



# Kids' Community

## 4-H "Heroes On Paws" Protects K-9 Dogs

(NAPSA)—Stephanie Garcia loves animals, especially her dogs. So when she learned about a police dog that was killed protecting its human partner because it didn't have a bulletproof vest, she knew she had to do something.

"Police officers must love their dogs the way I love my dogs," Stephanie said. "The officers get vests to protect their lives. I wanted to make sure that the police dogs were protected, too."

After doing some research on the Internet, Stephanie decided to raise money to equip her hometown K-9 unit at the Louisville, KY, Metro Police Department. Members of her local 4-H clubs readily agreed to help her raise money to outfit the local police department's seven dogs with bulletproof vests, and they established Heroes on Paws, a not-for-profit organization, for their fund-raising work.

The project was a huge success in Louisville. Word spread throughout the law enforcement and philanthropic communities. Four years and \$30,000 later, 16-year-old Stephanie and the 40 4-H members who work with her on Heroes on Paws have outfitted a total of 34 police dogs with bulletproof vests in the Midwest. The teens vow to outfit police dogs with vests as long as there is a need. And they continue to raise money for Heroes on Paws by holding an annual Mutt March, a dog walk-a-thon, in the fall.

Stephanie wanted to find other ways to serve the community, so she expanded the caring of Heroes on Paws by starting Little Heroes



**Stephanie Garcia with one of the K-9 recipients of her bulletproof vests.**

on Paws. It's a collection drive for stuffed toy dogs that 4-H members and pet therapy group volunteers give as gifts to sick, disabled and displaced kids when they visit the children with their real dogs during pet therapy sessions. The young people have collected 5,000 stuffed "little heroes" so far.

"These kids are scared, and many of them don't have anything. The toy dogs make them happy because somebody cared enough to give them something to hold on to when they were afraid," Stephanie said.

4-H is full of compassionate young people just like Stephanie who see a need in their communities and find a way to meet it. They are part of a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. You can become part of the 4-H adventure. Visit [www.4husa.org](http://www.4husa.org) to learn more.