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### *The Emerging Leader Institute*

I knew when I first began searching for a project idea that I wanted to do something with animals. Animal rights are an issue that is often overlooked in this society, and I've wanted that to change for as long as I can remember.

My original idea was to start a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals at UK, but I was afraid I wouldn't be able to raise enough interest and the project would be a flop. (I ended up doing this anyway, independent of ELI).

For quite a while, I had a very difficult time coming up with another idea, until I started thinking of all the horrible stories of animal cruelty that I'd heard and read.

Teenagers and adults who had neglected, starved, beaten and abused innocent, defenseless creatures. What was the source of all this? Obviously these people had never experienced the joy an animal can bring to your life. Perhaps I could find some children with whom to share that joy. Perhaps I could teach them a little bit about how to care for and respect animals as everyone should.

I started searching for a church youth group to whom I could talk. I called several churches and got several answering machines. After playing phone tag with voice mail and secretaries for a couple of weeks, I finally got in touch with Brian Hughes, the youth director at one of these local churches. My persistence paid off. Mr. Hughes was not only a youth director, but also a Cub Scout master.

This was perfect. Considering my intended topic, there was no more relevant group of people to work with than Scouts. The Scout master and I exchanged e-mail

addresses and arranged three sessions for me to meet with them, two of which have already taken place.

There have been set-backs. The friend who was supposed to bring two dogs from a local shelter to the first session got a fever and canceled an hour before the meeting, so my hamster accompanied me instead. I've never worked with a large group of eight- to ten-year-old boys, so I must admit I was a bit unprepared for their energy and enthusiasm.

But so far the sessions have been a success. We've all learned a little, and had some fun in the process. We played animal bingo and animal charades, we had some guests, like my hamster Phish and a dog named Sadie. For my final visit we'll be taking a little field trip to Lexington Humane Society. I believe I can safely say that these children know what animals can do for people, and how they should be treated. I have accomplished what I set out to do.

As to what to do next, I have three major plans. First, of course, I have one more session with the Scouts coming up, so I have to get the details worked out for that. I'm looking forward to it.

Second, my work with the UK Society that I have formed is just beginning, and I intended to use it as a network to reach out to as many children as possible. I've invited all of the Scouts to come help us out when they can, and they can get some valuable experience working with animals in the process.

Third, in developing this project, I've come up with a big concern. I do believe that I've made a difference in the lives of these Scouts, but perhaps they are not the ones who need it the most. They're already involved in something that is going to teach them

these kinds of lessons - they're not the neglected, inactive children who grow up to be abusive towards animals and people. That is why I've decided that my work with children is far from over. Now I must find a way to reach out to the children who truly need my help, the ones that I won't find in a youth group or a Cub Scout pack. How I am going to go about this, I do not yet know, but I have the drive and the vision and the experience I've gained and lessons I've learned from this project to help me along the way.