



HEART Matters

Fall 2010
Newsletter

Developing a more compassionate world through education

OUR MISSION

To foster compassion and respect toward other people, animals and the environment by educating youth and teachers in humane education.



Meeting shelter animals



Volunteering at a nursing home



Global warming project

Making our Mark on Humane Education

Message from HEART's Executive Director and Chair

Once again, we are pleased to be issuing another edition of HEART Matters. With this new academic year underway, we are celebrating our 5th year anniversary of the roll out of our Humane Living Program. As our long time followers and supporters will recognize, HEART has evolved from a rather limited pilot project five years ago into a robust provider of instructional and experiential learning programs for all grade levels from K-12.

This newsletter can only give a glimpse of some of our recent initiatives and accomplishments. We are continuing to expand the experiential learning part of our program and we now have a good balance between our instructional and service learning programs. We have added The Ethic Project to our experiential learning offerings. This program's focus is on project-based activities which empower students by helping them understand they can create positive change through community service and volunteerism.

The ultimate purpose of our programs is to give youth the information and skills to become more compassionate and respectful citizens of the community and the greater world. Introducing students to social justice, animal welfare and environmental protection issues, and giving them the tools to make a meaningful change, provides a powerful learning experience and one that should be available to every student. Among the many benefits of humane education, it can be an effective anti-bullying and violence intervention means.

It is truly shocking to us to realize that HEART is one of the very few organizations offering these critical services and certainly one of the largest. Our longer term objective is to see that humane education becomes an integral component of our educational system. We are so appreciative of the generosity and encouragement of our supporters. Together we will make a positive difference.

Humanelly yours,

Meena Alagappan, Esq.
Executive Director

Brad Goldberg
Chair

"Thank you for opening our eyes and helping us see that the earth is a beautiful place. Thank you for showing us ways on how to save the environment. You have awoken me and the rest of the class, and have inspired us to be active and start making positive changes to make the world a better place." 5th grade student

Some questions for our Executive Director, Meena Alagappan

Can you describe your journey from a legal career to one of humane education?

I have always loved animals and valued education, but it was really almost coincidental how I ended up in this field of humane education. After graduating from Northwestern University School of Law, I practiced corporate law and taught at an academic test preparation company. During that time, I attended a conference at the NYC Bar Association on the Legal Status of Animals sponsored by the Committee on Legal Issues Pertaining to Animals (Animal Law Committee). I was impressed by the concrete actions lawyers were taking using their legal backgrounds to help animals and I just wanted to be part of that effort. I enrolled in the M.S. program in Animals and Public Policy at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine. When I graduated from that program, I chaired the NYC Bar's Animal Law Committee for 3 years. It was during this tenure that I met Brad Goldberg from Animal Welfare Trust, a private operating foundation. He was interested in piloting a humane education program in NY and this project eventually developed into my becoming Executive Director of HEART.

What do you think are the main attributes of humane education?

Basically, I see humane education as being about fostering compassion and empathy and promoting critical thinking. Humane education really takes root with reflection. It encourages students to think about their responsibility to the earth and all its inhabitants and deepens their awareness of the global consequences of their actions. Most importantly, it empowers students by giving them the tools to make more informed and compassionate choices.

I also think humane education functions as a valuable deterrent to violence and helps break the cycles of abuse. It has been well documented that there is a link between childhood animal abuse and later interpersonal violence. Intentional acts of animal cruelty, from dog fighting to the murder of animals, have long been viewed as signs of maladaptive behavior and precursors to other violent or criminal acts. Humane education can be an important step in halting these cycles of violence.



Why has HEART recently been expanding its experiential learning programs?

Humane education is not just about raising awareness, but it is about doing so in a way that promotes compassionate behavior. All of our lessons impart knowledge and we think it is important to share information about major problems in the world, but not in a way that can be paralyzing. In each lesson we include an action list that students help devise to alleviate the problems discussed. We always emphasize the importance of individual action so students feel empowered to be agents of change. It has been inspiring for us to help our students learn to plan and conduct civic action projects from beginning to end and see the positive, tangible results of their commitment to community change.

What is HEART's greatest strength?

