

Meena Kumar is a young woman who is already making her mark on the world. A recent graduate of Silver Oak Elementary, 12-year-old Meena has translate her love of animals into a community service mission.

“She is a big fan of animals,” says her mother, Jayashree. “When Meena was nine years old, she met a neighbor who introduced her to Muttville, a senior dog rescue in San Francisco. We visited Muttville and Meena came back with a strong desire to raise money for them.”

To raise money, she started dog-sitting. A violinist in the San Jose Youth Symphony, Meena also used her musical skills to fundraise, becoming a busker, playing her violin for donations. “She was able to raise \$1000 last year by herself last year,” says Jayashree, “and thanks to corporate matching, she was able to contribute \$2000 to Muttville. This year, she increased her fundraising target by 50% and, after giving up her winter and summer vacation time to fundraise, she just met her goal last month.”

Meena believes that giving is more important than getting. That mindset is reinforced by the example set by her parents as they care for her grandparents, and by Dr. Kathy Stecco, the neighbor who introduced Meena to Muttville through an association with her dog, George.

“In 2015, I met my neighbor, Dr. Kathy Stecco, who is my inspiration to help senior dogs,” says Meena. “I first met Kathy when she was walking her hospice dog, George. As I started spending time visiting George at home, Kathy introduced me to another hospice dog, Polar Bear, who was adopted from Muttville, a senior dog rescue center in San Francisco. I had done summer internships at the Humane Society, but was very impressed by Muttville’s mission to change the way the world thinks about and treats older dogs and to create better lives for them through rescue, foster, adoption and hospice. Kathy introduced me to the CEO of Muttville, Sherri Franklin, who was one of the 2016 CNN Heroes of the year.

“I asked if I could volunteer at Muttville and was told that I had to be 17 to volunteer. So I decided instead to raise money for and create awareness of Muttville.”

She posted an ad on Next Door advertising dog-sitting services for neighbors who would soon be taking their winter vacations or who wanted assistance with regular doggie-care services.

“I got my first opportunity when a neighbor asked me if I could walk her dog on Sundays. That was a start of a wonderful journey with many neighbors giving me the opportunity to care for their pets. I keep the owners updated on how

their dogs are doing through text messages and emails. I also create a personalized card with highlights of their pets’ time in my home to make sure the owners are happy with the level of care.”

“I also started to think about other ways to raise money and create awareness. I play violin in the San Jose Youth Symphony. One day, as we were having dinner in Mountain View, I saw a friend from my orchestra team playing violin on the street to raise money for a cause. Inspired by that, I decided to do the same as a way to raise money while getting my practice done. I plan to continue to expand the way I offer better service to my clients and help Muttville.”

Meena’s biggest challenge in meeting the fundraising goals she sets for herself is simply not having enough time. She can only fundraise when school is not in session.

“I also find it challenging to balance my time between caring for dogs and spending time with friends and family. But the best thing is I have a great opportunity to play with dogs without asking my parents to adopt them.”

Her family does have a dog already, a cute pup named Bambie. Meena’s advice to her neighbors is that if they can get a dog, too, they should.

“If you can foster or adopt a dog, please do. They will bring you so much love and joy.”

If you would like to learn more about Muttville and the cause Meena is supporting, visit www.muttville.org.



HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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Email us at eakpabio@bestversionmedia.com.

Together we can bring neighbors together, stay connected and create an informative, family-friendly forum.