

Prison Pups: Assessing the Effects of Dog Training Programs in Correctional Facilities

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ABSTRACT. During the past twenty-five years, the number of prison programs in which inmates train dogs has increased rapidly. There are no comprehensive data on the prevalence of such programs, but they are in existence in at least twenty U.S. states, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Italy. Though extremely popular among both administrators and inmates, we have only anecdotal accounts to assess the effects of dog training by inmates. Such programs appear to have the potential to break down barriers of fear and mistrust between staff and inmates; and there is also some evidence, again anecdotal, that they reduce recidivism and behavioral infractions among inmates. Literally no systematic studies exist,

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however. This research provides preliminary information from data collected in two Kansas prisons (a men's and a women's institution) in which inmates train assistance dogs and dogs made available for adoption by the general public. This paper focuses on the qualitative findings from the interviews conducted at the men's prison, and examines motivations for entering the program, challenges inmates face in their work, and the benefits they believe come participating. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800- HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

During the past twenty-five years, the number of prison programs in which inmates train dogs has increased dramatically. There exist no comprehensive data on the prevalence of such programs, but we know they are in existence in at least twenty U.S. states, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Italy. While they appear to be extremely popular among administrators, inmates, and communities, we have only anecdotal accounts to assess their effects. This research is a preliminary attempt to fill this gap, and focuses on interviews with inmates (N = 38), staff, and recipients of dogs trained in two Kansas prisons. In this paper, we focus, in particular, on inmate accounts of their motivations to get involved with training dogs and their perceptions of the challenges and benefits of participating in such program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Humans have domesticated animals to serve as food sources, hunters, protectors, and companions for thousands of years. With the movement of the bulk of the human population from rural areas to cities, people have taken pets into their homes, where they now serve largely as sources of relaxation, comfort, and social support. Those who own pets hardly need to be convinced of their value. The pursuit of systematic scientific research on human-animal interactions is, however, a relatively recent development. It has only been over the past twenty-five

years that research has begun to confirm the value of animals in our everyday lives. Interaction with animals has been shown to improve survival rates among cardiac patients (Friedman, Katcher, Lynch, & Thomas, 1980; Friedman & Thomas, 1995; National Institutes of Health, 1988), decrease blood pressure and cholesterol (Anderson, Reid, & Jennings, 1992), lower stress (Eddy, Hart, & Boltz, 1988; Serpell, 1993), increase mental activity among Alzheimer's patients (Batson, McCabe, Baun, & Wilson, 1998; Edwards & Beck, 2002), and play a beneficial role in child development (Filiatre, Millot, & Montanger, 1983; Melson, 2003).

Beyond these demonstrable salutary effects, animals also provide psychological benefits through the provision of social support to their owners and others with whom they interact (Beck & Katcher, 2003; Flynn, 2000). It is for this reason that dogs and cats (and even birds, rabbits, and fish) have been increasingly relied upon to serve as therapy animals in institutional settings as diverse as hospitals, nursing homes, juvenile detention centers, mental hospitals, and prisons. Evidence for their effectiveness in these contexts is, however, very limited. Though such animal therapy programs have attracted many advocates and are supported by a wealth of positive anecdotal evidence, we have very little systematic research to validate (or invalidate) their effectiveness.

There is evidence of animals being used for therapeutic purposes in custodial institutions in the United States since as early as 1919. During World War II, German prisoners in American POW camps adopted rabbits, crows, and even a bear cub, with which the Germans and Americans posed for pictures (Koop, 1988; Strimple, 2003). The first successful animal therapy program in a U.S. prison began—by accident—in 1975, when an inmate at the Lima State Hospital in Ohio adopted an injured sparrow. The staff noticed an immediate change in the behavior of the inmates on the ward, and later approved an animal therapy program. After a year-long study, they discovered that the inmates on the ward with animals required 50 percent less medication, and had reduced violence and fewer suicide attempts when compared to the inmates on a similar ward who did not have access to animals (Harkrader, Burke, & Owen, 2004). The first modern program to use dogs in a prison setting began in 1981 in the Washington Correction Center for Women in Gig Harbor, Washington.

