

Children and Adults with handicaps, physical and / or intellectual, are a big focus at our sanctuary. We believe animals should be treated fairly and respectfully, regardless of their physical or mental challenges. We believe in teaching that people have these rights too. And in helping challenged people to make the world they live in a better place.

- Job placement programs send people to us (many with mild handicaps, either intellectual or physical) to learn skills so they are able to become productive members of society, benefiting not only the individual but society as well.
- County placement offices send mildly handicapped adults to us for training in preparation for working in the real world.
- Dennis Bane REACH (Reaching Educational and Career Hopes) at Chancellorville High School in Spotsylvania, Virginia is also on our Board of Directors.
- We are in our third year of a mutually beneficial high school REACH (Reaching Educational and Career Hopes) program, enabling students with intellectual disabilities to participate in all phases of life through social and vocational training. It is an absolute thrill to see the skills these boys and girls learn that will give them a better chance for a fulfilling life.
- The REACH kids have set up a food recycling program in the Spotsylvania County high schools, benefiting the schools through lack of waste and disposal fees, and benefiting our animals by providing a food source.
- The REACH kids have learned how to sort food into the different dietary needs of the different animals.
- The REACH kids frequently bring the food out and feed the animals.
- In addition to the food recycling program, the REACH kids come out to work the refuge every Thursday during the school year, learning job skills that will be useful to them later in life.
- in 2010 the REACH kids picked walnuts at our sanctuary, processed them and then sold them to raise funds.
- The REACH kids and their counselor Dennis Bane also organized, advertised, and ran our 2nd Annual 5K Run in November 2010.
- Another member of our Board is Bob Wallace, Librarian / Media Specialist at Stafford High School. He brought the intellectually challenged children from Stafford High School out for an enriching programs in 2010.
- Homes for intellectually, emotionally and physically handicapped children have mutually beneficial programs with us -- to see the eyes of an autistic child light up when they connect with the dog is a wondrous thing.
- Many adult clubs are benefited by our programs. Adult day care centers, homeless centers, abused women's centers, homes and organizations for intellectually challenged adults all come to share our facilities and programs in an amazingly mutually beneficial way.



**Dennis Bane gives
Rikki's an award for their
participation in REACH**



This year once again the Spotsylvania County Schools REACH program has worked with Rikki's as a part of our community involvement program. Reach (Reaching Educational and Career Hopes) is a post secondary program for students with intellectual disabilities ages 18 to 22. We have volunteered in many different ways at Rikki's. Some of the projects we have taken include a food recovery program in which the students collect the kitchen leftovers from 7 county schools and deliver it to Rikki's.

We also co-sponsored a 5K race called Rikki's Run to help raise funds and collected and processed walnuts and chestnuts and sold them also. This has been, and remains a very important part of our program. Rikki's provides a means for us to teach our special students in many areas that they will need once they leave us. We have spent many hours at Rikki's performing many jobs that give our students opportunities to work on work related behaviors.

Working with the special animals as well as all the animals gives them a great deal of enjoyment and sense of accomplishment. It provides a community setting in which we can teach vocational and social skills in a real life situation. Seeing how the animals with disabilities overcome their differences has made many of our students see each other in a different light. We look forward to another great year at Rikki's.



***Dennis Bane,
Spotsylvania High Schools,
Spotsylvania, Virginia***



As the sponsor of the Young Democrats Club here at Stafford High School, I wanted to send a "Thank You!" for allowing us to be a part of your organization as volunteers. Community service is a very important part of our mission statement, and the cleaning, painting and carpentry projects that our students have been involved in at Rikki's have made an obvious impact on their lives and strengthened their resolve to help change the world. With new insight into the workings of the daily operations of an animal refuge and the trials and tribulations (and sometimes heartaches) that are inherent in such an endeavor, I have been able to see a dramatic change in individual personal attitudes and maturity levels.

At our last meeting, the students were already planning return visits to Rikki's and wanting to know what our next project would be to help the animals. With many students today content to allow television and technology to meet their emotional needs, the opportunity to engage them in "real-world" activities such as Rikki's is priceless.

Thank you for allowing us to be part of your family.

