On the Positive Side
Animal service projects in the new year to connect with kids
By Jean Gilbert For the Sun-News
Posted: 12/27/2009 12:00:00 AM MST

The new year holds opportunity for our youth in character development. Kids want interesting experiences, so involving them in service projects to help homeless animals is a good choice.

Consider the following topics or themes, based on the month or season, for ideas in planning projects for your youth club, scout troop, teen group or class.

January: Make a New Year's resolution to be kind to animals and carry through with specific action. Put on a play or talent show to benefit a local animal organization or the ACTion Programs for Animals pet food bank.

February 7-14: Join the Dogs Deserve Better "Have a Heart for Chained Dogs" campaign. Las Cruces youth contributed to the 12,000-plus valentines mailed last year to residences nationwide with tethered or confined dogs, educating people with a message of kindness to help neglected dogs.

March: Spring is a good time for pet shows or walk-a-thons to raise money and support for Spay-Neuter Action Program (SNAP) and the Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley (ASCMV) to keep low cost surgery services available.

April: "Prevent Cruelty to Animals Month" is an opportunity to highlight the work of city of Las Cruces and Do-a Ana County animal control officers by inviting them to schools and clubs for presentations and learning ways to help.

May 2-8: "Be Kind to Animals Week" is a good time to hold a drive for needed pet supplies or organize a regular volunteer group for exercise or social enrichment of adoptable animals at the ASCMV and Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary. Visit Las Cruces Clicks "Paw Post" site for more animal groups needing help.

May 16-22: Invite educators from animal control and the Humane Society of Southern NM (HSSNM) to your school or club during "National Dog Bite Prevention Week."

June: Be an adoption advocate during "Adopt-a-Shelter-Cat Month" with ads/publicity for homeless cats at the ASCMV, SHAS, HSSNM, Better Life Pet Foods, Enchanted Gardens, Fcamp, & other rescue programs. The Feral Cat Management Program welcomes volunteers and supporters and is a resource for all cats.

July & August: Hot summer months are an opportunity to educate people about the danger of leaving pets in cars and safety issues related to Independence Day. Purchase hot car fliers from a national organization to use with your club outreach efforts or give to a local animal group.

September 19-25: "Farm Animals Awareness Week." Did you know cows prefer Elvis to Eminem and pigs are smarter than dogs? Learn about farm animals by selecting good literature to read during the observance. Visit the *Humane Society of the US Web site* for humane farming info. For a complete 2010 animal events calendar, visit the *PETroglyphs website*.

October: "Adopt a Shelter Dog Month." Be an advocate for a shelter or homeless dog by helping organizations/ agencies referenced. Promote adoption with fliers and photo ads made, or paid, by your club. A costume party is a fun way to help, with donations from participants going toward adoption cost or the spay-neuter fee.

November 7-13: "Animal Shelter Appreciation Week" is the time to invite friends to visit the ASCMV, SHAS, and area rescue groups. Make cards or bring snacks for staff to show your appreciation and bring treats for the animals too. Learn about volunteer programs or help create one.

December: Show your holiday spirit during the season of giving and become a member of an organization/s mentioned. Winter is a hard time for birds and wildlife. Contact Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue and Nature Park, the Southwest Environmental Center and area nature groups to learn how to help wild animals and the environment.

Jean Gilbert is a humane educator with the Humane Society of Southern NM. Call 523-8020 to schedule a presentation for your youth group. For more information, visit HSSNM online at *www.hssnm.org*