

# HCMS Project

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ply in Hawesville. His wife, Janna, a teacher at HCMS and HCMS/HCHS volleyball coach, purchased the bin.

**Student volunteers**  
Five students at HCMS were selected to help with this important project: one eighth-grader, Alyson Goodall, and four seventh-graders, Natalie Thrasher, Elizabeth Seaton, Jayden Corley and Lillie Rice. Some of the students say they are interested in pursuing careers in veterinary medicine, and the others say they just want to help animals.

Elizabeth is the daughter of Mickey Pogue and Amanda Wittingfield. Natalie is the daughter of Matt and Kaley Yates. Jayden is the daughter of Kevin Corley and Jan Thrasher. Lillie is the daughter of Shannon and Heather Rice; and Alyson is the daughter of Brad and Jeni Goodall, English language arts and art teacher at HCMS.

When asked why they are interested in caring for and fostering animals and are determined to encourage others to do so, their answers reflected a common thread of simply having a lot of love in their hearts for animals.

Elizabeth said she already has a lot of animals and wants to continue to help them by becoming a veterinarian to learn more about them and how to take care of them.

Jayden said she wants to be a veterinarian because she wants to make sure all the animals she can help do not feel unwanted or unloved. She wants to be the kind of vet that goes above the medicine aspect, she said, and to provide a place for the unwanted animals to go and live.

Natalie wants to help the shelters and maybe even have a shelter one day for all types of animals, she said, so they have a place to go and live, and to be loved.

Lillie wants to help at a veterinary clinic by taking care of the animals when they get out of surgery. She said she specifically would like to give love and support to the animals that feel scared.

Alyson said she is considering veterinary medicine as a career option. She loves animals and has enjoyed volunteering at the Hancock County Animal Shelter.

Each one of these students has a goal to make the world a better place for animals, and they all offered some tips for how people can start doing so now.

Elizabeth said, “Rescue and foster more, and try to get others to foster too.”

Jayden said, “More special activities should be held to raise money to help the shelters.”

Natalie said, “Build more shelters, and have land for the animals to have a good life.”

Lillie said, “Offer homes for the animals that have no one to care for them.”

Alyson encourages others to volunteer at the shelter and to consider fostering or adopting. She and her family adopted a dog from the Hancock County Animal Shelter a year ago.

“The dog we adopted is a Jack Russell-dachshund mix,” Alyson said. “The Hancock County Animal Shelter is a really great place to volunteer and see all the dogs they have that need good homes.”

Fowler worked with Hurst to pinpoint student leaders who had already shown an interest in animal-related careers through a

career-interest activity that was conducted in class. The students are helping share the mission with their classmates, both informally and through schoolwide messaging.

Fowler and her husband Preston donated a large cat tree to a foster parent in November, as part of their contribution to this caring effort.

Hurst said the main reason for this is to raise awareness that the Hancock County Animal Shelter needs volunteers to visit, take the dogs for walks, give them love and attention, and take them home for the weekend to get them out of the shelter, if they can.

“And also, to foster them until they find a home,” she said. “Love is what the dogs need most.”

She added that those who are able to foster animals will not have them forever. They would just offer them a safe place until a rescue is found or they are adopted.

This has been promoted to families and the broader community through the HCMS “Hornet Happenings” newsletter, special morning announcements and a display in the school lobby that includes photos of dogs in need of homes, a donation bin and Christmas stockings for gift cards and monetary donations.

Students, staff and visitors at HCMS are encouraged to donate money, treats, food, blankets, beds, toys and other supplies for both dogs and cats. The donation bin placed at the school and a second one located at the Hancock County Farm Supply provide more opportunities for the community to contribute.

## Hancock County Animal Shelter

York said Judge-Executive Roberts and the Hancock County Fiscal Court have strongly supported the shelter’s work and have helped provide what is needed to keep it a safe, clean home for the dogs in their care. The Hancock County Animal Shelter operates at full capacity most of the year, and staff work to find permanent homes for every dog.

When asked how community involvement, such as school partnerships like this and foster volunteers, impact the shelter’s ability to care for and rehomed dogs, York responded, “It’s actually helped a bundle because I get a lot of the school kids that come out to do their community service hours. Sometimes they go home and tell their parents that they are wanting to adopt. They tell friends and put it on their Facebook pages. That word of mouth is going to cause more to be aware and get dogs adopted. We’re also working with the Humane Society now, here in the county. We just get a whole lot of community involvement anymore; I’m constantly going to one of the schools for something, and it’s great.”