***Bob Wallace, Librarian / Media Specialist, Stafford High School
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22405***



RIKKI'S REFUGE ANIMALS HAVE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON MANY IN THE COMMUNITY by Cindy Wright

One of the long term benefits of animal sanctuaries such as Rikki's Refuge is the powerful impact it can have on people's lives. Rikki's Refuge has many educational programs and community outreach events that help to raise awareness of animal cruelty and neglect, and emphasize the need for a humane approach to all who live within our communities. Sometimes it is the animals

themselves that tell the most unforgettable stories, just by being a shining example of kindness, compassion, survival and forgiveness.

One such case study of how an animal can enhance the lives of many people is a dog named Walker. Walker is a seven-year-old Treeing Walker coon hound/English pointer mix that wound up at Rikki's Refuge in 2006 (?) after enduring a horrible ordeal. During the 2005 hunting season in Central Virginia, Walker was dragged out into the woods and shot in the back with a shotgun by his owner. It took several days for Walker to crawl home, at which point his owner took him to Orange County Animal Shelter and asked them to "finish the job". It took months and multiple, painful surgeries for Walker's back to heal. Once he was physically healthy, he was moved to the kennel area of the Shelter and put up for adoption. It did not take long for the OCAS staff to realize Walker was too afraid and nervous for adoption to be a viable option, so he was moved to Rikki's Refuge to live out his days in a safe, loving environment.

Walker settled in quickly at Rikki's Refuge, making friends with all the dogs in the Doggy Downs kennel area of the sanctuary. The first person whose life was changed by Walker was a Rikki's Refuge volunteer who had up until that time only attended events in the Northern Virginia area on behalf of the Refuge. This volunteer heard the story of the brave dog who crawled back to the person who tried to kill him, and her heart was touched by this extraordinary act of loyalty and forgiveness. On her first trip to Rikki's she immediately fell in love with the coon hound mix with the soulful eyes, and made arrangements to adopt him. This single trip to the Refuge changed her life in many ways, as she became a regular weekly volunteer and eventually an active Board Member at Rikki's. By volunteering regularly to take care of the multiple species at the sanctuary, she was able to create balance in her life that extended beyond 60 hour work weeks, and began to heal after a divorce and other traumas in her life. As she was curing herself from 25 years of being a workaholic, Walker was curing himself from his fear of humans who might do him harm. Most importantly, Walker helped her recover from a tragedy that had been locked in her soul for five years - she had been at the Pentagon on September 11th 2001 when a terrorist plot killed friends and co-workers with a hijacked Boeing 757. With Walker, she was able to sleep like a normal person. Both Walker and his new best friend were able to trust and love unconditionally again.



The second person whom Walker had a positive influence on was the Rikki's Refuge volunteer's brother. He also was touched by the events of September 11th, as he was the duty officer at the Department of Justice Watch Office while the tragedy unfolded. Like many other patriotic Americans, her brother volunteered for Army service, and was assigned to the 158th Cavalry out of the Maryland National Guard. In 2007, he was deployed to Iraq where he saw action during the difficult transition from British to US forces in the Al Basra and Umm Qasr region. He saw a good friend killed right before his eyes, and he escaped death several times due to good luck and fast action.



When he returned home, he was a changed man; tense, nervous, unable to sleep or to relax for a moment. That is, until he met Walker. The coon hound mix with the soulful eyes and scarred back touched something deep in his soul, and an immediate bond was developed between the two. This bond led the Army sergeant to volunteer at Rikki's Refuge, which created a healthy outlet for him to help others while he helped his heart to heal. After his first rigorous day volunteering at the sanctuary, tension melted away and he was able to laugh again. Rikki's Refuge helped him work through the PTSD that had plagued him since his return from Iraq. He looks forward to the times when Walker comes to stay at his house, where the two war veterans share a bond of trust and love. And often run through Wheaton Park, MD.

