

Pet project

Students collect
for SPCA with goal
of making a difference

By David Henson

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The first thing one notices upon entering Pam Wolf's back room at Golden West Middle School is the faint smell of dry kibble.

And the next thing you notice explains the first — beside the seventh-grade teacher's computer is a stockpile of pet food and accessories, bound for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Vacaville.

The cans, boxes and leashes stacked in the back room are the answers of five students to an assignment with the simplest of instructions — to make a difference.

The assignment integrated technology and community service, as students created a computer slideshow to raise awareness about a problem and then planned a solution.

"I don't want this generation to grow up, and be a bunch of whiners," Wolf said.

"Unless you back up your complaints with a solution, what's the point?"

However, the project ended a month ago with little follow-ups to the proposed solutions, except for one group of students who were moved by what they learned about pet abuse and the work of the SPCA.

"They do so much for animals, and we usually don't do anything," Stephanie Morgan, 13, said.

Morgan and her group members said they learned how prevalent pet abuse was, from neglect to physical abuse. They learned about the conditions at so-called "puppy mills," which produce high numbers of puppies through continual breeding.

The group, though, couldn't tackle these larger problems of pet abuse, but ~~she~~ wanted to lend their hands to help the SPCA.

"At first, we wanted to take care of the animals (at SPCA), but you have to be 18," Ryan McGregor, 13, said. "So the closest we could get was to start a fund-raiser."

So at the request of the SPCA, they started a pet-food drive. The students got permission from their principal, distributed flyers, made 30 posters to hang around campus and promised prizes to the class that donated the most.

"I was just really impressed by the initiative and concern," Wolf said, which is something that she said is often unique to children.

Unlike most busy adults she said, her students weren't afraid to dream big and believe they could make a difference, despite being in middle school.

And they weren't afraid to fail.

"This population is not tied down to preformulated perceptions that have been molded by the media. They are more open to possibilities and that there is nothing wrong with a dream," Wolf said. "Sometimes a dream crashes, but there is always value in dreaming."

Morgan and McGregor, with group members Naqwanda Hill, Emily Levin and Amy Hannon, will be dropping off the donations Friday at SPCA in Vacaville. The public is welcome to donate to the project through the Golden West office.

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