

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

On the Positive Side: Volunteer to help shelter pets

By Karen Shaughnessy / For the Sun-News

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It's all my daughter's fault.

My husband was studying for an exam and needed time alone to prepare properly. My then-6-year-old daughter kept asking, "Mom, can we go see the dogs at the shelter?" Of course, you can't DO anything, but SEE the dogs UNLESS you are a volunteer. That's how it all started. Two years later we are still volunteers.

During our first year of volunteering we started a home school dog walking and cat socializing group. Once a week, moms and kids spent two to four hours walking, petting, playing and loving dogs, and cats were allowed to explore toys and cuddle with kids.

A volunteer humane educator often worked with the kids, giving hands-on demonstrations with animals and lessons related to being a good pet owner, while parents supervised.

We still strive to walk dogs once a week, but lately it has been difficult due to an addition to our family: We first started fostering, then adopted a heartworm-positive dog from the shelter. While on site, we often do "socials" with prospective adopters to match pets and owners. Through walking the dogs, we are well prepared to answer questions and inform prospective owners about adopting a pet.

Many hours have been spent at off-site adoption events, too, in efforts to find homes for our furry friends. Connecting homeless pets with their new families is very rewarding.

Quotes from my daughter, Mikayla, who is 8 years old now: "I became a volunteer because I wanted to be with the dogs. I like dogs. Dogs are my favorite animal. I like being a volunteer because I like to spend time with the dogs-even if they are WILD! I like playing with them and walking the dogs. I like to do off-site adoptions because the dogs get to get out of the shelter and see people and they might get adopted."

To be honest, volunteering can be tough. Sometimes we get dirty and sometimes animal outcomes are sad. Adding another commitment to your schedule is always challenging. But doing nothing is unacceptable and condones the negative situations we struggle against in Las Cruces/Doña Ana County, so we continue to try to help our homeless animals in as many ways as we can.

Volunteer at the animal shelter or in some other capacity helping homeless animals. It really will change your life!

Please contact Jordan Simons, Animal Service Center of the Mesilla Valley volunteer coordinator, at (575) 382-0018, ext. 119, about volunteer opportunities at the animal shelter.

Many dogs and cats are available at the shelter so consider adopting a shelter animal or being a foster.

Go to the city of Las Cruces Web site to see the [ASCMV "Pet of the Week"](#) and to learn about off-site adoption promotions and other ways you can volunteer or help shelter animals.

Karen Shaughnessy and Mikayla also volunteer in humane education work with critter clubs, at adoption fairs and events.