

HOMELESS, NOT HOPELESS:

Making a Difference in An Animal's Life



My name is Rocky. I'm a 12-year-old dog. A few months ago, my owner passed away. He's the only man I've really known. My brother and I were brought in to stay at this new place called an animal shelter. There are others like me here, although some of them are much younger.

There's also a man here who visits us regularly. He's called a volunteer. At first, he was a stranger to me, and I didn't know whether I should let him into my life. As I got to know him, though, I realized one day that I could trust him. He wasn't there to cause any harm; he wanted to give me hope. He became less of a stranger and more of a friend to me. Now, I look forward to his visits. Somedays I just want a moment of attention, a pat on the head or a hug, and he understands that. Other days, he throws the ball and I chase it and bring it back to him until I'm too tired to play. Each day spent with him gives me a sense of belonging and takes away the loneliness.

Rocky is a dog at the Jackson County Animal Shelter who is waiting to go to a new home. In the meantime, Rocky gets some much-needed attention from one of the animal shelter volunteers. After veteran Wesley "Wes" Farley lost his black lab of 14 years, he decided to volunteer at the Jackson County Animal Shelter. For the past year, Wes has volunteered for four days per week, rain, snowstorm, or shine. He continues to volunteer because he recognizes how much Rocky and the other dogs appreciate the interaction. "I enjoy seeing their happy faces when I let them out and interact with them," he says.

Wes typically spends three hours with the dogs per day, and he divides his time up to allow each dog to have an equal amount of play and interaction time. "We appreciate all volunteers," says shelter director Barb Pfaff, "but it's Wes' consistency that is beneficial and truly makes a difference in these dogs."

This time spent with the dogs also has an impact on Wes. "It keeps my spirits up and allows me to get out in the community," he says. "If you like animals, this is the place to volunteer," he concludes.

Whether you want to volunteer on your own, with a group, or with your family, there are direct ways to volunteer and indirect ways to make a difference in an animal's life. "We welcome whatever way a person wants to get involved," shares Barb.

Volunteering with the animals directly, like Wes, is the most obvious way to get involved. "The animals need more voices and more variety," says Barb. "Someone might have the right voice or personality that makes that animal comfortable and trusting," she adds.

The purpose of these volunteers is to make an animal desirable so that it may find a home. If you can volunteer with this mindset, this position may be right for you. However, it is important for the shelter's staff to make sure you are capable of interacting with the animals safely. "We need to know who you are

and what you are capable of," shares Barb.

Within this opportunity alone, there are countless ways to make a difference. Volunteering may mean taking the dogs on a walk, letting an energetic child burn energy by throwing a ball, filling up the pool for the dogs on a hot day, dangling a mouse toy in front of the cats, or singing to a kitten cradled in your arms. It may also mean spending time with the occasional rabbit or guinea pig. The shelter has even taken in iguanas, goats, and chickens. "We support any animal in our county that needs our help, excluding wildlife," says Barb.

Another way to lend a hand is to help with the pet food pantry. Like a food pantry for humans, the animal shelter receives donations of pet food that cannot be sold in a store because the packaging is torn or damaged. This food must be packaged into smaller bags. This presents an opportunity for a volunteer who is unable to physically interact with the animals to get involved.

If you're not comfortable with direct volunteer work, there are other ways to make an impact. One way that everyone can give to the shelter is through something that everyone has—a birthday. You've probably heard of your Facebook friends asking you to donate to a charitable cause for their birthday. A similar trend has started at kids' birthday parties. In lieu of gifts, children have asked their guests to bring a donation for



The animals benefit from interactions with a variety of voices and personalities.



the animals at the shelter. “We’ve even hosted birthday parties at the shelter,” adds Barb.

Additionally, community members have used their hobbies, talents, or other resources to benefit the shelter. Some have hosted rummage sales and donated the proceeds to the shelter. Others make crafts, such as stained-glass paw prints, and sell them to raise money for the shelter.

“A Girl Scout group measured the cages in the cat room and made tie blankets for the tops of the cages where the cats like to lay. It makes the room more comfortable and home-like for the cats,” shares Barb.

