

On the Positive Side: Children Learn to “Have a Heart for Chained Dogs”

by Jean Gilbert

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The Dogs Deserve Better campaign “Have a Heart for Chained Dogs Week” (Feb.7-14) generates a phenomenal and growing number of valentines every year. Last year 16,880 residences with chained dogs received valentines with messages of hope from caring people. This year, the goal is 18,000 valentines to owners of dogs tied, tethered or caged 24/7- appealing to them to break the chain and bring ‘em into the family or to rehome the animal.

In conjunction with DDB’s 10th anniversary season this month, the objective of “Have A Heart” is to reach and teach dog owners about care and proper treatment in places where DDB has representation (US, Canada, England, Puerto Rico). The success of the valentine campaign and others are well documented, including the annual DDB “Chain Off” and a “Dog-A-Day Summer Rescue Challenge” when over 100 dogs were rescued from chains. Some of these amazing success stories are recounted in the DDB yearly calendar. The 2012 calendar is uplifting for the photography and smiling dog faces accompanying the stories.

Las Cruces are rallying to the cause again this year to help chained dogs and DDB reach its goal of 18,000 valentines (New Mexico contributed over 500 valentines last year) with Boys & Girls Club youth and public/private school children making valentines in “Critter Connection” and “Diggity Dog Reading” sessions lead by the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.

As part of the valentine campaign to raise awareness about the plight of chained dogs, volunteers tell children the heart-rending story of Buddy Unchained . The story is about a small, forgotten Terrier dog chained outside in the freezing snow and brought in by an animal control officer to a humane society where he convalesces and finds a loving family, a “real” home. This ASPCA award-winning book with skillful illustrations, told in the voice of Buddy, is captivating to children. The story elicits good discussion about care of animals and is a must-read for educators, parents, and children.

Copies of Buddy Unchained will be donated to area schools by HSSNM again this year, with the eventual goal for all elementary schools in the Las Cruces and Gadsden districts to have the book in their libraries.

For more information about the DDB “Have a Heart” campaign and helping chained dogs, go to www.dogsdeservebetter.org. Together, let’s break the chains!!

Jean Gilbert is a humane educator with the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. She leads weekly programs with volunteers from TheraPaws, RSVP & HSSNM for children at Boys & Girls Club sites, youth centers, & public/private schools. Please call 523-8020 or check online at www.hssnm.org about humane education projects and volunteer opportunities.