



## Fourth Graders Learn Pet Responsibility

Angela Zumwalt, Whispering Pines resident and animal advocate, introduces herself like so:

"I am from the south... The south of England." Coming to the States in 1979, she moved to Whispering Pines in 2001.

In 2006, she and the Moore County commissioners founded the Moore County Citizens' Pet Responsibility Committee ("PRC"). The PRC is a volunteer-based nonprofit that supports animal welfare in the community, now operating with about 60 volunteers.

Moore County's pet overpopulation problem, which caused high euthanasia rates in shelters, led Zumwalt to start the PRC. The PRC tried various projects to lower pet overpopulation and quickly found that prevention was the key component.

Educating the community was the best way to spread the message: pet owners should spay/neuter their pets.

The PRC decided to take their message to elementary schools—specifically, to fourth-graders. "(Fourth graders are) friendly enough for volunteers—they're quite loving," explained Zumwalt. "And they love talking to their families when they get home to spread the word."

Of the 60 PRC volunteers, 25 teach the educational programs. "A lot of our volunteer teachers are retired teachers, or have worked in schools, or [earned] high-level degrees," Zumwalt stated. The PRC constructed a six-session program which piloted in 2008. The program focuses on what Zumwalt calls "character education." Lessons about accountability, responsibility, and respect are taught through the lens of pet ownership, which pertain to state standards. A similar curriculum is used to this day.

Since the PRC's inception, Zumwalt said that the intake of animals to the county shelter has significantly decreased. She believes other institutions helped reach this milestone, such as the Sandhills Spay/Neuter Veterinary Clinic, but she knows the PRC's educational programs have made an impact.



Angela Zumwalt (back left) with Pet Responsibility Volunteers at Sandhills Farm Life School.



*Students decorated "Clinic Bags," which are given to the Spay/Neuter Clinic to distribute medicine to pet owners. Artists who designed the most creative bags were recognized with certificates and drawing tools.*

Here in Whispering Pines, the PRC taught six lessons over six weeks to fourth-graders at Sandhills Farm Life School. A few PRC volunteers worked in each of SFLS's fourth-grade classrooms.

During these lessons, they covered the importance of pet population control, responsible pet care, pet health, and more. Overall, they revealed the impact fourth-graders can have on the community's animals.

The sixth and final lesson took place on March 11th in SFL's library. Eight PRC volunteers were present. Students wrote stories about the importance of spaying or neutering pets. Authors of the best stories were awarded with prizes, including free spay/neuter vouchers for any pet they choose.

Though not all students could be recognized, every student learned valuable information about pet care and pet overpopulation. Zumwalt and everyone at the PRC hope they carry their knowledge with them forever.

Students proved their expertise when volunteers repeatedly begged the question, "What is Moore County's problem?" The crowd of fourth-graders unanimously shouted, "Pet overpopulation!"

—Andrew Sellers