If someone likes to take photos or is an aspiring photographer, the animals would also benefit from photos that make them desirable. These photos are then uploaded to Facebook. “You can help the animals and the shelter just by liking and sharing our posts,” comments Barb. “Facebook has become our main way to promote and share the animals because it has a faster response time than Petfinder,” she adds.

The Animal Shelter and Interfaith are hosting a collaborative Hart to Heart fundraiser event on August 18 in memory of Doctor Lyle Hart. The Hart to Heart pet walk will end with a picnic at the Lunda Park. Check your local news sources for updates on the event.



Above: The donated tie blankets make the cages cozy for the cats. Below right: Nibbles enjoys taking a walk on a nice day. Below left: The shelter is open on Monday and Wednesday through Saturday from 1 to 4 p.m.



If these various options don’t suit your interests, there’s still another way to get involved. Do you have a pair of shoes, or maybe a bag of shoes, that you’ve been meaning to throw out or drop off at a donation center? Did you know that you can simultaneously donate your old shoes and help the animals right here in Jackson County?

One of the shelter’s greatest ongoing campaigns is its shoe fundraiser. The animal shelter collects gently worn, used, and new shoes that are shipped to developing nations through the Funds2Org Group. Volunteers can donate shoes, help sort and bag the donated shoes, or even help with the marketing of the event. A



volunteer could even coordinate with the secondhand stores to collect unwanted/unsold shoes before they are thrown out. This not only benefits the shelter, but also the Earth by not allowing those shoes to go to the landfill. In return for these efforts, the shelter receives a check for the donated shoes. “Last year’s fundraiser brought in \$1,900,” says Barb.

If you’re looking to get involved, there are several routes that you could take. Volunteering may not look the same for everyone, but it still has the same objective. “The important thing to remember is that no matter how you contribute, you are ultimately helping the animals. They may be homeless, but they’re not hopeless,” concludes Barb.—
Brandi Shramek, Executive Coordinator



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There are currently 20 regular and occasional volunteers at the shelter. If you’re interested in getting involved, the best way to do so is by contacting the shelter. After the shelter’s staff has an idea of how you would like to get involved, you may be asked to provide your contact information/fill out an application, if applicable. Minors may volunteer without a parent/guardian, at the shelter’s discretion, by signing a waiver. Minors are scheduled in pairs, with one adult staff member per two minors.

ONCE A YOUTH AMBASSADOR, FOREVER A LEADER

We checked in with our class of 2014 youth ambassadors to see what they're up to. While their time as a youth ambassador is gone, the experience and lessons learned remain.



Stephanie Pipkin attended Western Technical College after graduating from Melrose-Mindoro High School. In the spring of 2016, she received her associate's degree in marketing. While earning her degree, she waitressed and worked at a credit union to avoid student loans. Upon college graduation, Stephanie became the office and marketing director at her family's business, U.S. Solar Mounts. "Oftentimes, I interact with electric cooperatives to ensure our clients are following their cooperative's rules and regulations with their solar project," shares Stephanie. This spring, she started her own business, Black River Falls Cleaning Services.

Stephanie uses the leadership skills she learned as a youth ambassador to make integral decisions that affect both daily and long-term company operations. The program also helped her with public speaking, whether that was in front of groups or talking to elected officials. "This helped build my confidence that I can interact with people who have a lot of experience in their field. It's okay to not know everything when talking to them, as long as you are genuine and eager to add value to the interaction."

Kenzie Hoeschele is a graduate of Black River Falls High School. As planned, she attended UW-Eau Claire, where she graduated in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science in communication sciences and disorders. During college, she took on leadership roles as a top seller at Bath and Body Works and as an instructional intern for a college course. Kenzie is a behavior technician at Reaching Your Potential, working with children with autism. In the future, she would like to earn her master's degree in both behavior and speech therapy.

