

# Effects of dog training programs to prisoners essay sample



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## Abstract

Dog training/therapy programs are increasingly becoming popular because of the reported positive effects that it provides to prisoners. Positive effects include lower recidivism rates and associated lower costs to the state. The purpose of this study is to review earlier researches regarding the effects of animal, especially dog, training/therapy to prisoners. A brief discussion on animal assisted therapy is first given then the psychosocial effects of dog training to prisoners are examined. A list of PAPs is provided near the end. Knowledge of the positive effects of dog training/therapy to prisoners will provide us with a less costly yet effective rehabilitation method.

## Effects of Dog Training Programs to Prisoners

When we talk about prisons, the initial thought that comes to mind is punishment. According to Allen (1998, p. 8) the three objectives of federal prisons include having the prisoners recognize authority, instilling “ an inmate work ethic”, and enhancing the morale of the prison staff. In short, the goal of prisons is to teach prisoners a lesson. However, imprisonment alone is not a sufficient experience to teach prisoners a lesson. Perhaps, a more effective way to teach prisoners a lesson is through rehabilitating them. Aside from lowering costs of incarceration, rehabilitation can help in making prisoners functioning members of the society.

Prisons use various methods of rehabilitation. One of the most popular methods of rehabilitation used today is perhaps through animal training/therapy, where animals such as dogs and horses are used to teach inmates life-enhancing skills (Strimple, 2003). The bond between human

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and animal stretches back from early history, but it wasn't until recently that a correlation was acknowledged between this bond and the emotional health of humans (Blackman, 2006).

The most popular animal used in prison-based animal programs (PAP) is dogs. Studies have shown that the mere presence of a dog increases the sense security from people that surround it. They have been used for guarding flocks, tracking, hunting, search and rescue, leading the blind, and in assisting the deaf and physically challenged, and now they are being used for teaching inmates life-enhancing skills.

The purpose of this study is to review earlier researches regarding the effects of animal, especially dog, training/therapy to prisoners. A brief discussion on animal assisted therapy is first given then the psychosocial effects of dog training programs to prisoners are examined. Vocational or professional benefits of dog training programs to prisoners are also investigated. The author will also try to give a brief report on the effects of dog training programs to the society as a whole. A list of PAPs is provided near the end. Knowledge of the positive effects of dog training/therapy to prisoners will provide us with a less costly yet effective rehabilitation method.

### Animal-Assisted Therapy

The birth of animal-assisted therapy can be attributed to two contributors — the Secretary of Interior Franklin K. Lane and Dr. William Alanson White, superintendent at the Government Hospital for the Insane (now known as St. Elizabeth Hospital) in Washington. In his letter to Dr. White dated on August <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-dog-training-programs-to-prisoners-essay-sample/>

12, 1919, Secretary Lane suggested the hospital to have some dogs so that the men confined in the hospital will have someone to play with to which the Doctor replied affirmatively. Ever since then, animal-assisted therapy has been widely used by most institutions ranging from medical to schools, shelters, foster cares, courtrooms and prisons (Wirth, 2005).

Animal therapy has been widely used in prisons. Animal therapy programs for the Department of Correction are operated in at least 15 different states and in one Federal Penitentiary (Wirth, 2005). Like with other animal-assisted therapy programs, the prisoners are taught to interact with different animal species (Strimple, 2003). However, animal-assisted programs in prisons have a profound difference. Prisoners not only interact with the animals; they also train them.

The first successful animal therapy program in a place where individuals are confined happened at the Lima State Hospital for the Criminally Insane (now Oakwood Forensic Center) in Lima, Ohio (Strimple, 2003). The institution is the first formal program to use a maximum-security population (Furst, 2006). The program was initiated in January 1975 by David Lee, a psychiatric social worker. He was struck by the improvement of some men who had come across and care for an injured bird. A patient reportedly found an injured sparrow in the prison yard. He managed to smuggle the bird in a ward, where animals are not allowed and the patients are the institutions most depressed and unresponsive patients.

For the first time, the patients in this ward worked like a group to heal and take care of the injured bird. The patients soon began to relate to the staff

well, to which the staff noted. This experience led the hospital to conduct a year-long study on the therapeutic benefits of animals. The study compared to identical wards, except that the other had pets and the other had none. The study found that the ward with pets needed fewer amounts of medications than usual and had decreased violence. Furthermore, no suicide attempts were reported. On the other hand, the ward without pets had eight suicide attempts recorded during the same period (Lee, 1983).

Several animals may be used in the therapy. Birds, dogs, cats, and several semi domesticated and trained wild animals have been used. However, man's best friend has always been the top grosser. Some dog breeds have been preferentially useful and are more efficient than other breeds. They have been bred for a long time for qualities of interacting with people. Almost all dog breeds and even mongrels are known to participate. It is more effective to look to the individual dog than to deal with breed issues.