No systematic survey of institutions exists to provide data on the prevalence of prison programs in which inmates interact with animals. Most involve dogs, though some institutions use cats and other small animals; inmates in a number of prisons train wild horses taken from

public lands to be sold to private owners. Dog programs themselves take on a variety of forms. In one of the most common variants—sometimes called “second chance” programs—inmates take unwanted dogs from local animal shelters, provide obedience training, and return them for adoption. Inmates in many other institutions provide early socialization or final training for assistance dogs who serve individuals with disabilities or provide therapeutic support in other ways. The type of program in place at any given institution is usually dictated by local resources and needs, and indeed the spread of these initiatives appears to have been more a result of positive word of mouth among correctional administrators than any systematic assessment of the programs themselves. From the perspective of prison administrators, dog-training programs have many apparent advantages. They serve the very important function of keeping inmates busy, always a concern in medium and maximum security prisons; they are relatively inexpensive; and they offer considerable potential for improving relations between institutions and communities. The latter is a particularly promising prospect in an environment in which the public seems increasingly willing to view inmates as anti-social monsters, incapable of doing anything positive.

While such programs are undeniably popular, we have little sense of what they actually do—whether inmates’ lives are changed by them, whether they improve institutional environments or serve as the basis for conflict between the inmates themselves or between inmates and staff. Dog programs have considerable outward appeal, they promise to break down barriers of fear and mistrust between staff and inmates (Harkrader, Burke, & Owen, 2004), and perhaps to reduce recidivism (Strimple, 2003) and decrease the number of behavioral infractions among inmates (Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Women, 1998). However, these programs also have the potential for harm. Certainly, animals could be abused (though we are not aware of any documented report of this kind). The inmates who participate in the program are also subject to a much higher level of scrutiny from staff and other inmates, and may themselves face risks if harm comes to the animal. There is emotional stress created by the temporary nature of placements; all of the dogs are returned to the community after training.

However, the existence and relative impact of these possibilities are, yet to be assessed in a rigorous, empirical way. Prison administrators, pressed to provide programming on a limited budget, increasingly require empirical data to justify expenditures. This is certainly true in the state of Kansas, in which six of the eight state prisons operate dog-training programs of one kind or another. During the fall of 2004, the first

author was contacted by a staff member in the state Department of Corrections who wanted to initiate a study to assess the effects of dog-training programs on inmates, institutions, and communities. This paper reports the preliminary results of this study.

METHODOLOGY

The larger study, of which this paper is a part, focuses on two institutions, a men's and a women's prison. Between them, these two facilities operate three different dog-training programs. Since 1999 inmates at the Ellsworth Correctional Facility (ECF), a medium-security men's prison, have received dogs as part of an institutional partnership with Canine Assistance Rehabilitation Education and Services (CARES). Puppies are assigned to inmate handlers, whose sole responsibility is training the dogs for 12-18 months, during which they learn more than sixty basic obedience commands and master an agility course. The dogs are returned to CARES, which places them with recipients, who are required to attend a week of seminars and additional training with their dogs. Recipients then return to the ECF with their animals for a graduation ceremony in which the new owners meet the inmate dog handlers. The Topeka Correctional Facility (TCF), Kansas' largest state institution for women inmates, operates two dog-training programs. The inmates classified as medium or maximum custody are eligible for the "blue ribbon" dog program in which animals from a local shelter, who are slated to be euthanized, are sent to the prison for obedience training. As at the ECF, the women in this program train dogs as their sole prison-job assignment. If the dogs pass an obedience test given by a local trainer, they are placed on a "do not destroy" list and returned to the Humane Society for adoption. Almost all eventually find homes. Those in minimum security provide assistance dog training in a partnership with Kansas Specialty Dog Services (KSDS). All of the women who train these dogs have jobs in the community, and the training is done on a volunteer basis during nonwork hours. All three of these programs are almost entirely supported by volunteers in the community and private donations. The only taxpayer money involved pays regular prison wages to the inmates in the "Blue Ribbon" and CARES programs, which amount to \$0.45 to \$1.05 per day.

During the summer of 2005, we conducted formal interviews with 38 inmate participants, seven administrators and staff members, and approximately 28 recipients of the dogs trained at these institutions. We

also conducted a number of informal interviews with administrators and the staff. The interview sample is depicted in Table 1.

The interviews with the staff and inmates were conducted on-site at the two facilities and took the form of semi-structured conversations. Those with recipients were conducted at a CARES training seminar for new owners and took the form of unstructured group interviews.

We will focus, in this paper, on the interviews with the inmates in the program at the ECF, the medium-security men's facility we visited. These men train dogs as their sole work assignment, and their range of experience in the program was between two weeks and two years; the median experience level was a little more than three months. We did not collect systematic data on the offenses for which these men had been convicted. The program's administrator told us, however, that many of the men in the program had been convicted of sex offenses, and the ECF does house a disproportionate number of sex offenders. Our own informal checks after the interviews revealed that a number of white men in our sample had been convicted of sex offenses, the African American men were more likely to have been drug or property offenders.

