

Fourth Graders Raise Money for Disabled Cats and Dogs

Students' fundraisers paid for wheelchairs.

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Xavier, a 10-month-old tabby from Rhode Island, sits in his new pet wheelchair, paid for with money raised by a group of fourth graders in Oklahoma. (Photo courtesy of Handicapped Pets) An Oklahoma fourth-grade class raised enough money to pay for pet wheelchairs for a quadriplegic cat and two disabled dogs through bake sales, pet parades and community donations.

Xavier is a 10-month-old yellow tabby cat from Pawtucket, R.I., that is unable to walk because of a neurological disorder. Now, in the pet wheelchair he received in March, he's able to get around on his own. Amy, a disabled Chihuahua from Cayce, S.C., was born without front legs. Amy moved by hopping on her back legs until she received her rear-wheel cart from the money raised by the fourth graders. Zach, a 13-year-old Beagle from Melbourne, Fla., also was unable to walk because of a weak back end. Now, in his wheelchair, he moves freely and gets the exercise he needs.

Kathy Barton, a fourth-grade teacher in Velma, Okla., organized the students' fundraisers. For the past few years, Barton has helped her classes raise money to support disabled cats and dogs.

In 2005, Barton's class raised almost \$1,000 to fly an injured Dachshund in Tennessee to her new home in Maine and purchase the dog wheelchair she needed to walk again. In 2006, Barton's class raised \$1,100 to provide equipment to dogs in South Carolina and New York.

Barton has worked closely for years with HandicappedPets.com, an organization that teaches people pets with handicaps can lead happy, healthy lives.

Barton said she began developing a curriculum that focused on helping pets three years ago. Her fourth graders have learned about handicapped pets; blind pets, pets with cancer, pets with special needs, such as wheelchairs, harnesses, slings, diapers and more.

"It has changed how these children see animals and people with disabilities, and it breathes new life into the pets they help," Barton said. "The class has some children with behavior problems who have exhibited a new level of focus and excitement toward this project."

For more information on wheelchairs for disabled pets, visit HandicappedPets' website.