

Educators 4 Education prepares for cohort number three of its Youth Veterinary Pre-Apprenticeship Program in partnership with the PSPCA

By: Sydney Lam and Michael Jin

The Pre-Veterinary Apprenticeship Program is a collaborative initiative between Educators 4 Education (E4E) and the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PSPCA). In the summer of 2024, E4E proposed a partnership with PSPCA to launch a paid workforce development program aimed at exposing Philadelphia youth to careers in veterinary medicine.

Designed for teens ages 14 to 18, this program offers immersive, hands-on experiences in veterinary care and in animal shelter operations. Participants explore animal sciences, veterinary careers, and animal welfare through structured activities that include

surgical observations, shelter hospital rounds, veterinarian-led workshops on suturing and surgical knots, animal shelter inspections, shelter cat feeding, and off-site trips to tour veterinary emergency rooms.

Mandy Hood, Outreach and Humane Education Manager at PSPCA North Philadelphia, has served in this role for more than a decade. They have played a key role in shaping the program to foster both youth career exploration and community access to veterinary and pet care. Their department has led youth internships, special affinity groups such as this apprenticeship, programming for justice-involved youth, free veterinary clinics, spay/neuter services, transportation assistance, and pet food distribution to priority Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) sites.



Hood emphasizes the pre-veterinary apprenticeship program's mission to increase diversity in veterinary medicine, noting, "the pre-veterinary apprenticeship program builds pathways into veterinary medicine and animal sciences in a field where only 2% of veterinarians are Black and less than 5% are Latino or Hispanic. There needs to be greater diversity in the field to adequately care for families with pets."

The apprenticeship is based at the PSPCA headquarters on Erie Avenue and includes off-site activities such as food distributions at local public housing sites, farm trips, and equine therapy trips. Since its launch, the program has completed two 10-week sessions, each accommodating 10 youth. The third session begins on October 21 and concludes on December 9, 2025.

Yahsii (17), a West Philadelphia teen who completed the program earlier this year, shared how the apprenticeship opened his eyes to the world of animal care. Through the program, he had the chance to interact directly with animals—including dogs, cats, rabbits, and even horses—and observe surgical procedures that deepened his understanding of veterinary medicine.

"My favorite experiences were feed-

ing and playing with the dogs at the shelter and visiting the horses during a trip, but the most meaningful moment for me was handing out dog and cat food to members of the local community," Yahsii said. This gesture reminded him how veterinary care extends beyond clinic walls.

While he doesn't plan to pursue a veterinary career at this time, he expressed a newfound appreciation for the field and a desire to be more hands-on in caring for his own pet. "Now I know how to treat my dog better if anything happens to her," Yahsii said.

The Pre-Veterinary Apprenticeship program continues to shape how young people in Philadelphia see their role in animal care—whether as future professionals or as more informed and compassionate pet owners. With its emphasis on equity, education, and engagement, the program is not just building pipelines into the veterinary field—it's also fostering a culture of care in communities that need it most. This program funding is made possible by the City of Philadelphia Community Expansion Grant.

To learn more about the program or get involved, contact E4E via e-mail at info@educators4education.org or by phone at (215) 792-3171.

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