TABLE 1. Dog Project Interviews

Program Participants (N = 38)	N	%
Sex		
Male	18	47
Female	20	53
Race		
White	32	84
African American	4	11
Hispanic	1	3
Native American	1	3
Custody Level		
Medium or Maximum	24	63
Minimum	14	37
Training type		
Assistance	32	84
"Blue Ribbon"	6	16
Other interviews (N = 35)		
Administrators and staff	7	—
Recipients	—	—
Focus group	26	—
Individual recipients	2	—

FINDINGS

As we have just begun the analysis of these interviews the findings at this point are preliminary. We focus here solely on the inmates' perceptions of the program at ECF, and in particular, on three issues that have emerged from our analysis of the data. First, we examine the inmates' motivations for becoming involved with the dog program. Second, we examine challenges these inmates face in their relationships with other inmates and with the staff, and finally we explore the benefits that the inmates believe they receive from their participation.

Motivations for Becoming Involved

Motivations the men gave for becoming involved with the program are listed in Table 2. Not surprisingly, the most common impetus to becoming involved in the dog program is a love for dogs. Many of the men we interviewed had owned dogs before they came to prison and so already enjoyed spending time with them. Few came to prison with any formal experience in training dogs, however, and none had any background in working with assistance dogs.

The next most common motivation for getting into the program is the lure of the relative freedom allowed to dog handlers. In this institution, handlers are free to be with their dogs and train them from morning until evening and also have access to a fenced "dog yard" and agility course. The ability to be outside with the dogs clearly has considerable appeal for many, as one inmate puts it: "[I do this because there's] More freedom to go outside. It's company [for me] I can get away from the other

TABLE 2. Motivations for Joining Program*

	N
Likes dogs	10
Freedom of movement in institution	9
Giving back to community	5
Easy work compared with other jobs	4
Desire to keep busy	4
Dog as therapy	3
Learning opportunity	3
Previous exposure to program	2
Previous dog-training experience	2

* Participants could identify more than one motivation.

inmates and the noise, and stupidity.” On this dimension, the job compares favorably with assignments like kitchen work, laundry, and institutional maintenance tasks that require inmates to labor inside under relatively close supervision.

The final most significant motivation the inmates mention for becoming involved with the program invokes the notion of giving back to the community. Many of the men see training assistance dogs as one way to remedy some of the harm their criminal actions had caused. Another inmate conveys this motivation particularly clearly:

I look at it like this: if I've taken so much from the community, I've done the drug selling, I've been involved in the gang shootings, I've done a few robberies and whatnot. . . . now, I'm taking this as an opportunity to give back to the community because this dog is going to be used to help somebody else. It is going to be used to help a handicapped person, so I'm taking this time to just give back what I've taken out.

In a context like prison in which many jobs are little more than makework exercises, programs like these may in fact be one of the only ways for the inmates to feel that they can somehow redress the harms caused by their actions. For many men, this is in fact a powerful catalyst for their participation in the program. As Table 2 indicates, other motivations are not particularly surprising, and include a perception that training dogs is easier than many other potential work assignments, a desire to keep busy, the hope that working with the dog will be therapeutic, and the desire to learn something new. The latter may well become an even more salient motivation as learning opportunities in prisons become harder and harder to find.

Challenges

In this institution, the trainer inmates live with the dogs almost constantly. The dogs sleep in the men's cells—all of which also house another inmate—and accompany them to meal times and appointments (with the exception of visits). In a closed, cramped environment in which people have little choice about with whom they associate, it is logical to expect that adding animals to the mix will result in some tensions. And in fact the men in this program related a number of challenges they face in their everyday lives in the institution.

Visibility

The first set of challenges comes from the sense of hyper-surveillance inmates feel as a result of their participation in the program. Though being free of disciplinary reports is a requirement for becoming a dog handler, these men, nonetheless, feel that they are watched much more closely than their counterparts who work in other areas of the facility. Part of this is simply a product of the novelty of the dogs. As there were only 18 primary dog handlers during the time we were there, it was always easy for the staff to identify the trainers. In fact, many of the men said that officers who might not know their names, nonetheless, know their dogs—as one puts it, “Like you’ll see an officer say ‘Who is the guy who has that dog . . . the Border Collie?’”

