

Paws-itively amazing — Girl, 8, organizes drive to help animal rescue organization

By Lisa Roose-Church
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Natalie Batten is a typical 8-year-old with younger twin brothers who pick on her (she picks back); she loves playing sports, hanging out with friends and counts her dogs among her best friends.

Yet, it becomes obvious after one conversation with the blue-eyed, brown-haired girl that she is not ordinary, but extraordinary.

At age 8, Natalie created Dimes for Dogs, a fundraiser to help Last Chance Rescue, a nonprofit organization that provides foster homes for animals.

She also is a salesperson for Healthy Happy Pets for Life, something she begged her mother to do after seeing a video about the recent national recalls on tainted pet food.

"I think dogs are the most wonderful creatures on Earth," Natalie said, grinning from ear to ear while one brother, Lucas, 6, chimed in, "She loves dogs."

"They always cheer me up," Natalie said about the family's dogs, Bella and Oliver, whom she obtained from Last Chance Rescue.

Natalie wanted to help homeless animals, so she came up with an idea — collect money to donate to Last Chance. She talked about her idea with her family, and together they came up with the name Dimes for Dogs because it was catchy.

Natalie, who wanted to raise \$100, shared her idea with Last Chance founder Sharen Kizer, who liked it.

Next Natalie talked to Lindsay Smither, principal at Lakes Elementary School in Hartland Township, where Natalie is a second-grader. Smither agreed to allow Natalie to collect donations for two weeks.

"I talked on the PA to the whole school and to classes and told them about Dimes for Dogs," she said.

Friend McKinzie Pillen helped get the fundraiser started, as did brothers Dino and Enzo Iannello, who made posters announcing the fundraiser.

Natalie's mom, Angelle Batten, also sent to friends and family an [e-mail](#) that her daughter dictated. The e-mail asks for monetary donations — her new goal was \$200 — and new and gently used dog collars, leashes, toys, crates and dog food for Last Chance.

Natalie, who dreams of being a veterinarian some day, also created Daisy — her name for a cardboard box dog she placed at school to collect the donations.

"The kids love feeding Daisy," Angelle Batten said.

Natalie raised nearly \$300 her first week into the fundraiser and the family's kitchen table was cluttered with dog collars, toys and other donated items.

Natalie says she plans to invite Kizer and, hopefully, a puppy from Last Chance to school to present with the donations.

"Sharen Kizer started Last Chance because she didn't like the Humane Society putting the dogs down," Natalie said as she read from notes she keeps in a spiral notebook specifically dedicated to her passion for animals.

"They saved 2,000 dogs and cats last year," she added.

Angelle Batten and her husband, Mike, have taught their three children to be giving. They take one-third of their allowance and birthday money and donate it to charity.

Natalie always picks an animal-based charity, her mother said, adding that Natalie is always coming up with ideas to help animals.

One recent idea included turning the family's backyard into a kennel or building a veterinarian [office](#) in the backyard.

When mom asked where the kennel or office would sit, Natalie offered a quick, "We can move the trampoline over."

Not going to happen, mom said.

"I'm still working on it," she said with a laugh.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Lisa Roose-Church at (517) 552-2846 or at lrchurch@gannett.com.

About Natalie Batten

- Age: 8
- Residence: Brighton Township
- Family: Parents Mike and Angelle; twin brothers, Jacob and Lucas, 6.
- How you might know her: Salesperson for Healthy Happy Pets for Life; animal lover.
- Online: www.healthyhappypetsforlife.com

