

Education Drives Change for Animal and Human Welfare



Carlos Chacón, WSPA Education Manager for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, met Jerry López and his pet "Chiquis Perris". Jerry's temperament and his aversion to animals changed with the animal welfare classes given in his kindergarden. Photo: Emi Kondo.

More than 27.000 boys and girls with basic concepts about animal welfare thanks to an agreement between WSPA, the State of Puebla, Mexico, and the Mexican non-governmental organization, Dejando Huella.

Jerry's life will never be the same since the day he kicked a puppy looking for food at his school. His own classmates, indignant, reproached him: "Hey Jerry! That's wrong! The teacher is showing us how we need to respect animals, take care of them... not hit them!". They may only be five years old, but the children had already learned the importance of respecting animals' welfare.

These small children are among more than 27.000 boys and girls learning basic concepts of animal welfare in their classes, thanks to an agreement between the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), the Puebla State Government and the Mexican non-governmental organization, Dejando Huella.

“The numbers are significant, of course; but it’s even more important for each boy and girl to hold in their heart and mind the values and information the program aims to develop, for animals and for the children themselves as human beings”, said Carlos Chacón, WSPA Education Manager for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

“Jerry had behavioral problems. He was a very aggressive child who hit and pestered his small classmates a lot [...] and he was the same way with animals; he had no respect for them”, explained Isabel, his teacher at that time. Jerry’s aunt and tutor, Violeta Gutiérrez, also said that before taking the animal welfare classes, Jerry didn’t like animals, much less dogs. They bothered and frightened him.

No one would ever believe she was talking about the likeable boy we met a year later, shouting with laughter as he ran after his puppy “Chiquis Perris” to hug her and play with her. His innocent little face full of shyness, he told us, lisping a little, that he thought his puppy loved him “cause I give her affection”.

Jerry’s aunt and former teacher both agree that he changed after the animal welfare classes and his experience involving the dog at school. “That was the moment he caught on that animals feel, have pain. (...) The next day and in the following sessions he began to behave differently. He treated his classmates differently too”, recounted Isabel.

Stories like this one exemplify the message WSPA and its partners want to transmit in this project: That all forms of life deserve respect and that applying this value in everyday life is vital to achieve the culture of peace Puebla and Mexico need.

*WSPA worked together with the Government of the State of Puebla and the local organization, Fundación Dejando Huella, to implement an educational project that brought animal welfare concepts to over 27.000 Mexican children.
Photo: Emi Kondo.*



Puebla: Exemplary Actions for Animal Welfare

Some of the actions carried out:

- Vaccination, sterilization and education carried out together with the Puebla Health Service; as a result no cases of rabies have been recorded for more than ten years.
- Implementation in 2010 of “Regulations for Responsible Ownership of Dogs and Cats” in San Pedro Cholula, in association with Fundación Dejando Huella.
- Eruption of the Popocatepetl Volcano: Operation of a preventive program for animal protection recognized as exemplary by WSPA.
- Signature of an agreement with the organization, Modelo Educativo Educación por la Experiencia (ExE), to include the themes of respect for all forms of life and animal welfare in complementary primary school textbooks for 911.000 resident children.



Due to the problems of citizen security and lack of space on their properties, residents tend to hoist their dogs to the roof, exposing them to high temperatures, discomfort and risk of injury if they fall. WSPA's education project aims to change such practices by working with the smallest members of the household. Photo: Emi Kondo.

Synergy for the Welfare of Animals and People

A history of over ten years of successful joint work between WSPA and the State of Puebla (see inset: "Puebla: Exemplary Actions for Animal Welfare") led to the launching of a new project that would also involve Fundación Dejando Huella.

The main objective was to combat violence in Mexico by teaching values such as respect for the life of animals. In the State of Puebla alone there were 18.022 robberies, murders and kidnappings in 2012, 104 more than the year before, according to the Secretariat of Public Security's Interinstitutional Committee of Statistics and Information.

"I'm convinced that for a country to evolve and improve you have to invest in education (...) if we instill a respect for animals and all forms of life in children at that age, it's a sure bet that tomorrow they'll grow up without violence, as children who learn to appreciate what nature gives them and live alongside others in a better way", commented Martha Érika Alonso de Moreno Valle, First Lady of the State of Puebla and President of the State Comprehensive Family Development System (SEDIF for its name in Spanish).

