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Learning from other activists

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My dad was a life-long animal lover, and when he died recently, he asked me to make donations to several leading animal welfare groups. Since then, I have been struck by the vibrancy and effectiveness of the animal protection movement. I am sure I'm not the first to ask why there's not an equally vibrant and visible movement on behalf of neglected and abused children.

Some people ask this question in a tone of outrage – “people spend all this money on animals, and they don't even care about kids.” That's not my position at all. Animals are living creatures who feel pain, hunger, cold, and fear. When we bring them into our society or encroach on their territory, they deserve our protection. My question is whether people working on behalf of abused and neglected children couldn't learn something from the strategies used by animal protection groups. I don't believe people care more about animals than children. I just think the situation is more complex, and people don't really know what to do.

- I suspect that most Americans can easily name the leading animal protection organizations. Can we say the same about the organizations and public institutions working to protect children?
- Animal welfare organizations appear regularly in the media urging people to adopt abandoned animals and take steps to avoid the problem in the first place. A TV program on Animal Planet chronicles the cases of professionals working to save animals in danger. Are groups working for children equally inventive and persistent in getting their message out? Are we taking every possible opportunity to educate the public on what can be done to protect children?
- Since contributing, I get regular updates from the major animal protection groups celebrating their success stories. Do we publicize our success stories with abused and neglected children? Are we letting the public know that we don't have to “live with” child abuse and neglect?
- I get bulletins from animal welfare groups whenever there is pending legislation to help animals. I am invited to contact my representatives to support it – it's as easy as clicking a link in an e-mail. If the bill passes, I get the news hot off the presses. I would be astonished if there weren't millions of Americans eager to support legislation to help abused and neglected children. My question is: Does anyone ask them to do it?

I know there are child protection groups that do some of these things and do them well. But my sense is that we have a way to go to catch up with our good friends who work to protect animals.