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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Are Shelter Dogs the Cure for Bullying?

spcaLA and the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office bring spcaLA's award-winning violence prevention program to the Los Angeles juvenile system

Los Angeles, CA – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles (spcaLA) in cooperation with The Juvenile Division of the Los Angeles Superior Court and the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office, is re-instilling empathy into teens with a revolutionary approach to curing violence – the Teaching Love and Compassion Program for Juvenile Offenders (jTLC)™.

In a two-day, court-mandated course – a condition of probation for some juvenile offenders – teens are paired with shelter dogs and offered intensive sessions designed to help at-risk youth identify and break the cycle of violence. The jTLC candidates are carefully selected by the District Attorney's Office along with the Juvenile Court judges.

"jTLC is a different approach with teens who are entering the juvenile system," says spcaLA President, Madeline Bernstein. "These kids learn coping and anger management skills and gain self-esteem. With the help of our shelter dogs, we instill in them compassion and empathy – which steers them into a more positive direction."

For the last two years, spcaLA has pilot-tested the jTLC program with juvenile offenders from communities like Long Beach and Sylmar. 80% of the offenders have avoided trouble and not reoffended. jTLC is unique to spcaLA and Los Angeles County. Other communities, like New York City, have inquired about the program and how they can introduce it into their own juvenile systems.

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“As an animal lover, retired Police Sergeant and currently Los Angeles County District Attorney Juvenile Offender Intervention Program (J.O.I.N.) hearing officer, I knew from experience and studies that the direct correlation between animal cruelty and domestic violence, child abuse, bullying and school fights is factual,” said Lianne Osendorf. “The cycle of abuse will continue unless there is intervention to break the cycle. The collaboration of the LA DA and spcaLA to bring awareness and intervention to these minors is a major step in doing just that. Thanks to Melanie Wagner, Director of Humane Education, and her staff and some very caring District Attorneys the program has been a phenomenal success. With few exceptions the minors that participate come away from the experience with new found respect for animals and people. The weekend class focuses on teaching minors how damaging abuse can be not only to animals and people but also to the person inflicting the abuse.”

jTLC attendees range from teenage girls who were convicted of bullying to an animal abuse offender who, at 8 years old, was bullied by his brother to injure a rabbit. Now at 14 years old, he was sentenced to jTLC for hitting a dog in the head with a brick.

jTLC is based on spcaLA’s award-winning at-risk youth violence prevention program, Teaching Love & Compassion (TLC)™. Since 1996, TLC has helped over 500 at-risk youth exhibiting behavioral problems or anti-social tendencies. The program is designed to prevent animal cruelty and in turn prevent violence toward people. The TLC program helps students identify and break the cycle of violence through positive feedback, building self-esteem and increasing respect for all living creatures.

The students work one on one with the shelter dogs with the focus of building a positive relationship. In the group portion of the class, the teens focus on teamwork and other valuable interpersonal skills.

At the end of the two-day session, a graduation ceremony is held. The teens, alongside their shelter dogs, will discuss what they have learned in the program and show a brief demonstration of commands with shelter dogs. Media is invited to attend provided the juvenile offenders remain anonymous.

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For media who would like to attend the graduation ceremony or to schedule an interview, please contact Ana Bustilloz at 323.730.5300, x252 or cell 323.707.1271, abustilloz@spcaLA.com

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Established in 1877, spcaLA is an independent, nonprofit animal welfare organization serving Southern California. There is no national SPCA, parent organization, or umbrella group that provides financial support. Donations run programs and services including Cruelty Investigation, the Disaster Animal Response Team, Humane Education and a variety of shelter services.