

# MARY ELLEN'S STORY

## HOW ANIMALS HELPED WITH CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



Animals are known for being able to comfort and support people, especially sick or abused children. But did you also know that animals had a behind-the-scenes role in creating the first laws to protect children?

It all started with a little girl named Mary Ellen. Her story happened a long time ago in 1874, but it is still remembered today because it helped people realize how important it is to keep children safe.

Mary Ellen's father had passed away, and her mother couldn't take care of her. Mary Ellen was put into foster care and placed in the home of a woman named Mrs. Connolly. Instead of caring for her, Mrs. Connolly treated Mary Ellen badly. She kept Mary Ellen locked in a room, gave her little food and clothing, and physically hurt her. A neighbor heard Mary Ellen's cries and tried to get others involved, but no one knew who could help.

News of Mary Ellen finally reached Henry Bergh, the founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Even though the ASPCA only helped animals, Bergh thought, Doesn't this child need to be protected, too? Bergh believed she did, so he sent someone to see what was going on.

The investigator pretended to be asking questions for a survey. When he entered Mrs. Connolly's home, he saw how badly Mary Ellen was being treated and took careful notes. Using these notes, Bergh asked a judge to hear the case, and the judge agreed.

In court, Mary Ellen was brought in wrapped in a blanket. She told the judge about her life: how she only had one pair of shoes, slept on a piece of carpet, and was beaten almost every day. She said she didn't want to live in her foster home anymore because Mrs. Connolly hurt her so much.

Because of this case, Mary Ellen was taken away from Mrs. Connolly. Many people began to speak out about the need to protect children. This led to the creation of a new group—the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children—and the start of a movement to keep kids safe! This was the beginning of the child protection system, and now there are many groups like KIDS MATTER that help children like Mary Ellen today.

You're helping kids, just like me!

