

Toys for wagging tails

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Some of Vancouver's loneliest four legged residents welcomed boxes of donated Christmas gifts with wagging tails yesterday at the B.C. SPCA's first-ever shelter animal toy drive. Yesterday, people dropped off hundreds of Frisbees for dogs, balls for cats, and even chew toys for rabbits and gerbils. Rhonda Sherwood, volunteer coordinator for the Vancouver shelter, said she came up with the idea after seeing the effect a simple chew toy had on one of the shelter's former residents. Izzy, an old pit bull, suffered from depression, something Sherwood said is a side effect of being so isolated in shelters. "I brought him this big ball and it was the look on his face when he took that ball," said Sherwood. "He sort of held it close like it was his pride and joy." Sherwood said shelter animals are prone to depression because of loneliness, boredom and lack of attention, and toys provide much needed mental stimulation and comfort. "The (animals) are in small cages for months at a time," she said. "The toys help stimulate the mind, so it keeps them occupied and distracted from their environment. It's comfort, and it's something that's theirs."

Corota and her son, Oscar, who did not want to give their last names, were at the shelter to donate dog toys and food. Corota said she wasn't aware of how needy shelter animals were until she adopted her four-year-old golden retriever, Ross, from the BC SPCA. "I don't think we were as aware of what's happening to (these) animals until we got him," she said, adding that Ross has enriched her family's life as much as they have enriched his. "It's made us more active. We meet new people because when you walk the dog people want to stop and talk to you. It's a great thing."