Without a doubt, it is our dedicated team of talented instructors. While there is no formal credentialing process required for humane educators, we have been very selective in hiring our instructors. They are each uniquely qualified and have extensive teaching experience. All our teachers have graduate degrees in education or a related field. Most importantly, they are passionate about humane education and share the same philosophy of teaching. All of them are able to connect in such meaningful ways with their students and serve as admirable role models.

Can you share feedback from a student on the impact of HEART's programs?

Students have been so enthusiastic about our lessons. They love our teachers and get very excited when they know it is a HEART day at school. We have gotten so many different reactions from kids that have left an impression on me. One incident that really stands out is when one boy, after going through our program, became so angry that he never learned about these issues before since he said he would have been able to make different choices and could have helped animals more in the past if he had been more aware. I feel that this child's reaction clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of humane education.

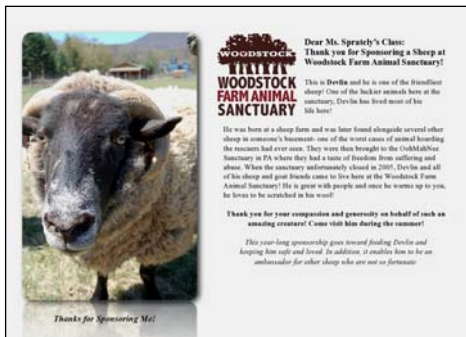
What would be your long term hopes for what HEART can achieve?

Humane education should be available to every student and it deserves representation in the standard curriculum. I would hope that the work that HEART is doing will provide a model for what can be accomplished and that our efforts cause a lot of school administrators to value humane education and implement it in their schools. I also hope our work leads to the development of other organizations dedicated to offering humane education services to help fill this critical but neglected need in our educational system.

Students Engage in Service

This past year at HEART there have been a range of student-driven projects. Here are just a few examples:

- In response to the tragic oil spill in the Gulf Coast, students took action to try to help solve the problem by contacting local hair salons and dog groomers to collect hair to send to Matter of Trust, an organization that collects discarded hair and fur and uses it to help clean up oil spills.
- Students committed to raising money to help victims of the earthquake in Haiti and provide scholarships to young girls in Nepal. They engaged in direct service, hosting a very successful and well-attended fundraising concert, regular bake sales at their school, and fair-trade reusable bag sales.
- Students, focusing on the human/animal violence link, made pro-social buttons, magnets, bookmarks, flags, and T-shirts that they sold to collect donations to the American Humane Association and Child Welfare Organization Project in NYC. Many wrote letters to the Mayor about their concerns about bullying and animal abuse, requesting stronger animal protection laws and more funding for educational programs on anti-bullying and animal care.
- One service project focused on farm animals with students 'adopting' several farm animals living at the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary. They learned about the animal's history and the way that farm sanctuaries work, raised money to support their animal, and created multi-media educational materials.



HEART's Chicago Chapter Grows at Full Speed

HEART is now in our second academic year of serving the youth of Chicago with our programs. We have found strong reception to our programs and thanks, in part, to our partnership with Communities in Schools, we have a backlog of schools interested in our services. In total, HEART Chicago has served 19 schools since starting up last year. In addition to Bob and Kristina, we have four volunteers that are helping build support for the Chicago program. We also have plans to add a third instructor in 2011. New York and Chicago share the same programs and there is a free exchange of ideas for improving and advancing both curriculum and service learning programs. Our objective is for HEART Chicago to become self-sufficient in funding its programs.

HEART Partners with the Hunts Point Alliance for Children

We have developed an exciting partnership with the Hunts Point Alliance for Children (HPAC) in the Bronx. HPAC successfully builds many collaborative relationships that sustain and nurture its neighborhood's families and children.

We are implementing The Ethic Project program at JVL Wildcat Academy Charter School. We are also continuing an after-school program for children at The POINT Community Development Corporation. We are also excited about our new collaboration with City Year corps members in conducting an extended service learning program with middle school students enrolled in the new HPAC after-school program.