Since high school, Kenzie has had interaction with cooperatives through the Co-op Credit Union and Jackson Electric now that she is back home from college. Her participation in the youth ambassador program has made a tremendous impact on Kenzie's life. The program stresses the importance of making connections with new people, and she has done just that. "The trip I took to D.C. was life changing because it pushed me to meet many new people from across the country," she says. "I do believe that trip and the program has helped me grow as a person and a leader."



Brandi Shramek attended Viterbo University following graduation from Lincoln High School. In May of 2018, she earned a Bachelor of Science in English, writing emphasis, while also obtaining a biology minor. She was then hired for the executive coordinator position at Jackson Electric.

During college, Brandi took on several leadership roles. She was involved with the Student Activities Board, served as editor of the campus literary and arts magazine, maintained the online content for the student newspaper, helped lead campus ministry and honors program retreats, tutored, and was selected to sit on a student hiring committee.

Since her time as a youth ambassador, Brandi has had interaction with cooperatives through the Co-op Credit Union and her employment at Jackson Electric. Her experience as a youth ambassador has prepared her for her roles at Jackson Electric. "I learned about the cooperative business model and principles during the program," she recalls. "It has been exciting to learn more about what cooperatives do for their members and the community, and be able to share that knowledge with today's youth ambassadors."

Hunter Loveland graduated from Lincoln High School with plans to become a nurse. After obtaining his EMT license from Chippewa Valley Technical College, Hunter decided to become a paramedic. "I realized my passion is for emergency medicine, public safety, and helping people during what is probably the worst day of their life," he shares.

Hunter graduated from Western Technical College in April of 2018, earning his paramedicine degree. Now, he's a nationally registered paramedic and works full-time for the City of Black River Falls, and part-time for Black River Memorial Hospital and Sparta Area Ambulance Service. In the future, Hunter wishes to earn his Critical Care Paramedic License and eventually follow his dream of becoming a flight paramedic.

In addition to work, Hunter volunteers with the Merrillan Fire Department and First Responders, where he has taken on the leadership roles as EMS director and EMS training officer. He also volunteers for Bruce Mound Ski Patrol and is training to become an American Heart Association BLS/CPR instructor.

Jackson Electric's youth ambassador program is designed to enhance leadership skills, teach students about the cooperative business model, and to instill the concern for community cooperative principle.

Hunter says the youth ambassador program helped him learn that small gestures can have a big impact. "Something as small as being positive can unite people. Everyone is more open to listening and working together, which is a huge aspect in the emergency medicine and public safety services in which I work."





JACKSON ELECTRIC CONTINUES ITS COMMITMENT TO YOUTH EDUCATION



Preston Guttenberg,
Blair-Taylor High School



Ethan Bible, Black River
Falls High School



Emma Rogers, Alma
Center-Humbird-
Merrillan High School

This past spring, Jackson Electric presented \$7,500 to area graduating high school seniors. Since 1998, nearly \$118,000 in scholarships has been presented to high school seniors who plan to continue their education beyond high school.

The annual youth scholarship program encourages post-secondary education for area high school seniors by assisting them in financing their education. A \$1,000 scholarship is offered to each of the eight high schools that are in Jackson Electric's service territory, as well as those students who are home-schooled, open-enrolled, or attend a private school. A \$1,500 scholarship is awarded to a deserving senior who participates in the Jackson Electric Cooperative Youth Ambassador Program.

Jackson Electric uses Federated Youth Foundation funds to provide scholarships and monies to charitable organizations. This account is funded from Jackson Electric's unclaimed capital credits.

Scholarships were offered to Neillsville, Sparta, and Whitehall high schools. No qualified applicants applied.



Tenley Walker, Open-Enrolled



Gabrielle Ruffi, Melrose-
Mindoro High School



Colby Gunderson,
Osseo-Fairchild
High School



McKayla Gilbertson,
Youth Ambassador



Welcome, Danyelle!

Jackson Electric welcomed Danyelle Waldera as a summer employee on June 3. Danyelle is from the Taylor area and graduated from Blair-Taylor High School in May. This fall, she will attend Ripon College, where she will play basketball while pursuing an Exercise Science-Athletic Training degree. You'll see Danyelle working outside the headquarters building and helping with the operations department.

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