This causes considerable pressure, creating visibility in an environment in which many would rather go unnoticed. As one man noted, being in the program is like having “a bull’s-eye on your back.” This account underlines his sentiment:

We’re in the limelight. I mean, there’s 900 something inmates here and eighteen dogs. You’re not only in the limelight with the staff, but also with the inmates. *And what are they watching you for?* Every little thing. They watch you for every little mistake that you’re going to make. They watch for all the negative stuff. *It sounds like it’s easy to mess up.* Real easy, real easy.

As this man indicates, higher levels of scrutiny come both from staff and other inmates; several men told stories of having been reported to the staff by fellow prisoners who believed they were violating program rules or otherwise mistreating their dogs, accounts that were confirmed by program administrators.

Conflict

Aside from participating in surveillance, inmates not in the program create other kinds of challenges. Most men told us that the majority of the other inmates like the dogs and enjoy having them in the facility. Even so, some try to interfere with the training program. As service dogs, the animals the inmates handled are being trained not to interact with others, except with their owners’ permission, and follow a variety of rules not generally enforced with the typical family pet. Other inmates sometimes fail to respect these limits, petting the dogs without

permission or feeding them table scraps. There is little evidence, however, that this is done out of sheer malice.

A minority of inmates are, however, actively hostile to dogs or prefer not to be near them. The men can usually identify these inmates and do their best to stay away from them. Inmates who do not wish to be housed with dogs can receive transfers to other cells and housing units. These strategies do not always work, and the men sometimes face direct hostility. One inmate relates such an encounter:

Everybody likes Buddy, when we come in the pod [they're always calling him over]. *So you haven't had difficulty with people saying that they didn't want to be around him?* Just one guy . . . I guess he doesn't like dogs, he's scared of them. I kind of got angry because Buddy, he's not the type of dog that's going to bark at you or growl at you, he just wants to be petted, he's like a big kitty, he just likes to be petted. I guess that's all he wanted from Dude, and Dude raised his foot up like he was going to kick Buddy. I told him that if he kicked my dog we were going to have a real serious problem. If he had kicked him, I probably wouldn't have Buddy, and we wouldn't be having this conversation.

As in this man's case, the dog handlers clearly feel that they are responsible for the welfare of their dogs, a sentiment that might or might not extend to their fellow inmates. While a man fighting another man might be left to fend for himself, the inmates agree almost to a man that anyone who harms one of their dogs will face the possibility of retribution.

The most serious issue our interviews revealed, at least from an administrator's perspective, lies in fact in this demonstrated potential of the program to serve as a catalyst for violence. This can come from the handlers, as above, or from other inmates who feel that the handlers are mistreating the dogs. This possibility is heightened, in the context of the institution we studied, by the fact that this particular program employs the technique of leash correction in which dogs are trained using chain collars. The inmates correct dogs by jerking the leash, hence tightening the chain, around the dog's neck. Some of the handlers themselves actually expressed reluctance about correcting their dogs in this way—a few saw it as abuse, and so refused to use this technique except in extreme circumstances. Other inmates often see correction in this way, a fact that can cause conflict, as seen in the following account:

See, we do a leash correction as a form of training, and they think that's abusing the dog. I mean, it can be abusing the dog if you're not doing it correctly, I can see it being abuse. But if you're performing it correctly, then I don't see it as abuse, because according to our manual, we are told to do that, so that's what we do. A lot of guys see it as abuse, and the next thing you know they want to fight you.

We did in fact hear one story—which we believe to be true—of a situation in which other inmates perceived that a dog handler was mistreating a dog by over-correcting him, a fight broke out, and the handler was removed from the program.

However, we do not meanoverstate the case for violence . We heard of only one such account in all the interviews we conducted for this project. The fact that inmates in the program invariably lose their dogs for such altercations is a powerful disincentive, and we heard about many more cases in which complaints about dog handlers or concerning other inmates' behaviors with the dogs were handled through appropriate channels. What we do find interesting, however, is that these stories describe violence directed not against the dogs, but in the interests of protecting them. The effect of hyper-surveillance, under which the dog handlers work, belies one of the primary concerns of the general public about prison dog-training programs, which is the belief that dogs will somehow be abused by the inherently violent, uncontrollable men who supposedly live behind prison walls. In fact, our interviews indicate that the opposite is true: dogs are undoubtedly much less likely to be abused inside the prison than in the "free world."

