**Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

On Sunday, November 1st I had the opportunity to attend the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) here in Farmville, Virginia. SPCA is an “independent, donor-supported, and nonprofit organization” that shelters unwanted, abandoned, or stray dogs and cats (“Field of Dreams Memorial Garden”). They are a no-kill shelter which to me is an extraordinary thing. Every year, approximately 7.6 million animals enter shelters across America, and of that, 2.7 million are euthanized (“Statistics & Facts”) Growing up, I was never without animals and recently, my family and I have adopted three beautiful German Shepherds from Tennessee shelters who were facing death row. Currently, the South is having a problem with the overbreeding of dogs because they cannot afford or think it is cruel to spay/neuter their animals. The truth however, is that by not doing so, all those puppies and kittens are essentially left for dead, as no one can afford to take care of them and they end up in the wild or in kill shelters.

Animal cruelty is one of the few things I feel deeply passionate about, even writing this essay is hard. What makes it easier is knowing that, even if only on a small scale, I am able to help. This past Sunday I was put in charge of monitoring the “Cat Room”, a small room that is home to about 25 cats and all their play toys. Most of the cats that come here are feral and therefore, the shelter is attempting to domesticate them so that they can become adoptable. My job is to help that process by playing with them, slowly approaching them, and hopefully, maybe even pet them. SPCA also tries to do the same with the dogs, however when I visited there were too many people to take the dogs out of their cages.

SPCA has done a lot for these animals and many of them are healthy and people-friendly. Others, however need a little bit more time and attention. Even knowing that this shelter is doing the best that they can, it was extremely hard for me to leave and think of these animals alone again another night. Some are just skittish, others have been abused, and like with any person, I would love to take those fears away from these poor animals. The biggest satisfaction I can get out of this, is watching one cat finally rub up against me or have the dog in the corner wag its tail. It’s the small things and the progress that makes me love it there so much. And they help me too.

As mentioned earlier, I’ve never been without pets and with coming to college, it was hard to leave my furry faces behind. Something I’d always taken for granted was just how much they helped me. When I was having a bad day, my cat was right there to curl up with me. If I was crying, my dog was by my side nudging my hand. And it’s not just in my head. Studies show that people with pets are likely to have lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels. In addition, playing with pets has been shown to increase serotonin and dopamine levels that help to calm and relax (“The Health Benefits”). This opportunity allowed me to alleviate some of the social and academic stresses that have been piling up over the semester while at the same time, having fun and doing a good thing.

Without a doubt I would go back to SPCA and I’m hoping to make it a weekly trip. It’s easy to tell that everyone at the shelter really cares for these animals and wants to see that they find good homes. However, because it is a non-profit most of the volunteers have other jobs and commitments so these animals don’t necessarily get a lot of one on one time with people. I would be more than happy to donate my free time to walking dogs and playing with cats. If I do return, some other jobs I might have to do are cleaning the cages, brushing/grooming, and feeding, all of which I would be happy to do, even if I’d rather be playing with them.

Although I had always been interested in volunteering at SPCA, it wasn’t until I actually went that I realized just how much of an effect it had one me. It’s one thing to talk about giving back or making a donation but it’s another thing entirely to actually go and see the effect that you’re making first hand. The appreciation all of the volunteers had for the Longwood students was humbling and watching the animals wag and purr melts your hearts. From what I know, there were at least four adoptions during the open house, and knowing that they were going to loving homes makes you feel so satisfied. I think that any one, not just Longwood students should try and get out at least once. Even if you don’t end up liking it, if you can make one person smile, then you’ve already made a huge difference.

SPCA gives me a purpose that goes beyond my own needs and reminds me just how small my problems really are. In the grand scheme of things I may not have made a big difference, but to those pets and those volunteers that love that shelter, I made all the difference in the world.

**References**

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