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Teaching people how to live via the animal kingdom

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Children can learn a lot from animals. They learn empathy, responsibility, manners, compassion and even how to treat other people.

Penny Nichols was at least one person who thought this was important enough to explore. Therefore, she and a few others launched Creatures and Kids, Inc.



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Since 2001, the people associated with this nonprofit organization have been helping children stay out of trouble. At the same time these same children are given life's little lessons families once taught one another in the good ol' days of yesteryear.

Today, not all children live in a loving two-parent home. They may live in a shelter or in a large poverty-stricken household where the paltry time and/or money available cannot be spent on all children equally. Any extra money is spent paying the electric bill and any extra time is used to catch up on sleep or tackling a second or third job. Therefore, a child doesn't learn the basic social skills necessary to keep brutal aggression at bay.

"Creatures and Kids, Inc. is dedicated to utilizing animals to instill positive character qualities in youth," Nichols said. "It is devoted to humane education and violence prevention."

Loretta Caram also thought this 3-year-old establishment was a worthy cause. Therefore, she and her dogs took classes for therapy animal certification at Dogtopia, 3724 E. Second St., near Interstate 35. Now Caram takes her Sheltie, Bailey, to a battered womens' shelter - or temporary home - to help the children.

Twice a month, Caram and Bailey initially taught the children simply how to pet and brush dogs. At first, many of the children were shy, sad and scared. Now when they see Bailey, some of the children enthusiastically run up to this miniature Lassie look-a-like and smother the dog with kisses.

Since Caram and Bailey have been showing up, the children are opening up more to the on-site psychologist which makes helping them easier.

"If we can teach children to be kind to animals, they will be kind to others," Caram explained.

It's been well documented that many hardened criminals got their malevolent start with harming animals.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, "someone who commits animal abuse may have serious psychological problems."

Jeffrey Dahmer killed and strangled neighborhood cats. Ted Bundy tortured animals as a teenager and Son of Sam, David Berkowitz, shot a neighbor's dog.

Also proven is a clear link between domestic violence and animal abuse.

"One study found that animals were abused in 88 percent of the homes in which a child was abused. Another study found that 83 percent of families reported for animal abuse also had children who are at high risk of abuse or neglect," stated the ASPCA. "Although most of the abuse toward the animals came from the parents, about a quarter of abused children abuse animals."

The volunteers at Creatures and Kids are trying to abate that abusive cycle with different types of pets.

Albert Schweitzer, the famed humanitarian, missionary and medical doctor, knew the link between the treatment of animals and the treatment of people.

"Anyone who has accustomed himself to regard the life of any living creature as worthless," he is quoted as saying, "is in danger of arriving also at the idea of worthless human lives."

Creatures and Kids needs more animal/person teams to go out and help others through its therapeutic animal intervention program. If you would like to help make this section of the world just a little more peaceful, contact Creatures and Kids, 478-8550 or www.creaturesandkids.org.

Together, you and your pet can help bring about change in a child's life.