

► **"After school special"**
continued from page 15

VOLUNTEERING

BY ANDREA HEERDT

Volunteering is a great way for children and adolescents to give back to their community, boost self-esteem, learn new skills and find life purpose. Many organizations in Northern Nevada recognize the value of volunteering at an early age by providing opportunities for kids to get involved, and below are several local organizations welcoming volunteers under the age of 18.

SPCA OF NORTHERN NEVADA

4950 Spectrum Blvd.
324-7773
Spokanevada.org

After filling out an application, children can volunteer alongside a parent or guardian at the SPCA of Northern Nevada. A child must be at least 8 years old and must complete a one-hour training to volunteer with cats and must be at least 12 years old and must have completed a two-hour training to volunteer with dogs.

After completing the designated trainings and orientation, children and parents can begin participating in some of the more common volunteer roles, including reading to and walking dogs, playing laser pointer with cats and reading in the cat rooms, feeding treats to cats and dogs, assisting with cleaning and organizing the facility and representing the

SPCA during special outreach events in the community.

According to the SPCA's community outreach and volunteer manager, Nayla Garcia, children who volunteer at the SPCA learn valuable skills like how to observe and read animal behavior, time management, patience, how to treat others with kindness and compassion and self-motivation.

According to Garcia, volunteers, no matter what age, are the key to what the SPCA does. "Volunteers go home knowing they helped make a homeless animal feel loved and important, that they haven't been forgotten about," said Garcia. "These animals are often disoriented and feel lonely, and any time they get to spend with a volunteer means so much to them."

In addition to the volunteer opportunities available for children, the SPCA also hosts a kids' camp during fall, spring and summer breaks where kids get to learn about the adoption process, how to keep animals safe, how the veterinary clinic works and how to make treats for pets.



Kids ages 8 and up can volunteer at the SPCA. COURTESY/SPCA OF NORTHERN NEVADA

WALKER BASIN CONSERVANCY

615 Riverside Dr.
463-9887
Walkerbasin.org

For children and teens interested in learning more about ecosystems in the Great Basin and who want to develop an understanding of the desert habitat they live in, the Walker Basin Conservancy has volunteer opportunities available to kids of all ages.

According to outreach and communications coordinator Caroline Ackerman, the conservancy is currently restoring 15,000 acres of land in the Walker Basin. Volunteers will work alongside Walker Basin's staff to learn how to collect seeds from native plants, how to properly plant young sage shrubs and how to be stewards for the high desert.

Walker Basin also recently built a greenhouse in Yerington, Nevada, that is open for tours. Ackerman said worksheets and hands-on activities suitable for elementary school children are available during these.

For older teens, Ackerman said volunteers will have the opportunity to learn from seasoned professionals. "High school-aged volunteers have the opportunity to learn more about job opportunities and future careers in environmental science," she said. "We have an AmeriCorps

program that has a variety of term-lengths and accepts members 17 years and older."

No prior knowledge is needed to volunteer and day-of training is provided. Volunteer days are scheduled when there is a high volume of interest. Applications to volunteer can be filled out by visiting walkerbasin.org/volunteer.

RENOWN HEALTH

Multiple locations
Renown.org

Children 14 years of age and older interested in exploring a medical career can apply for a number of volunteer opportunities and Renown Health's high school program by visiting renown.org/interact/volunteer.

Once a candidate's application is processed, he or she must then attend an informational session, complete a medical clearance, attend an orientation and pass a background check. Upon approval, volunteers will then practice valuable skills like learning to greet patients at the hospital welcome desk, escorting patients around the hospital, interacting with patients and family visitors alike and assisting with clerical errands like delivering mail.

For teens interested in working in the medical field after high school, volunteering at a hospital will not only help them boost their college application, but volunteering also holds the power to help them make a difference in someone's life. □

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