Giving up the Dogs

The final challenge that inmates face centers on the fact that the dogs' stay in the institution is temporary—they are always returned to the CARES program, which in turn, places them with recipients. The men who train the dogs often form deep emotional bonds with the animals. It was not uncommon for men to have tears in their eyes when they spoke of giving up their dogs. Several inmates who were training small dogs in fact held them on their laps during our interviews; others were obviously proud of what their dogs could do, and demonstrated this to us while we talked. A man who had worked with his dog for four months said:

How will it feel to give up this dog? I'm going to go crazy, believe that. It's going to drive me nuts, but I know that he's going to be

someplace better and he's going to be somewhere helping somebody. He'll be doing good somewhere else. . . . [But] Four months is a long time, especially when he's all I've got.

There are two things that make this process easier for the inmates. First is the sense, as in this case, that the dogs were doing an important service. The second is a formal mechanism that reinforces this notion. This facility has a graduation ceremony every few months in which the men who train the dogs are allowed to meet those who receive them and hear their stories about the work the dogs are doing. We describe this in greater detail in the following section.

BENEFITS

In this final section of the paper, we focus on the benefits that the participants believe come from their participation in the program. Though there is a wide variety of these, we highlight here the three that are the most salient: perceived changes in behavior and attitudes, alterations in the prison environment, and the opportunity to give back to the community or to a person in need.

Changes in Behavior

Many of those we interviewed believe that the strongest positive they receive from the program is the change it effects in their attitudes and emotions. For these men the dogs are truly therapeutic. Administrators love to tell these kinds of success stories; we heard many during the course of this project. One of these is the story of Jackson, told here by the dog-program coordinator:

Mister Jackson, bless his soul, was a person that weekly filed grievances, and had huge anger and emotional problems . . . [He was in segregation regularly]. I called him in one day and I said "Mister Jackson, what could we do so that you and I aren't fighting anymore?" He got real quiet, and he hung his head, and mumbled "Well, I kind of would like a dog." I was just shocked. After I picked myself up off the floor I said "Alright, I'll have to go all the way to the warden on this one." . . . Now he is teaching my class,

my new people, to be dog handlers. He's not perfect by any means, but he's gone from somebody who was the most nasty, angry, hostile [inmate], fighting us every step of the way. . . . He's just a different man. He knows he still has some anger, but he's spending all of his time taking care of this dog and training him right. And this has made just a night and day change in this man . . . and now that's exceptional, a really obvious amount of change.

Jackson's was indeed a special circumstance; men in the program are required to be free of disciplinary reports before they are approved to train a dog. Both the warden and the program coordinator chose to give him a chance, and by all accounts he has succeeded. We interviewed him, and his story echoes these themes:

[The program] helped me a whole lot. I was constantly in trouble, and I've been six months D [isciplinary] R[eport] free. My case was a special case, through the warden, he gave me the dog. *Why do you think he was willing to take a chance?* I convinced him that maybe I needed the dog, that the dog could help me, while I'm helping the dog. So he went ahead and did it *Would you say that this is a positive program?* Yeah. It's real positive. Like I said, it changed me so far, and I know that it has changed a whole lot of others. It gives you something to look forward to. I was a selfish person, and now I do things for others. The impact of a pet, or a dog, it calms a whole lot of people down.

This is probably the most dramatic story we heard, but it is certainly not the only one in which an inmate related a story of having been significantly changed by the program. Participants believe that the dogs help them to deal with anger, teach them patience, give them unconditional love, and simply make doing time a little easier.

From an administrative perspective this is obviously promising. It is relatively rare for inmates to believe that they have been changed for the better *by* prison (rather than in spite of it). Beyond these individual-level effects, however, inmates also perceive that the presence of the dogs also improves the institutional climate more generally. The program's coordinator told us that dogs often become "mascots," adopted by the inmates in the handler's housing unit. Participants confirm that most inmates welcome the presence of the dogs, and that their benefits are not limited to the handlers:

I see the dogs affect a lot of people, I go through a lot of cellies. . . . And I've had some pretty violent and angry bunkies, and this dog changes their life. I have guys say "I don't want to leave this cell," because of the dog. So, when I see stuff like that, I take it and run with it . . . keep it as a good thing.

Another man's experience is similar:

It's nice to have [the dogs] . . . I mean . . . it brings better moods. Like at the county jail you don't have dogs and everybody's all uptight, upset and everything. But in here with a dog, I mean everybody . . . well, the ones that like dogs, it brings their spirits up a little bit more. And it brings up mine, it brings my anger down than what it used to be.

Though these accounts can only be taken as suggestive, other research on the presence of animals in institutional settings would seem to bear out these positive effects. There is every reason to believe that having dogs in an institution could calm and normalize the atmosphere.