Ana Claudia Mastretta, from the Volunteer Department of the Secretariat of Administration of Puebla, is also very clear: "We have many, many things to learn from animals. I've learned that through them it's possible to live together in peace, and I believe we human beings can apply other values of theirs, such as respect for others, tolerance and compassion".

To reach the objective, the Government of Puebla gave the project access to 431 community childcare centers (CAICs for their name in Spanish), places created for population groups more vulnerable to problems of poverty, school drop-out, malnutrition and violence. There, guiding teachers attend 3-to-6-year old children with the help of parents and relatives who collaborate in the center's work.

With support and advising from WSPA, Dejando Huella trained 1.021 preschool guiding teachers in the methodology suggested to incorporate animal welfare in their lessons so that instead of an extra burden, it would support their regular functions. 81 of the State's 217 municipalities were reached in a first stage.

"Teaching children respect for animals is important because it educates them to value life, and not just ours but the one in

front of us, no matter whether it's smaller or bigger, if we understand it or it doesn't understand us", said Hilda Nava, one of the guiding teachers who received the program. "A child who learns to respect the life of an animal will be able to understand what it means to respect human life", stressed the Director of the Getsemaní childcare center, Josefina Ramírez.

The agreement also included 13 sessions together with the Puebla Secretariat of Health for dogs and cats to advise families on how to keep their animals healthy and provide veterinary assessments, prescriptions and sterilizations for animals. "Family integration and response is the main thing. If we have protected animals attended by veterinarians, the health of families is also going to improve", stated Juan Manuel Balderas, the Puebla State Health Secretariat's Zoonosis Coordinator.

For Leticia Gallardo de Tovar, Linkage Coordinator at Dejando Huella, an interest in education and love of animals were the points in common facilitating the synergy, uniting hundreds of people with different capacities and positions around a single goal.

Together for a World Free of Cruelty toward Animals

Lorena Aguilar, Coordinator of the CAICs in Puebla, had no hesitation in pointing to teamwork as the project's pivotal factor: "The integration of different government agencies with international and local nongovernmental organizations and above all, with the participation of the community". The CAIC Getsemaní in the Municipality of Cuautlancingo is a good example.

Outside: unpaved streets full of dust and mud, half-finished constructions and unpainted houses with chipped walls. Inside: a willingness and commitment to work, despite the adversities. Teachers united with the small students and their parents to produce a play promoting animal welfare, with costumes, scenery, script, periodic rehearsals and even cookies shaped like kibble and bones.



Needs abound in the community of Getsemaní, but this doesn't hinder day after day of efforts to improve the conditions in which their animals live, through education. Photo: Emi Kondo

Don Félix Pozos, for example, decided to travel a little over three hours from Mexico Federal District to participate in the activity with his three children: Enrique, Uriel and Óscar.

His voice proud, he says they were the ones who taught him about animal welfare: "When I used to see a stray and wanted to throw a stone at it to keep it away they'd say to me: 'No Pa! You shouldn't hit them, just shoo it away, don't hit them'".

"We've seen that the program not only generates a change in the mentality of the children and their parents, but also leads to better living conditions for the animals", added WSPA's Carlos Chacón.

"Now the children come and they say: 'Now mommy goes with us to get the dog vaccinated, now mommy doesn't give leftover scraps to the dog or cat; now she gives them kibble!'", commented teacher Josefina Ramírez, Director of CAIC Getsemaní. She tours the community streets and assures there are fewer abandoned animals than there used to be.

Based on the work accomplished, the Municipal Government of Cuautlancingo was inspired to draft regulations on responsible pet ownership. "Healthy and fit animals also means welfare for us and our children", said Alba Michelle Ramos, President of the Cuautlancingo Municipal DIF.

For Sandra García, Coordinator of Special and Community Projects at Dejando Huella, the benefit occurs from working at the roots of society. "Each child that receives the program, each one of the guiding teachers that has been trained

and each parent that joins in this project is contributing, little by little, to a change in mentality and a culture of peace to flourish (...) and this is reflected in each one of the animals, as well".



Don Félix had no qualms about dressing up as an animal to share in the lessons about animal welfare his children are receiving. Photo: Emi Kondo

Nothing speaks more than Jerry's own words about how he feels when he sees someone mistreat an animal: "I think like, pain that they're mistreated and pain feels bad". Hope lies on the horizon for animals and human beings alike.