

PHOENIX

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BETH DUCKETT/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Jacob Crespo, 7, asked friends to give him animal treats for his birthday so that he could donate them to the Arizona Humane Society. The group will honor him with its Human Hero Certificate.

Boy, 7, trades birthday gifts for animal shelter donations

By Beth Duckett
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

SUNNYSLOPE — Jacob Crespo loves animals. Dogs, cats, hamsters, fish — you name it.

He loves them so much he is willing to give up something many 7-year-olds wouldn't even consider: his birthday presents.

On Thursday, Jacob and his family tugged a wagon full of chew toys, cat food, leashes and other goodies to the Arizona Humane Society's Sunnyslope facility in Phoenix. He asked friends to give him animal treats for his birthday instead of the video games and Hot Wheels cars.

A growing number of youngsters are giving their time to help the Humane Society, according to Alexis Boyle, spokeswoman for the

AHS. When kids learn that the animals don't have homes, Boyle said, "they want to do something good for them."

Though young people can't volunteer until age 16, they can donate food and toys like Jacob did, Boyle said.

This time of year, the Humane Society needs help from people of all ages. Its usual post-holiday influx of unwanted pets leaves the organization in need of volunteers and contributions.

"For people who bought a pet or gave one to friends or family for the holidays, the novelty wears off or people find they don't have the time for that new puppy," she said.

They are especially in need of foster parents for their sick, injured and young pets.

For Jacob, the prospect of a new puppy is a far-off dream. His apartment complex

does not allow animals, he said, a big let-down for the boy.

But come Saturday, he'll be able to live part of his dream when he tours the AHS Sunnyslope facility, a gift of gratitude from AHS officials. He will also receive the organization's Human Hero Certificate, Boyle said.

"We're so grateful," she said. "It's refreshing to see such compassion in a 7-year-old."

Still, Jacob said everyone can make a difference.

"I thought of doing this because the dogs don't get birthdays or chew toys or don't get food," he said. "If everybody in my classes gave up one birthday, this world would be a better place," he said.

For more information, call (602) 395-3873 or go to www.azhumane.org.