The idea of dog training was introduced to the Washington Correction Center for Women (WCCW) by Kathy Quinn, now Sister Pauline. Together with Dr. Leo Bustad, Sister Pauline established a dog training program at WCCW (Bustad, 1990; L. M. Hines, 1983). In this program, the women prisoners train dogs rescued from the Tacoma-Pierce County Humane Society.

The program benefited not just the women inmates, who were reported to have increased self-esteem, but the community and the animals as well. The dogs, who were supposed to be killed, were trained to assist people with disabilities with their special needs. Recognizing the benefits of a dog

training program, Sister Pauline has helped other correctional facilities to establish their own dog training programs (Strimple, 2003).

Once prisons are convinced of the benefits provided by animal training programs, these programs will certainly increase in number (Strimple, 2003). Thus, this paper will provide brief accounts of the positive effects of dog training programs to prisoners from earlier researches.

## Effects of Dog Training Program

### Effects to Prisoners

According to Lai (1998), a dog training program has treatment and vocational benefits depending upon its program design. Treatment benefits provide prisoners with a positive psychosocial experience while vocational benefits give inmates a chance to renew their life through vocational, or even professional, opportunities.

### *Treatment Effects*

Studies have shown that a person holding or petting an animal will cause a lowering of blood pressure, the release of strain and tension, and can draw out a person from loneliness and depression (Blackman, 2006). Dog adoption programs in penitentiaries have been conducted to help prisoners cope up with depression. Inmates with the help of dog rescue community groups and volunteers, provide obedience training to rescued dogs, along with continuing education for foster pups being trained as therapy dogs (Blackman, 2006). Reviews of dog training programs reported significant

improvements in attitude behavior displayed by inmates participating in such programs.

One of the originators who adopted a dog training program is the Purdy Treatment Center for Women, a maximum-security prison in Washington. In this program, inmates are taught to train dogs with the help of a former inmate (Arkow, 1998; Graham, 2000; Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991). It started in 1981 under the supervision of the People Partnership Program.

Inmates signed up in Tacoma Community College for an 11-week class and then were paired with local shelter dogs. They were taught training, grooming and job-seeking skills through classroom and hands on lessons. Administrators initially feared that there will be incidences of animal abuse but the opposite went true. Inmates actually became concerned with animal welfare and thus became more cooperative (L. Hines, no date).

Furthermore, they learned self-control.

Around the same period, Lorton Prison, a prison chapter in Virginia, built a similar program through the help of a veterinarian of the national People-Animals-Love group (Arkow, 1998; Beck & Katcher, 1996; Graham, 2000; L. Hines, no date). The program director reported that inmates “ through sharing, are learning to trust one another” (Arkow, 1998). He further stressed that “ animals bring humanity- they bring out the best in all of us” (p. 13).

Moneymaker and Stimple (1991) conducted an evaluation of the treatment effects of animal training programs by examining disciplinary records. They reported that inmates who participated in the program had reduced feelings  
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of isolation and frustration. According to them, inmates showed “considerable change in their outlook toward others and their sense of self-worth, as well as their sense of achieving a better goal in life” (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991). Participants were reported to display “fewer altercations and problem behavior” (p. 148).

At the same period, Harbolt and Ward (1991) conducted another review evaluating a program where incarcerated older teenagers were taught to train unwanted shelter dogs for three weeks. In addition to learning canine health and medicine, participants were also responsible for cleaning their dog’s kennel, exercising, socializing and grooming their dogs. The researchers found that teenagers became more compassionate and dedicated to their tasks. Furthermore, they learned how it feels to give and receive a positive reward in return (Harbolt & Ward, 1991).

Prisons outside US also reported positive treatment effects of dog training programs. In 1994, Walsh and Mertin evaluated a dog training program in a prison in Australia by measuring the reports of participants. After a six-month period, they found that participants had significant improvements in their self-esteem and levels of depression (Graham, 2000).

Another program to bring partnership between prisoners and abandoned dogs is Project Pooch at McLaren Juvenile Correctional Facility in Woodburn, Oregon. The program was started by its principal, Joan Dalton, in 1993. It became a nonprofit organization in 1999 and consequently hired a project manager (Strimple, 2003). Students are taught dog grooming and training as well as attending for the health needs of the animals. Merriam-Arduini



(2000) evaluated the program in her dissertation studying recidivism, reformation and behavioral changes made by the incarcerated youth brought about by studying dog training. She reported in her abstract,

The findings indicate that there is zero recidivism of POOCH participants, that the program assists to meet judicial orders and educational expectations with high percentages. Based on survey responses from the adults there appears to be a marked behavior improvement in areas of respect for authority, social interaction and leadership. The youth provided descriptors of change and growth in areas of honesty, empathy, nurturing, social growth, understanding, confidence level and pride of accomplishment. (Merriam-Arduini, 2000)

Several similar programs had been adapted in different penitentiaries. These programs are based on mutual respect and dignity. This is a program where inmates in prisons are training dogs to assist the disabled. The dogs are then placed with someone who needs a specially trained dog to assist them. Also in other prison programs they raise future assistance dogs and guide dogs for the blind for existing training schools, thus cutting back the time that a disabled person must wait for a dog to assist them.

