



There is a lot of poverty and want in Llanos de Santa Lucía, but young people in ALJA are committed to improving their own conditions and those of their animals and community.

Animal Welfare Education Breaks Down Barriers

An educational project in a community of scarce economic resources demonstrates that young people can leave behind problems like drugs and lack of opportunities, by taking care of their animals.

The residents of Llanos de Santa Lucía, in the province of Cartago, Costa Rica, may not have money, paved streets, basic services, adequate sanitary conditions and opportunities to work and study, but a group of young people are demonstrating plenty of will and commitment in their decision to forge a better future and change their community by helping animals.

The Youth Alliance for Animals (Alianza Juvenil por los Animales - ALJA) arose as the result of a series of animal welfare tasks that Arts teacher Ana María Castro assigned her middle school students.

Youth in Action

Some of ALJA's initiatives:

- Monitoring the health and food situation of stray animals
- Basic attention for injured or trapped strays
- Talks about animal welfare in businesses and schools
- Sterilization and awareness-raising campaigns in the community
- Information through their Facebook page (ALJA)
- Built and management of the group's web site and virtual paper
- Preparation and distribution of materials like calendars and flyers
- Documentation and reports

"There's no point teaching art for art's sake. Education should be an agent of change, a way of getting closer to people and improving their situation", said the educator. She took advantage of an agreement between the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and Costa Rica's Ministry of Education to receive training and advising about animal welfare.

Thanks to ALJA, her 13 to 15 year-old students are becoming aware of the problems in their community, avoiding the pitfall of drugs and crime and being motivated to stay in school and spend their free time learning about veterinary care and computer sciences to help animals, among other things (see inset, "Youth in Action").

"Teacher Ana María is an example of what education should generate in people. Every one of the initiatives we carry out in the program is aimed at educators and students transforming knowledge into concrete actions to improve living conditions for animals and for themselves", explained Carlos Chacón, WSPA's Education Manager for Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean.

Beyond Limitations

Not having money for medicines did not keep young Gabriela Gutiérrez from taking charge of "Estrella", a little dog that showed up one morning near her house with three broken legs after being run over by a truck.

"We asked a veterinarian in town for help, got splints put on her legs and have taken care of her for the past seven months. We had to bathe her and feed her like a baby because she couldn't do it for herself. I even made a picture to raffle off so I could buy her medicine and food", told Gabriela's mother.

Bryan Salazar is 15 years old and has not been able to start high school because there is no space. Still, he knows more about animal illnesses, medications and behaviour than many adults in the community.

He uses the Internet to investigate and assists the veterinarian with treatments, just as if he were a university student. ALJA has motivated him to learn more and more every day to save animals.

Frayser Navarrete is also an exemplary case. While many young people his age spend their time on the street corners of Santa Lucía consuming alcohol or smoking, he is in charge of the medicine chest, food, documentation, presentations, the group's Facebook profile (ALJA), web site and virtual paper.

When he told his mother about ALJA, all she asked was that he not neglect his grades in school or the animals in his house. "Now everybody in the community calls Frayser when some animal is suffering- and in three courses he got such excellent grades he didn't have to take the final exam!", revealed Seidy Barboza, his proud mother.

All of these young people and the others in ALJA share a deep love for animals and the conviction that there are no obstacles to achieving what you want.



In spite of economic limitations, Gabriela Gutiérrez took charge of "Estrella" after she was hit by a truck, ending up with three broken legs. Thanks to Gabriela's care, the dog can now stand up.

Animal Welfare Education Methodology

The teacher who founded the group started doing art workshops inspired by animal care, asking the young people to take charge of a stray animal for eight days and illustrating articles of animal welfare laws.

"Based on a Ministry of Public Education guideline dictating that we should aim for learning that has meaning for the students, I developed a methodology where they figure out how to address their own problems. There's nothing more important than for them to feel part of the solution", explained Núñez.

This school year projects will be carried out together with other middle school subjects, like biology and civics. Indisputably, a demonstration of how education can change the course of things for animals and human beings.



With assignments like this painting, the Arts teacher Ana María Castro instilled the love for animals in their students.