

Orangeville SPCA program brings youth closer to animals

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The Ontario SPCA Orangeville and District Animal Centre is looking for community members to join their team of volunteers and help deliver humane education in local classrooms through a new program ? AnimalSmart.

AnimalSmart is an educational program offered by the Ontario SPCA to local schools with the goal of fostering empathy, promoting responsibility and inspiring connection with animals. The program is free for schools to access and is available to classes with students in Grades 1 to 8.

?Education is one of the most important ways we can improve the lives of animals, and by advocating for the healthy bonds between people and animals, we can empower our youth to treat animals with kindness,? said Shannon Bury, community outreach coordinator for the Orangeville and District Animal Centre.

During the AnimalSmart presentation students are given grade-specific content, such as interactive games and activities, that focus on their role and responsibility in the well-being of animals.

Some of the activities students may take part include learning how cats communicate by trying cat yoga moves for the primary grade students, while intermediate students try to solve real life scenarios that help animals at risk while determining possible barriers in doing so.

This fall the Ontario SPCA is launching a new theme for the program titled, Animals in Our Community. The focus of the theme is to share safety tips with young animal lovers while also providing them with information on community program offered by the Ontario SPCA, animals services such as pet stores and vet offices that are available in the community. They also learn way to support healthy animals and safely interact with animals they encounter in public.

?We believe in the power of education to inspire positive change and drive collective action towards a more compassionate future for animals,? said Bury.

According to the Ontario SPCA, the more than 100 volunteers in the AnimalSmart program were able to conducts upwards of 300 presentations to more than 7,000 students in roughly 90 schools across the province in 2023.

?Hearing the students' enthusiasm when they talk about their pets, seeing their faces when they realize that animals have emotions too, and listening to how they can be caring to animals is very fulfilling,? said AnimalSmart volunteer Cory Philip, who has presented to 17 classes and reached over 325 students. ?It gives me hope when young children talk about being kind to animals as an extension of being kind to each other.?

The Ontario SPCA depends on the support of volunteers to operate programs, such as AnimalSmart, in the community.

In order to volunteer with the program, community members are required to be available a minimum of once a month for presentations on weekdays, either 9 a.m. to noon or noon to 4 p.m.

Volunteers don't need to be teachers or have a background in education to support the AnimalSmart program as they will receive one-on-one coaching as well as in-classroom mentoring with an experienced educator.

?We're looking for someone who's passionate about animals, who wants to make a difference in our community and enjoys working

with and inspiring children,? said Bury.

Those interested in becoming a volunteer as a member of the AnimaSmart team can learn more about the role and submit an application by visiting www.animalsmart.ca.