## Foster-to-Adopt program

York noted that the shelter also offers a “Foster-to-Adopt” program. This is a really neat program because of the way it is set up and allows people the opportunity to try out adoption to see if it will work out. If not, they can bring the dog back to the shelter. Those interested can call or visit the shelter and fill out the application.

York said the program provides valuable input about what the dog might need some additional training on. Then he and the staff can work on those challenges, whether with discipline or other is-

suues, which helps get the dogs ready to be adopted by someone who is a good fit and can be their lifelong caregiver.

“We also have a little program where people can come and just get a dog for a day, an hour or two hours, and take them to the park or take them home,” York added. “And who knows, maybe they will fall in love with them and adopt them.”

When asked what part of her daily work at the shelter she finds most rewarding, and what she wishes more people understood about caring for rescue dogs, Garcia said, “I find that in dealing with the dogs, they’re like humans in that they have their own personalities. They love to see you when you can come in. They want you to speak to them. They want your attention. They give back so much more than we could even give to them. They don’t judge you. They don’t care, and they’re just awesome. They’re better than humans, in my book; they just are.”

Hurst said she wholeheartedly agreed with that sentiment, and spotlighted the fact of how animals love unconditionally, which makes them some of the best companions anyone could ever ask for.

“I wish more people, when they get dogs, would realize that it is a lifelong commitment,” Garcia added. “We don’t give them up because we have babies or move, or because they’re not a puppy and aren’t cute any more. They are a lot of work, but they’re worth the effort. Some of the dogs are in the shelter for a long time. We have one that will be there a year in February. I try to get them out to Vastwood Park. I take pictures and videos. I usually take some of the longer-standing resident dogs out there and that has definitely helped get many of them to rescues maybe more than adopted out into the community.”

Judge-Executive Johnny “Chic” Roberts talked about what motivated him and the Hancock County Fiscal Court to prioritize support for the Hancock County Animal Shelter, and how he sees that investment benefiting the community long-term.

“It’s very important to the community. Ronnie and Coleen have a passion for the shelter, and I certainly think that shows,” Roberts said. “The collaboration we have with the schools, the cities, Shelter Supporters of Hancock County and everyone who volunteers is just critical. We couldn’t do what we do without them. The community cares about animals and it is important to us and to the whole community. There is always more to do, and we’re looking at ways to do those things now. Ronnie and Coleen communicate the needs of the shelter well with us. Caring for animals is a team effort. Debby getting this together is very appreciated. We could not do what we do in the community without our volunteers because we’re such a small community, not just with the animal shelter but with all our departments. Myself and the Fiscal Court are very thankful for them. It is tough to get volunteers if people don’t know what is going on. It’s important to get the word out.”

## Feral cat challenge

Burton said stray and feral cats have been a persistent problem in parts of the county.

“In my years at the Hancock County Sheriff’s Office, this was a major problem in Lewisport,” he said. “A group of people stepped



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up and try to catch them and take them to a spay and neuter clinic. I appreciated that effort. I was moved to help by the fact that we have nowhere to take these stray cats. When we find dogs roaming, we can usually take them to the Hancock County Animal Shelter, or someone is willing to take them in until we find housing. With cats, they are often left out in the elements. The cost of homing a cat is a little more expensive than a dog. I think that’s why people are not quick to pick up or house a stray cat. With this initiative, we can get donations for supplies and spread awareness. Hopefully we can get the support to move forward with a shelter for stray cats. I have a cat in my house and I couldn’t imagine him being left out in the elements. I’m just excited that people feel the same about making a difference for the cats in our county. My wife Janna is excited for this effort as well.”

Hurst said she will be checking the donation bins at HCMS and Hancock County Farm Supply each week, and will be sharing the donations to the shelter and foster parents in the community.

“If any checks are written to the Hancock County Animal Shelter, we ask they make those out to: Shelter Supporters of HC. That way it goes directly to the Hancock County Animal Shelter to buy treats or needs for the dogs,” she said.

