

On the Positive Side: Cans 4 Critters Community Project
by Jean Gilbert
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Cans 4 Critters began as a service learning project last summer, with youth at the Las Cruces Boys & Girls Club in weekly humane education sessions led by the Humane Society of Southern NM. The project started with proceeds from reclamation of aluminum can collections, with some coin donations, going to a medical fund for a special needs dog in foster care with Basset Hound & Beagle Rescue. Sadly, the female basset hound "Miracle" did not survive.

But the project and education continued, with ambassador dogs and their owners from the rescue organization visiting the children. The dogs were top notch teachers with their combined showmanship, unique personalities, and friendly dispositions. They brought a message of love, loyalty, and trust that accentuated the educators' presentations on care of specific breeds, pet guardianship, and spay-neuter awareness.

Since the Cans 4 Critters project launched, proceeds from can reclamation and coin donations total over \$500 with the fund helping other animals in the community. Currently, for the spring quarter, the fund is assisting a dog rescuer in the south valley with medical bills for dogs that were poisoned and required emergency treatment and hospitalization. (The incident was reported in a January issue of the Las Cruces Sun News.) Two dogs survived and, sadly, two died.

The Cans 4 Critters project has grown considerably with members of the pet network involved, youth from private/public schools and clubs, merchants in the community, and many caring individuals who contribute cans and coins. The ways and means of can collection from contributors are varied: An elementary child proudly tells how he managed a load of cans, transporting 4-5 daily by backpack from home to school for days in succession to contribute to the class collection. Not the norm are the "can queens" who continuously scan the roadsides and walkways and bring in large garbage bags full of cans. Some 'dumpster dive', skimming the surface of open receptacles. And there's an activist who wrestles cans from everyone and convinces party organizers that the beverages MUST come in cans.

A notable Cans 4 Critters story is told by a donor who scouts for aluminum cans daily and eyes one on a sunny afternoon, glistening in a culvert. She is unable to safely retrieve it with her dog in tow so returns later and, before climbing into the culvert, chances on a neighbor walking her dogs. The two converse. Can scouting and the project are mentioned. The neighbor is excited and tells about finding a one hundred dollar bill lying in a road with no clue or context to determine origin. She explains it was an alternate route taken with her dogs a month or two ago. She had been waiting for some kind of sign or direction telling her what to do with the money. The encounter was it! The neighbor delivered the hundred dollar bill the same afternoon. It was received with gratitude and awe, and promptly deposited in the C4C fund.

Cans 4 Critters thanks all contributors for their generosity during this early phase of the project. The response has been tremendous, heart-warming and uplifting. There are many animals to help so C4C invites everyone to participate by donating aluminum cans (and coins are welcome too). All aluminum can amounts are accepted, no matter how small or large. Please contact the project coordinator for pick-up (or drop-off) at 575-523-8020.

Jean Gilbert is the project coordinator for Cans 4 Critters. She is a board member and humane educator with the Humane Society of Southern NM.