Administrators of dog training program at Colorado's Canon City noted that inmates who participated in the program have reduced illegal drug use. Participants also showed significant improvements in self-confidence, patience, and respect for both people and animals. They also experienced less.

Another dog training program is where inmates are taking unwanted dogs from animal shelters, then groom and train them to be good citizens. They are then placed back into the community as “ paroled pets”. This gives the dogs a second chance in life, exactly what the prisoners are wishing for in their own life. One of which is the Prison Dog Project. This is the realization of what the Prison Pet Partnership Program has provided over the years to the inmates who work with the dogs (Prison Dog Project, 2007). It helps to bring a sense of calm in the institutional setting. The dogs are also a bridge between the inmates and the guards as well as with a disabled person to people in the community.

The prison dog programs help the inmates learn how to become “ other” centered, thus giving something back to society. The inmates learn needed skills in order to help them get jobs when they are released. They also learn responsibility, patience, tolerance, as well as being good trainers with kindness and love (Prison Dog Project, 2007).

Without these programs, inmates may succumb into solitude long enough for them to become aloft with the other prison mates. Aside from giving them a training in pet management, persistence and care may be cultivated and aide them into becoming a better person when they go back into the world out side. Having pets in prison may not only solve problems of boredom, it is a reflection of the government’s efforts to give former law benders a second chance to enjoy life. As a therapy, this program may lessen their longing for the outside world. It may even make their prison life enjoyable and less tiresome. They may even forget the years that pass by.

Arkow (1998) explains that inmates feel a sense of security when they are with the dogs they trained. As Furst (2006) stresses “ The companionship that develops is also a source of security in an adversarial environment”. Furthermore, the prisoners experience interaction with a living being that gives no interest in their past mistakes (Furst, 2006). Inmates whose lives lack the sense of touch and belongingness feel a sense of unconditional love from animals that are able to “ stimulate a kind of love and caring that is not poisoned or inhibited by prisoners” (Beck & Katcher, 1996). Arkow (1998) explains that the mere presence of a dog can be therapeutic.

For others it is the sense that the activity is in some way useful to someone else - for example doing physical therapy by grooming the dog is something the dog enjoys so the person feels good about making the effort. Some individuals attribute the benefit to the fact that the new scheme has invariably broken the routines. Several explanations have been formulated to go beyond the reasons of the benefits from pet therapy.

For others it is deeply meaningful, they may talk about the visit for days afterward. Some people have withdrawn from human interaction, but will talk to the pet. The pet may bridge two different people to communicate, or bring up pleasant memories. In many cases the benefits offered by visiting pets are the same as those offered by Animal Assisted Therapy, the difference being that there is no prescribed course of treatment and no recording of the effects on the individual.

### *Vocational Contributions*

Dog training programs do not just provide benefits to the psychological well-being of the prisoners but to their employability as well. Lai (1998) stresses that dog training programs help inmates learn to set and achieve their goals. Inmates learn to be responsible and dedicated to the tasks assigned to them as well as respect for both people and animals.

The Prison Pet Partnership Program gives inmate trainers the opportunity to learn valuable pet industry-related vocational skills to use in finding employment when they resume their lives outside of prison. In addition to training, boarding and grooming dogs, inmates also gain clerical skills by working in our office. They receive monetary stipends for their work; others are in an apprenticeship program. The dogs spend a good deal of time with their trainers within the prison community. This allows other inmates to benefit from the presence of the dogs even though they are not directly involved with the program (Pauline, 2007).

The Coleman Federal Complex, a minimum-security work camp for women in Coleman, Florida, has built a dog training program through the help of Donna Bucella, the US attorney in Tampa, Florida, and Julie Aichroth, director of Southeastern Guide Dogs, Inc.

The inmates provide advanced training to dogs on assisting individuals with impaired vision (Brink, 2005). Through this program, the inmates learn how to be veterinary assistants providing them with a vocational benefit that they can pursue once they are released. In fact, once the inmates are released, they can attend a two-year vocational course on animal training and eventually earn a certificate as veterinary technician (Strimple, 2003).

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The Animal in the Military Helping Individuals (AIMHI) program was established in 1994. In this program, the US army inmates at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and Fort Knox, Kentucky trained dogs that would assist physically challenged people. Aside from training dogs to assist the physically challenged, inmates were also taught animal husbandry and human and animal behavior. Strimple (2003) stresses that “ this program provides vocational training and helps the men in their transition back to civilian life”. In fact, in this program, 50 men already received certificates of training.