## The “Catio” project

Hurst and her husband Lee currently care for 21 cats that have been spayed or neutered, along with a squirrel, and until recently, three baby raccoons that were bottle-fed and were released once they could care for themselves. To keep their cats safe while still letting them enjoy the outdoors, Lee has designed and is building an enclosed patio that will be ready by spring.

“Lee is in the process of building us a Catio,” she said. “He is also building a nursery, where we can care for sick animals to be safely away from our other animals. It’s always been my passion, and his, to provide care for God’s creatures. It breaks my heart to know an animal is hungry and not loved.”

The Hursts both grew up around animals and have always had a strong compassion toward any animal in need.

“Mostly cats find me, whereas wildlife animals find Lee,” she said. “Raccoons, squirrels,

opossums, and last year we found a baby skunk that didn’t even have his eyes opened. I had to Google what to feed that baby. It was just lying in the field on our farm. We learn as these challenges find us. A skunk is of the canine family, so puppy milk it was. We found a rescue and turned him over to them after two weeks of getting up every four hours to bottle feed him. He was the cutest, and we had named him ‘Sparky.’ We always have food and water in our vehicles for these ‘just in case’ issues. We once saw a cat on an iced-over pond trying to drink water. It scared us to death. What if the ice had a weak spot in it? We immediately went home, got a house ready with straw and took that senior tom cat to shelter and continued to feed it throughout the winter. It’s just the personality God gave us.”

While feeding a stray cat near her home one day, Hurst met Veronica Taylor, a Hancock County Board of Education member, who stopped to talk after noticing her efforts.

“Veronica told me about Galina Murphy and the Hancock County Community Kitties group, and that’s all it took,” Hurst said. “She immediately recognized my love for cats and my desire to help however I could.”

Hancock County Community Kitties began in February 2021 and typically holds a free clinic each year to help residents care for about 50 cats at a time. Since its founding, and through its partnership with Friends of Butler County Animals, the group has helped spay and neuter nearly 1,000 cats across the county.

“Lee has been incredibly supportive and is just as devoted to this as I am—maybe even more compassionate in some ways, and that’s one of the things I love most about him,” Hurst said. “Veronica has also been a huge help, guiding me when I was learning how to trap and fix the stray cats near me. God truly sends the right people at the right time.”

Hurst said she dislikes keeping her cats indoors all the time, knowing how much they love being outside. That inspired the couple to create the Catio, which will hold about 12 to 14 cats, and people have already been asking Lee to build one for them as well.

Caring for so many animals can be expensive, Hurst admitted, but she views her work as a calling. “That’s why I work two

jobs,” she said. “God always provides, and I’m thankful every day for that. We have big hopes and even bigger dreams. You can’t hide the heart God gives you—and if you try, you’re missing out.”

The long-term goal is to open a dedicated cat shelter in Hancock County. “I’d love for there to be a cat sanctuary right here in our county,” she said.

While the effort will require funding and grants, the community’s teamwork and compassion keep her optimistic, she said. Local support from foster families and volunteers is growing and more help is always welcomed.

“I’m so proud of how our community is stepping up for cats in need,” Hurst said.

During these colder months, it’s especially vital to find foster homes for kittens and cats so they can survive the winter, as well as for homeless puppies and dogs.

Recently, the Hursts received a call from a couple who had read her column in The Hancock Clarion and asked for straw for a rescued feral cat. “We told them to come by and pick some up,” Hurst said. “I’m glad that the word is getting out.”

Some may not be able to volunteer, foster, or adopt, but might be moved to donate toward helping this effort. The donation bins will be in place for a while in each location to allow time for people to have a chance to do so.

Volunteering at the Hancock County Animal Shelter by walking dogs or playing with them in the shelter yard is a great way to help with this initiative. York said volunteers should call the shelter before visiting.

He said the spay and neuter clinic will start back up again in March 2026. Those will probably run through September or October, he said. They will have one dog clinic a month and one cat clinic per month. As of right now he said the price is not set, but is still a less expensive option.

The Hancock County Animal Shelter is located at 305 Gene Hayden Road in Lewisport. Hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and noon to 4 p.m. Saturday. The phone number is 270-927-8544, and the email address is [hancockcountyanimalshelter@gmail.com](mailto:hancockcountyanimalshelter@gmail.com). Updates are shared on the “Shelter Supporters of Hancock Co KY” and “Friends of Hancock County Animal Shelter” Facebook pages.