

Animal advocacy nonprofit starts program to educate students

JONELLE BOBAK Staff Writer Dec 11, 2017 (...)



Lynn Jackson (right) and Vicki Harper (middle) show students different types of brushes that can be used on their pets during a PREP class on Wednesday at Chesterfield Elementary School.

Jonelle Bobak/ The News Herald

A local nonprofit that seeks to decrease the amounts of animals that are euthanized has partnered with Burke County Public Schools and started a special class to educate students about proper pet care.

Those with the nonprofit REASON, or Reduce Euthanasia and Spay or Neuter, have been visiting with fourth-grade students at Chesterfield Elementary and teaching about different ways to be responsible pet owners. They are using a six-part curriculum called "PREP" which stands for pet responsibility education program.

"When I moved down here a couple years ago, I saw a desperate need for education around dogs and cats in the area counties," said Lynn Jackson, secretary for REASON.

Jackson said she would be driving around and would see several dogs running near the road and some that had been hit by cars. That reality was a culture shock to her and after that she decided to do something to change it, so she joined REASON.



Patience Brown (middle) raises her hand to answer a question during the Pet Responsibility Education Program, while classmates Kylee Wright (left) and Lilianne Giglio listen.

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The nonprofit also helps low-income families spay and neuter their pets. They spay and neuter up to 40 animals a month working together with several local veterinarians.

“All we keep doing is spaying and neutering, but we are not educating anybody to know why, so (with the start of the program) the generation cycle will hopefully be broken,” Jackson said.

One of the goals REASON had this year was to bring education to the county through the school system, Jackson said.

“In considering the opportunity, I knew the program would promote a great awareness of compassion for animals,” said Chesterfield Principal Charles Williams. “One reason why I wanted to pilot the program was simply to promote empathy among our students.”

Approximately 50 students are involved in the program at Chesterfield and will finish the program this month. Jackson plans to continue teaching the PREP classes at Mull Elementary School this spring.



Chesterfield student Dalton Wyatt (right) talks with Instructor Vicki Harper about being a responsible pet owner during the PREP class on Wednesday morning.

Jonelle Bobak/ The News Herald

The program, which is funded by the county, starts each lesson with “I Can” statements to help students learn about pet ownership and responsibility.

Students have been learning about how to be safe around pets, about overpopulation, how to raise healthy pets, the basic commands a dog should know and the difference between types of dog collars.

They also were introduced to a local K - 9 and therapy dog trainer and explained how to approach a dog by always asking the owner beforehand and petting the dog underneath the chin.

“The presenters have done a nice job in making the connection to the need for kindness and compassion — not only how we treat and care for animals, but also in how we engage with one another,” Williams said. “A highlight for me was seeing our students interact with the animals as they have visited the classroom. Students have shown compassion and a sense of gentleness.”

One main part of the class is having the students write a “Speuter” story as part of a friendly competition. Jackson asks students to explain why spaying and neutering is important in the story.



A winner will be chosen and will receive a free spay or neuter certificate for their family.

“I really see them starting to turn a leaf now with why it is so important to do it,” Jackson said. “Some of their light bulbs are going off and I love it.”

She hopes to expand the program to reach more schools throughout the county, but in order to do so, they would need more volunteers, she said.

That is something we could grow to," Jackson said. "This is a huge step."

For those interested in volunteering for the nonprofit with the classes, call 828-403-3675.

At the end of the classes, each student will receive a certificate of completion from REASON.



For more information about REASON and their efforts, visit www.reason-nc.org.

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