This vocational opportunity stems from the fact that prisoners are taught information about animal caring and handling. They are taught not just to simply take care for the animals. They also study their grooming, health and diet. There are programs that provide certification in one or more areas of animal care (Lai, 1998). Others, because of their participation in the program, receive contacts from shelter or volunteer agency and veterinarians that hire participants and request for their release. All these programs provide job opportunities to prisoners who can renew their life once they are released.

### Effects to the Community as a Whole

Dog training programs do not just benefit the prisoners alone. They also benefit the community as a whole. Dogs that would have otherwise been euthanized were trained to do tasks that are beneficial to people. Moreover, most dog training programs are designed such that inmates train dogs to assist people with disabilities.

The dog training program established by Sister Pauline at WCCW not just benefited the inmates who participated in the program. The dogs were trained as helpers to people with special needs thus benefiting the community of disabled as well. One particular example is Sue Miller, a woman convicted of murder. Sue successfully trained two dogs Glory and Sheba.

Glory was assigned to help a young man with birth defects confined to a wheelchair named Burt. Glory was able to help Burt carry books, negotiate sidewalk curbs and elevators and pick up dropped objects (Strimple, 2003). Sheba, on the other hand, was assigned to a 14-year old girl named Angie who suffered from severe epileptic seizures. Through Sue's training, Sheba was able to recognize an impending attack. Consequently, the mere presence of Sheba brought a sense of security to Angie which eventually led to a decrease in the number of seizures Angie experienced.

Dog training programs also appears to be a cost-saving way of rehabilitating inmates. Robert Kent, superintendent of the Sanger B. Powers Correctional Center in Oneida, Wisconsin reported that since they started their dog training program in 1997, 68 inmates who participated in the program were already released and none has returned to prison. This results to reduced incarceration costs.

Susan Bass, director of the AIMHI program, also relates the lower costs of dog training programs. Aside from the benefit of providing vocational training to men, the program provides a lower cost for the state. Bass relates that costs are low because their only expenses are the professional

staff salaries, dog food, and supplies (Strimple, 2003). In the civilian world, the expense of training may cost from \$10, 000 to \$12, 000 but in the military expenses averages \$4, 000 only.

Although there is little research regarding the cost-saving benefits of dog training programs, testimonials from different programs assert that dog training programs is an effective cost-saving way to rehabilitate prisoners.

### Current Prison-based Dog Training Programs

Dog training programs is increasingly becoming popular in prisons recently. Despite the opposition of some who believed that prisons are for punishments only, others overcame this belief and helped establish several prison-based dog training programs. Aside from the ones previously mentioned, there are many other facilities that already adopted this program.

Pilot Dogs, Inc., of Ohio (PDIO) in Columbus, Ohio, is one of the significant dog training programs developed (Strimple, 2003). PDIO had its first dog training program in 1992 at the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, Ohio. Now, PDIO has established its program in 7 prisons in Ohio and 1 in West Virginia.

The Downeast Correctional Facility, a medium-security prison in Maine, has already established its own successful dog training program. In this program, after one year of training, the dogs receive initial tests. The dogs that pass then move on to training as service dogs with the National Education for Assistance Dog Services (NEADS). It is reported that more

than half of the 53 dogs in the graduating class of NEADS were trained by inmates (Gold, 2006).

Another program of this type is run by the Puppies Behind Bars program. It was founded in New York by Gloria Gilbert Stoga in 1997 (Harkrader, Burke, & Owen, 2004). Stoga proved took five rejected puppies from and gave them to inmates to be trained. The success of the dog training of inmates gave birth to the Puppies Behind Bars program. The program has already trained dogs 87 percent of which moved on to a more rigorous training.

Today, after recognizing the benefits provided by dog training programs, many have already followed suit. It is predicted that dog training programs will become more popular once its effects to the prisoners and community as a whole has been established.

## Conclusion

Dog training programs is increasingly becoming popular recently. This is due to reports regarding its positive effects. Dog training programs prove to be helpful especially to prisoners. Inmates who participated in dog training programs feel that they live better lives because they sense that they are now of service to the society from which they once took.

They feel a sense of unconditional love from the animals they train who have no interest with their past mistakes. Studies have also shown that dog training, and animal training in general, brings about significant improvements in the behavior of the participants. Aside from these



psychosocial effects, these programs also provide job opportunities to participants because of the knowledge they learn.

The human and animal community benefit as well. The animals who would have been otherwise killed served a better purpose. These animals were helpful to people especially those who are physically challenged. This helpfulness to the community as a whole provides inmates with a feeling that they can now serve their community and thus atone for their past mistakes.

Since there is little research regarding this study, it is highly recommended that such a research should be undertaken in order to convince the public that dog training programs is beneficial.

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