

Vest-A-Dog

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I started a fundraising drive that I called Vest-A-Dog, in which I solicited donations to buy bulletproof vests for police K-9's for the three police agencies in my community. They are the Washington County Sheriff's Department, the Hagerstown City Police, and the Maryland State Police.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? My project addressed a public safety need. I raised \$13,300 in just 3 months to purchase 26 bulletproof vests and 20 sets of protective booties for the police dogs. My initial goal was \$5,000, which would vest the 10 police dogs, in Washington County's three police agencies. I raised that in just two weeks. I then contacted the Maryland State Police and found out that they had 15 K-9's throughout the whole state of Maryland that needed vests. I then set a new goal of \$12,500, which would vest the 10 K-9's in Washington County and the 15 K-9's throughout the state for the Maryland State Police. I surpassed that goal in just 3 months and purchased 26 bulletproof vests and 20 sets of protective booties and donated these to the 3 police agencies. By having the police K-9's protected with a bulletproof vest, like their police handler, the K-9's life could be saved if the dog were to be shot. These dogs would not have a vest if it were not for my project. The Police Departments told me that K-9 vests would never be in their budgets. I feel the police K-9's do just as important job as police officers and they should be protected, just like the human police officers.

I had read a story in a book entitled "Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul," about a police officer in New Jersey that lost his K-9 named Solo. The dog was going into a warehouse to apprehend a suspect and got shot and died. Solo did not have a vest. This inspired a girl in California to raise money for vests for police dogs in her community. I thought that was a great idea and I wanted to do the same for the police dogs in my community. I contacted the three police agencies in my community to see if the dogs needed vests and if they would be interested if I raised the money to purchase the vests. None of the dogs had vests and all three police agencies were very supportive and interested in my campaign.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? I love to read and after reading the "Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul" story I knew I had to do this project to help protect the police dogs. I love animals and I want to become a veterinarian after college. I also learned a lot about the police dogs and their work. Most of the dogs come from Eastern European Countries and their commands are in Chek, Yugoslavian, or Dutch. Through this project, academic skills used and developed included reading, persuasive speaking and writing, project planning, public relations, and math.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? I have had plenty of time to think about my project. Recently the Washington County Sheriff, Charles Mades, came to my school along with two of the police dogs and their police handlers to name me an honorary Washington County Sheriff's Deputy. They

answered questions that the kids had prepared about the dogs and their police work. I have also been honored by the Washington County Commissioners, the Washington County Board of Education, the Hagerstown City Council, the State of Maryland House of Delegates and the Senate. I was also named an honorary Maryland State Trooper by Col. David Mitchell, Superintendent of the Maryland State Police. Every time I am fortunate to attend one of these recognition ceremonies, I think about my project and how much fun I had doing it. Also, every time I see one of the police dogs, it makes me feel good that I know they are protected.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? After getting approval from my parents and the police agencies, I made donation containers and placed them at all the veterinarian offices throughout my community. My mom took me around to collect the donations each week. I was interviewed several times throughout my campaign by the local television, newspaper, and radio stations. I also spoke at several community events.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? The Maryland State Police, The Washington County Sheriff's Department, and The Hagerstown City Police were all partners on this project. Also, there were several businesses that donated the full cost of a vest, \$500. I had a picture taken of these businesses presenting me with the check and had it put in the newspaper in order to give them some publicity and also to help my fundraising drive. There were also two veterinarians that were very helpful in getting the word out about my project.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? After getting the donation containers out in the veterinarian offices, I sent letters out to a lot of the larger businesses asking them for donations. I set up an account for the project at a local bank so donations could be mailed directly into the account.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? I have become very comfortable talking in front of groups of people. I was scared at my first interview, but the more I did it, the more I liked it. Now, I look forward to talking to groups about my project. Also, it has shown me that kids can make a difference in our communities. I encourage and challenge other children to do similar projects.

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