The coon hound mix with the soulful eyes and the scarred back continues to enhance the lives of many people who have heard his story and seen his remarkable recovery. Walker is a regular at animal welfare events across the Washington metropolitan area, and well known by the residents of Reston, Virginia where he currently lives. Now an Official Spokes Dog for Rikki's Refuge, Walker has helped raise awareness for animal cruelty through his example of calm, affectionate outreach to the community. Two examples of how Walker has changed lives as a Spokes Dog are especially touching and exemplify how important the work of Rikki's Refuge is to the people of Virginia: first, how he touched the heart of a grief-stricken 8 year old girl. In 2009, at the May Reston Pet Fiesta, many people stopped by the Rikki's Refuge booth to learn about the 367 acre sanctuary where all life is considered sacred. Walker was there representing Rikki's as he proudly does at each event, happily greeting all visitors. That day, a sad 8 year old girl who was recently separated from her father due to divorce was in attendance, as her mother thought the interaction with the animals might cheer her daughter up. Nothing seemed to do the trick until the mother and daughter team stopped by the Rikki's Refuge booth. There, the little girl and the coonhound mix with the soulful eyes met. The girl asked why he was so scarred, and was told that someone tried to kill him. She started to cry at the story, and hugged the sweet hound as if to comfort him along with herself. Walker leaned





in, and put his head on her shoulder, and the two embraced for a long time. An eternity for an 8 year old! Walker sat with her the entire time, with his head on her shoulder as if to say he understood what it was like to be scared and alone. It was a moving moment, but it was time to move on and see all the other animals at the Fiesta. Fast forward a year and a half, and the now 10 year old girl has moved in near the neighborhood where Walker lives. Imagine the joy in her face when she sees the sweet coon hound mix with the soulful eyes and the scarred back again! She ran to him and hugged him with tears in her eyes. Her mother later explained that her daughter was so moved by the dog who comforted her when she needed it the most by putting his head on her shoulder -- that she often spoke of that moment that helped her heal.

She was so thankful for the dog that helped her daughter during a dark, painful period in her life, and the Refuge that allowed this kind of miracle to occur.

Perhaps the most memorable time when Walker made a difference in someone's life was with a girl named Desiree from Richmond, VA. Desiree came to Rikki's Refuge as part of a high school group that was visiting as part of their community outreach program. This school was for troubled teens, and the outreach program was an effort to spark an interest in the girls to help make a positive impression. Desiree stood out as the toughest and most fearless in the group. She wanted to enter every gate and interact with every animal at the Refuge. When she heard Walker's story, she was visibly touched. At the end of the tour, the group wanted to go back to the dog area. Desiree hugged Walker, and said "I hate animal cruelty. I hate what happened to Walker. I want to become an Animal Cop just like on TV to put a stop to it. I want to save every dog on earth". Something in the determined look in her eyes said this was a person who meant what she said! Fast forward two years, and Walker is again representing Rikki's Refuge at the 2010 Richmond Vegetarian Festival. An older, more sophisticated young lady saw the banner for Rikki's Refuge, and came by to see "if there was anyone who she recognized from that wonderful visit to Rikki's". "Walker!" she screamed, as she threw her arms around the sweet coon hound mix with soulful eyes and a scarred back. "Do you remember me? I came to visit you 2 years ago and fell in love with you. You changed my life - I am now in Community College getting my degree so I can become either an animal cop or something else where I can save every dog on earth". The determined look was back in her eyes, and everyone there knew that she meant what she said!! A perfect example of a life transformed by a dog that survived cruelty to demonstrate to the world that we all deserve a second chance and a happy ending. Rikki's Refuge is a magical place that gives everyone a second chance at happiness - both for the animals who live there and the people who are touched forever by their stories.



The REACH (Reaching Educational and Career Hopes) program enables students with intellectual disabilities to participate to the fullest extent possible in all phases of life by providing academic, social and vocational support while they are still enrolled in high school. Students with intellectual disabilities become aware of realistic opportunities in the community to work, recreate and live in the community after graduation. As a part of the program the students learn the value of giving back to the community by volunteering. Rikki's Refuge has provided a place to give the students the opportunity to do just that. Self-confidence and self-esteem are greatly enhanced by the many hours we have spent at Rikki's in 2010. Many students have overcome their fear of animals and for some their speech has even improved as they learn to be more relaxed around the animals and people alike. It gives us a place to practice a variety of vocational skills in a real life setting. Gaining Rikki,s as a community partner has been very valuable to our program and we hope to continue that relationship in the future.

Dennis Bane

