

STUFFED with LOVE

Kids take plush toys to zoo for TLC

By NATALIE TRUSSO CAFARELLO
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The cuteness factor was in full play as children brought their plush toys for a little tender loving care at the Teddy Bear Care Fair at the Toledo Zoo on March 14.

Griffin Pototschnik, 3, traveled from Ypsilanti, Mich., so Hay Fever, a giant grass pollen, could get a moment with the teddy bear care team.

"He had a boo-boo on his mouth," Griffin shyly whispered as he held a bandaged Hay Fever close to his chest.

Typically held in March, the zoo has hosted the annual Teddy Bear Care Fair since 2010.

"It's not only fun for our younger visitors. The message of the event, caring for animals, be it a stuffed pal, a family pet, or our zoo animals, aligns with our mission of inspiring others to join us in caring for animals and conserving the natural world," Andi Norman, zoo spokesman, said.

"For kids, their best buddy is a stuffed animal," she said.

A row of toy caretakers steadily sewed and mended any rips, tears, or pretend ailments on stuffed dolls and animals, so they could quickly be reunited with their owner for more years of imaginative play and fun.

Teddy Bear operator Cindi Young tended to Sparkle, 5-year-old Maidlyn Kwiatkowski's glittery multicolored cat, with fur as fluffy as cotton candy. Maidlyn's sister, Kaitlyn, 6, brought teddy bear Hearts in for a checkup.

Teddy Bear aid Bev St. Clair pulled a stethoscope from her doctor's bag and listened to Heart's heartbeat and checked her blood pressure too. The two Toledo sisters received certificates of good health for each toy.

"I brought her today to make sure she was healthy and her heartbeat was good. She's my favorite because she has a big heart," Kaitlyn said.

Volunteers Ms. Young, 57, and Mrs. St. Clair are true teddy bear rescuers and plush toy emergency responders.

"She finds them abandoned on the road and fixes them, and then finds a home for them," Ms. Young said of her friend, Mrs. St. Clair.

The home is Ms. Young's house, where her grandchildren are happily entertained by the newly found toys.

"We've been stuffed animal lovers since we were kids. ... We love teddy bears because they always give us love and never talk back or judge," Mrs. St. Clair said.

The two have volunteered at the Teddy Bear Care Fair for several years.

"The kids are so serious about it and they are so happy after their animal gets fixed up," she said.

It was not all mending and sewing, though. The Toledo Area Humane Society was on hand throughout the day introducing families to dogs that are in need of a home, like Turtle, a 3-year-old Basset Hound mix.

The zoo also offered demonstrations about animal behavior and its enrichment activities for zoo animals.

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Volunteer Cindi Young of Sylvania sews an injured stuffed animal.

Bev St. Clair, left, and Cindi Young of Britton, Mich., operate on injured stuffed animals.

LEFT: Amelia Kimble, 4, of Toledo checks the heartbeat of Mr. Fuzzy.

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Ms. Young holds Hay Fever while its owner, Griffin Pototschnik, 3, of Ypsilanti, Mich., checks its blood pressure.



Ashley Gilliland, far left, her children Hunter, 5, and Alexis, 3, all of Lucas County; Justin Drees, 8, and his brother Joel Drees, 6, both of Toledo, with others watching a program presented by puppeteer Joyce Davis of Toledo.



Macy Courville and her son Sterling Courville, 15 months, with his giraffe after the giraffe's checkup.

LEFT: Toledo Area Humane Society volunteer Darlene Quintanilla, left, with Caren Simpson, center, and her daughter Leona Simpson, 3, of Monclova Township. Ms. Quintanilla has two adoptable canines, a Beagle mix puppy, front, and a Basset Hound mix.