactive workshops, arts and crafts, and meaningful encounters with the animals at our Rescue Center. Highlights of Camp Critter include:

- Animal Care Basics – Introduction to the world of animal care, such as grooming, feeding, and understanding animal behavior.
- Animal Encounters – Quality time bonding, playing and helping with daily routines of our Rescue Center animals.
- Creative Exploration – Arts & crafts and storytelling sessions that celebrate the unique personalities and resilience of our Rescue Center animals.
- Empowering Activities – Games and challenges designed to promote compassion, empathy, and responsible pet ownership.

JUNIOR VETERINARIAN SCIENCE CAMP

This immersive one-day camp introduces children ages 11 to 14 to the world of veterinary science and animal welfare through hands-on activities and real-world scenarios. Campers gain early exposure to veterinary tools, anatomy, and animal care techniques — helping to spark potential career interests.

Two Junior Veterinarian sessions are offered each summer, one for 6th and 7th graders and another for 8th and 9th graders, ensuring that activities are appropriately challenging and inspiring for each age group.

JUNIOR VET SCIENCE CAMP INCLUDES:

- Hands-on learning – Learning about and practicing veterinary exam skills like signalment (identifying and recording key information about an animal), auscultation (listening to the heart, lungs and other organs with a stethoscope), and palpation (feeling for vital signs) – using one of the SPCA’s puppies.
- Surgery observation – Observing the SPCA’s veterinary clinic staff as they perform procedures, gaining an appreciation for the many components and teamwork required in veterinary care.

- Career conversations – Meeting with staff to hear about their individual paths into veterinary medicine.
- Critical assessments – Watching as the veterinary team evaluates animals without a medical history.
- Compassionate Care – Witnessing the power of veterinary medicine through meeting some of our most vulnerable animals. This summer campers interacted with a neonatal kitten who required bottle feeding, and Hope, a stray dog who arrived at our Rescue Center suffering from heatstroke, painful wounds, and severe infection. Thanks to the extraordinary care of our veterinary team and Rescue Center staff, Hope made a full recovery. Meeting her allowed campers to witness the life-saving power of veterinary medicine and compassion in action.

LASTING IMPACT

Both Camp Critter and the Junior Veterinarian Science Camp have quickly become cornerstones of the SPCA’s HE programs, leaving lasting impressions on participants. In addition to gaining new friendships, children acquire knowledge, empathy, and a deeper sense of responsibility toward animals and their communities. Our campers go on to practice compassion in action in fun and creative ways. Long after their camp session ends, campers stay inspired. They channel that inspiration into leading bake sales benefiting animals in need, becoming a foster offering temporary shelter for cats and dogs, and even choosing to volunteer at SPCA Westchester.



Animal lovers Beatrix and Kaya attended SPCA Westchester's Camp Critter and loved it. They wanted to support the SPCA, so they held an incredible bake sale, raising \$250.

Continued on next page



Parents tell us that after attending camp, their children come home not only excited about the animals they met, but also more mindful about kindness in their everyday lives. They show greater patience with family pets, become more thoughtful about animals they encounter, and often express a new interest in science and animal-related careers — as these parent testimonials show:

“My daughter and her two friends had the BEST time at camp critter! Staff were wonderful and welcomed them to the SPCA world with open arms. They learned about the mission of the SPCA, why all animals need love and a home, and most importantly, how to hold and snuggle them safely. The volunteers that helped run the program were kind and the children adored them.”

“Thank you for a wonderful week! My child had such a fun time and could not wait to go back each day. She learned so much; caring for animals, the adoption process and the SPCA. We look forward to hearing more ways she can volunteer or participate at the SPCA.”

“My son could not say enough about his amazing experience in Junior Vet Science Camp. This is perfect for a child who loves animals and may be interested in veterinary medicine. He even witnessed surgery on a cat and was fascinated by anesthesia. Taking vitals on Goose Noodles was a real hit of the day!”



At SPCA Westchester, humane education is not simply an addition to our work — it is at the heart of our mission. By teaching kindness, we are shaping a generation of advocates who will stand up for animals and for one another.

SPCA Westchester is a 2025 Latham Grant Recipient. 🐾

What Donkeys See

By Genie Joseph

Photo courtesy ChrisEcob999/Getty Images



Donkeys don't judge. Their power for healing lies in their authenticity.

Have you ever been truly seen by a donkey? I'm not talking about just being looked at. I mean, have you experienced those big liquid brown eyes looking right into your soul?

Meet Rosie and Lilly, two mini therapy donkeys—mother and daughter—who possess an extraordinary gift for gazing into your eyes and reminding you of your true self. Sweet, gentle, curious and playful - they don't judge. They aren't distracted by our pain or troubles; they simply want to share a moment of peace with us.

If I ever doubted that therapy donkeys can read my emotions, one day they proved they understood me better than I understood myself. I was in the car, late to an event, when suddenly I couldn't remember if I had filled their water bowls. I swung back home, rushed into their corral, full of the worry of being late. The donkeys took one look at me and bolted away. They wanted nothing to do with this stressful energy!

One unforgettable day, a young girl came to visit our donkeys. She had endured severe abuse and inflicted disfiguring injuries upon herself. The donkeys didn't see her scars, they saw her. They sat with her protectively, allowing her to gently brush them with a soft, caring touch. Tears she had long held back washed away the shame and sadness as she let the donkeys touch her heart. Allowing herself

**"THE PRIVILEGE OF A LIFETIME IS TO
BECOME WHO YOU TRULY ARE."
- CARL JUNG**



to be treated so tenderly by the donkeys unfroze something deep inside her.

“I feel like I had lost myself,” she whispered. “But now, I see myself the way they see me.”

Returning their love marked the beginning of her journey to reclaim the goodness and innocence that had been stolen from her.

How do these donkeys do their healing magic? They simply are themselves - patient, curious and open-hearted. Their authenticity

is contagious. Therapy animals love us for who we are, reaching us in ways that words cannot express. And don't we all deserve to experience such a profound connection and healing? 🐾



*Genie Joseph is the Executive Director of the nonprofit, The Human-Animal Connection, The author of **Human-Animal Connection - Deepening Relationships with Animals and Ourselves**, and has been a volunteer at Tripler Army Medical Center, where she helped wounded warriors.*



To learn more, visit thehumananimalconnection.org or genie@thehumananimalconnection.org.

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