

Yadira Cervantes

It started with two tacos. Whatever meat fell from the taco onto my plate I gathered onto a napkin and kept it hidden. Once we stood up, I dropped it on the nearest dog I saw sitting in the street. From then it became a repetitive cycle. Every time I am in Mexico, it's my own goal to give as much food to stray animals as possible. From two tacos to convincing my mom I am so hungry I can eat four just to give two tacos to the dog at the corner. Time passed, and I upgraded to working the month before vacation started and bought a full bag of dog food. With the bag, I was able to feed a meal to more than 20 dogs. One of my happiest accomplishments. I never really thought I had much of a passion, but feeding dogs in the streets, and getting to see their faces light up as soon as they realized that they were not invisible at least to one person, was something that brought me joy. It brought a different side out of me. I continued to feed animals in the streets, caring for them as much as I could.



My experiences in Mexico led me to have a passion for veterinary medicine. I joined clubs in my high school Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK) and throughout being a member I've participated in monthly volunteering at the animal shelter and creating decorations for the animal cages. I have also joined the Veterinary Mentoring Program with the Anti Cruelty Society in Chicago. Within this program, I have learned more about topics of general practice, one health, exposed me to different career paths within veterinary medicine, and had the chance to shadow Dr. Medhurst at the Anti-Cruelty Society in Chicago following her around in shelter medicine. With Dr. Medhurst, I was able to see surgeries and regular exam check-ups. Shadowing sparked my interest in medicine, so I started weekly shadowing with Dr. Naas and Dr. Keuhn at River Forest Animal Hospital in River

Forest, IL under general practice. Under the mentorship of Dr.Naas I've learned teamwork amongst everyone in your team is vital. I've got a strong interest in general practice and I'm excited to continue my journey in shadowing.

In my junior year of High School, one of my assignments in my Advance Placement English Language class was to become a youth activist. There was no doubt what topic I would choose, animal testing in the cosmetic industry. Throughout my research, I realized two things: the horrors of animal testing and how easy it is to turn cruelty-free. And, that's exactly what I did, I checked all the items I owned for the Leaping Bunny symbol and researched my brands. If there was any product I owned that wasn't cruelty-free, I used it and then replaced it with an alternative. I'm proud to say my products are cruelty-free from my makeup to my hair care. I didn't stop there, as others became interested in my research, I was able to help others around me become cruelty-free. It became my newest passion, spreading awareness and becoming a voice for animals. I opened people's eyes and I turned everyone around me cruelty-free. Because no animal should die in the name of beauty.



Spoiler Alert: I didn't stop there. I thought what else can I do to continue spreading awareness, so I created a blog! With tons of research and tutorials, I created Two-Ears Up a blog that provides you with the history and what animal testing contains, but a site where you can check popular brands in stores such as Sephora and Ulta if they're cruelty-free. I'm taking my blog little steps at a time, balancing school, work, and extracurriculars can be difficult. I have many plans for Two-Ears Up, this is only the beginning for my blog and for me. If you would like to learn more, check out my blog <https://twoearsup.weebly.com/>

Although I may not have photos that capture an exact moment where I showed my volunteer efforts to help animals in need, my efforts to help animals have been running deep since I was a little girl. I've given meals to countless stray animals and with the help of my neighborhood I was able to find a home for some of the animals too. One of the photos I've provided is a field trip I went on with my Veterinary Mentoring Program visiting the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign College of Veterinary Medicine. The last photo is a picture of me and one of the dogs I have helped rescue and relocated to a better home.

What I have done is only the beginning although I may not have had a mentor to help me or any support, I persevered because I know I can achieve my dream of mine. I hope to become a guide to other young Hispanics who aspire to pursue veterinary medicine.