Second Annual New York Week for the Animals

HEART partnered with Animal Haven to celebrate the 2nd annual New York Week for the Animals at Animal Haven's unique boutique shelter in SoHo. Kids participated in a humane education workshop that addressed the pet overpopulation crisis, humane considerations in dog training, and the dark side of puppy mills and pet shops. Of course, the best part of the event was meeting some of the shelter dogs and cats!



INTRODUCING OUR NEW INSTRUCTORS



Susan Ryz served the New York City public school system for the past two years as a special education teacher through the Teach for America program. Susan received her B.A. from Tufts University, majoring in Peace and Justice Studies with a concentration in Education. Susan received her M.S. Ed. in special and general education for grade 1-6 from Bank Street College of Education.

Sonny Singh has worked in the labor movement for the union UNITE HERE, was a Community Organizer at CHAMP (Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project), and most recently was a Community Organizer at the Sikh Coalition. Sonny received his M.Ed. in Social Justice Education from the University of Massachusetts and received his B.A. in Sociology and Latin American Studies from the University of Arizona.



Program News

HEART's programs address bullying and violence

The U.S. Department of Education reported that 24% of students have experienced bullying in school. Compared to their peers, students who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed and four to eight times more likely to be suicidal. Some students are especially vulnerable to be targeted by bullying because of their race/ethnicity, nationality, religion, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender expression, or disability. However, bullies don't just bully people -- they bully animals too. The link between violence toward human beings and animals has been well documented in numerous research studies. HEART's programs address this important link and help break the cycles of abuse toward both people and animals.

What you can do:

1. Talk to the leadership of schools in your communities (a principal or staff at the department of education) and find out what the schools are doing to address and prevent bullying and bigotry. Urge them to conduct programming and training for students and staff on diversity and social justice issues. **Bring humane education to your schools!**

2. Talk to your children, siblings or other youth in your life about bullying in their schools and encourage them to share their experiences with you.

Many young people are afraid or ashamed to talk about what they are going through, but breaking this silence is critical in confronting the bullying and building positive self-esteem.

3. Support passage and enforcement of anti-bullying legislation, such as the landmark New York State Dignity for All Students Act (DASA).



Student drawing

Teacher Training Developments

• ABA-HEART Project Expansion

We expanded our joint humane education public service project with the American Bar Association's Animal Law Committee this past year to both Chicago and Baltimore. This project involves training volunteer attorneys and law students to offer a 4 lesson program on animal protection issues to local 4th and 5th grade elementary school students. We conducted successful day long workshops at Northwestern University School of Law and the University of Maryland Law School.

• NYC Department of Education P-Course

In conjunction with the United Federation of Teachers Humane Education Committee and the ASPCA, HEART offered a 30 hour credit-bearing professional development course that qualifies toward a salary differential for NYC schoolteachers in the fall/ winter of 2009 through the NYC DOE. This course was very well-received and we are planning to offer it again in the spring of 2011.

• CoPAL Training

HEART offered a day-long workshop for CoPAL (Coalition to Protect Animals Locally) volunteers, educators, parents, animal lovers, and other concerned citizens in the Boston area to train them to teach humane education classes to elementary school students. We were pleased that our training session was taped by Andover Cable and made widely accessible to the public!

• Upcoming Conference

HEART will be presenting a workshop at WNET's 6th annual Celebration of Teaching and Learning Conference, March 2011.



New York Invests in HEART

We are pleased to share that HEART has been awarded \$31,500 for Fiscal Year 2011 from various New York City Council Members to support implementation of our Humane Living Program at public schools in their districts: \$8,000 from Maria del Carmen Arroyo (Bronx-17); \$3,500 from Daniel Dromm (Queens-25); \$5,000 from Sara Gonzalez (Brooklyn-38); and \$15,000 from Annabel Palma (Bronx-18).

HEART's services rely on the generosity of individuals like you who are dedicated to humane living.

Your contribution can be mailed to: HEART, P.O. Box 738, Mamaroneck, NY 10543. Or your donation can be made through our website- www.teachhumane.org. All gifts are enormously appreciated! For more information, please contact: Meena Alagappan, Executive Director, at 212.744.2504 or via email at meena@teachhumane.org.