The final benefit inmates perceive as a result of their participation in the program comes from giving back to the community. As we noted earlier, this facility holds a graduation ceremony every few months. These coincide with the end of the week-long training sessions for the recipients of the dogs trained at the prison, and we attended two. During this time the recipients of the dogs, sometimes entire families, come to the prison and assemble in the visiting room at tables across from the two dozen or so primary and secondary inmate dog handlers. The primary handlers each talk individually about the dogs with whom they are working and their feelings about the program. The recipients then stand up and, one at a time, describe what the dogs they have received will be doing, and often talk about how they feel about having received a dog. The handlers then receive certificates for the dogs they have trained (about which many seem quite proud), and then the inmates and the recipients mix freely for the next 45 minutes. The first few minutes are awkward, but the dogs seem to break the ice, and conversation soon flows fairly freely. It is an emotional scene; we witnessed crying among the inmates, the prison staff, and the new owners of the dogs. We cannot overemphasize the effect this event has on confirming for the inmates that they are indeed doing

something worthwhile. All of the men we interviewed, who had attended a graduation, cited “giving back” as one of the primary benefits of being in the program (versus only four of the nine who had not). The following story is typical:

What’s that like? Well, it’s amazing to see the people and how it helps them . . . all the effort we put into it. It gets you right there (touches chest). I’ve been to four or five of them, and it’s just . . . it’s always real good, it’s always touching. Like this one [girl] she’s in a wheelchair and she wasn’t real mobile at all . . . and that dog was just listening to her and it was like “Wow!” Just for them to say something and the dog does exactly what it’s supposed to do, that’s why I stay in it, that’s why I continue to train them. . . . We’re providing animals for individuals [who need them]. That’s the best part.

For these inmates the program clearly offers the possibility of a link to a community in a positive way, something very few other prison job assignments promise. Though, perhaps, this sentiment could be conveyed without the mechanism of the graduation, it is clearly a powerful venue through which these men come to see their contribution in a concrete way.

The graduation also offers the new dog owners, many of whom have no previous experience with prisons, a chance to connect with inmates in a setting in which they become more than just the sum of their crimes. For the recipients this experience is equally powerful, as this woman’s experience indicates:

[Before I went] my stomach was in knots, I was so scared. I had never been [to prison] and I just . . . all these things are going through my head, like what’s going to happen, what if one of them gets upset, you know. [But now] I have a totally different outlook on it, just the opposite. When I got in there and they started introducing themselves and their dogs, it was just like everything just went away. I was relaxed. I was comfortable being around them [This program] helps them to have a second chance at life, to get their stuff straight. I really believe that these dogs help them. I believe that whole-heartedly. It gives them a second chance, and it gives them a sense of responsibility, and it . . . if they’re depressed or something, they can just sit there and love on the dog, and you

know they're calm after that. It's like they take the stress out of you, and I just think that it's an amazing program.

Indeed, in an age in which prison inmates are increasingly banished by a public that seemingly cares little about them, programs like this, particularly if they include direct contact between community members and inmates, may provide one of the few opportunities for bridging the gap between the institution and the community.

CONCLUSION

What we can say at this point is that though such programs clearly create some challenges for inmates, staff, and administrators, they also appear to hold considerable promise. The accounts of the men we interviewed indicate—at least in a qualitative sense—that the dogs have the potential for transforming lives, both within and outside prisons walls. Data from staff and administrators, not presented here, indicate that supervising inmate dog handlers can present some out-of-the-ordinary security concerns, and there may always be resistance from members of the community who oppose seeing the lives of inmates improved in any way.

There are two future components to the project. First is the qualitative analysis of the interviews from the women's prison. Early indications are that there may be some gender differences in the effects of the dogs in women's institutions. It seemed to us, for example, that women were more likely to refer to the dogs as their "children," and to speak of training dogs as being like raising children. Women are also more likely to have histories of abuse, and dogs may play a valuable role in helping them to deal with this. The closer, more personal management style in women's prisons also means that the dogs offer one of the few conflict-free vehicles for expressing affection. As one of the women we interviewed put it, "This dog is about the only thing you can hug in here without getting written up." This analysis is ongoing. We also plan to add a quantitative component, testing for the effects of the program on variables such as disciplinary infractions and recidivism. This latter analysis should give us a sense of whether prison dog programs are just one option among many for filling inmates' time, or whether they produce effects that are measurable at the quantitative level.

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