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Help Children Voice Their Compassionate Choice

Mrs. Jan Flanagan’s sixth-grade class at St. Edwards School in Waterloo, Iowa, was working on a service-learning project with the Cedar Bend Humane Society when they discovered something that needed their support. They found out about Bill SSB3086, which would classify animal fighting in Iowa as a felony. At the time, Iowa was one of only three states that still allowed dog fighting, and the 12-year-olds from St. Edwards jumped at the chance to do something about it. Without any instruction, they began a letter-writing campaign to Iowa representatives. So impassioned was their plea that

Kids need to address real needs in their community — to think, plan and actually make a difference.

— Barbara A. Lewis

they even got a visit from Iowa Senator Bill Dotzler, who praised the children’s efforts and expressed surprise that they had found the time and enthusiasm to make such a difference.

The students’ letter-writing campaign was successful, and Iowa became the 48th state to ban animal fighting. After her class’s campaign and subsequent legislation, Jan Flanagan said, “I hope they remember that they have a right to be listened to, and what they do makes a difference.”

Jan’s words were as important as the legislation banning animal fighting. Not only did an entire state take a compassionate step forward, but a whole class of children learned an empowering lesson. Children have a right to be listened to, and their actions can make a difference.

Cultivating Creativity

Children gain confidence and awareness by watching creative ideas come to life, especially when it’s an idea they’ve come up with themselves. That’s why it’s so important to let students follow through with their ideas. Teachers and parents can provide access to information about animals, encourage them to learn more and support their efforts, helping



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Participants in Roots & Shoots’ Youth Leadership Immersion Experience trip in Peru.

them realize that they can make choices that make a big difference.

Roots & Shoots

In 1991 a group of 16 students gathered around Dr. Jane Goodall on her front porch in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The students were fascinated by animals and the environment, and they asked Dr. Goodall what they could do to learn more about topics that their school didn't cover. She sent them back to school with a mission: to find other interested students and take action. Thus, the Roots & Shoots program was born. With the guidance of the Jane Goodall Institute, and the enthusiasm of young people worldwide, Roots & Shoots has spread to over 90 countries and more than 7,500 registered groups.

All Roots & Shoots groups are dedicated to three goals: caring for animals, the human community and the environment. In schools, Roots

& Shoots participants organize workshops, conferences and after-school clubs. Students and teachers from elementary school through university use education materials and special events to raise awareness and effect change both locally and globally.

Roots & Shoots succeeds because of the efforts of youth like the 12 members who attended the first-ever Children's Earth Summit in Soweto, South Africa, in 2002. Among the five delegates who drafted the body's final declaration¹ was 16-year-old Roots & Shoots member Jessica Rimington of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The declaration was presented to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Roots & Shoots also succeeds because of the efforts of the dedicated groups of 2 to 2,000 members, working together for a more compassionate, sustainable world. You can get involved with Roots & Shoots by visiting www.rootsandshoots.org.

- Children of the Earth United: www.childrenoftheearth.org
- Compassionate Kids: www.compassionatekids.com
- Earth's Birthday Project: www.earthsbirthday.org
- The Giraffe Heroes Project: www.giraffe.org
- PAKT Foundation: www.paktfoundation.com
- Peace Corps Kids World: www.peacecorps.gov/kids
- Seeds for Change: www.seedsforchangehumaneeducation.org

Compassion from the Farm

Cultivating Compassion: Teachers' Guide and Student Activities, created by Farm Sanctuary, includes lesson plans, handouts and activities to inform and inspire kids about farm animals. It is warm-hearted and humorous, while guiding kids through the difficult subject of farm animal welfare. Designed for elementary (grades 3-5), intermediate (grades 6-8), and secondary students (grades 9-12), *Cultivating Compassion* can be ordered from Farm Sanctuary: www.farmsanctuary.org/media/pr_teach_guides.htm.