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# ANIMAL FOCUSED PRISONER PROGRAM

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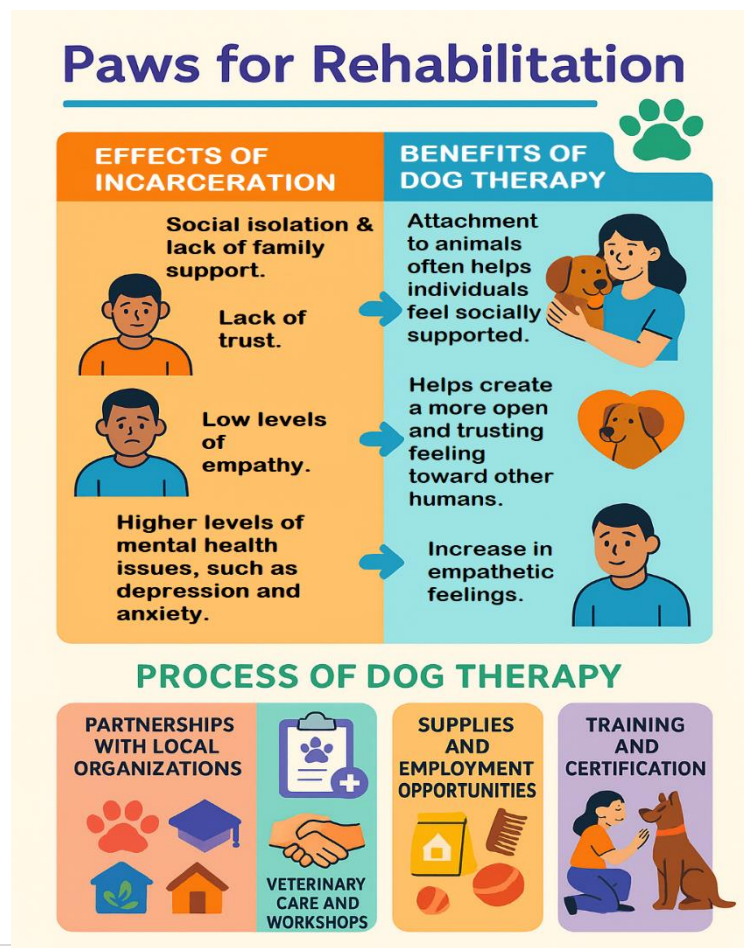
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## INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Some prisons and detention centers across the United States have implemented animal-training programs, which have offenders work and train with various animals. Most of these initiatives typically partner with local animal rescues to improve dogs' basic obedience and behavior, thereby enhancing their chances of being adopted. These programs may also include training animals for service positions, including (1) assisting with physically or mentally challenged individuals, (2) assisting with law enforcement practices, and (3) placing therapy dogs in nursing and retirements homes, schools, and more (Mims et al., 2017). Having some form of rehabilitation within incarcerated populations is highly important. Having programs that not only help inmates serve their sentence and reduce violence within these settings but also help teach compassion and acquire new skills may be the difference in whether many individuals recidivate after being released (Corleto, 2018). Addressing developmental growth within inmates, especially in a psychosocially mature manner, has been seen as an important tool to help those who have been released disengage from future anti-social behavior, which may lead to criminal acts (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).



Individuals who are involved within the criminal justice system have been frequently listed as being exposed to various forms of violence, traumatic experiences, and critical life events. This exposure to negative variables leads to a higher amount of post-traumatic stress disorders among those incarcerated as compared to the public (Goff et al., 2007). Incarcerated individuals are disproportionately affected by mental health issues, including substance use disorders (Furst, 2019). The prevalence of multiple psychiatric disorders is relatively high in prisons. It is estimated that approximately 10% of inmates meet the criteria for depression, while 50% experience antisocial personality disorder (Armistead et al., 1992; Leskelä et al., 2006; Wilper et al., 2009).

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) focuses on the multiple benefits of populations with psychiatric issues. Studies have found that AAT sessions resulted in reductions of anxiety, increased social functioning and openness, and higher desire for social contact (Barak et al., 2001; Barker & Dawson, 1998; & Prothmann et al., 2006). Prison Animal Programs (PAPs) can be viewed as a specialized form of AAT, while maintaining the core principles within correctional settings to promote behavioral change and personal growth. Studies focused on PAPs have found that these programs can have various positive effects on inmates such as lower recidivism rates, decreased loneliness, high self-esteem and confidence, and gaining skills and education that can be used after they are reintegrated back into society (Bachi, 2013; Fournier et al., 2007; Deaton, 2005; Harkrader et al., 2004). Bachi (2013) noted important findings in four different areas: lower recidivism rates, disciplinary misconduct, higher emotional and psychological effects, and improved sociobehavioral effects. Under the PAP styles, the most effective and prominent style is with the use of canines since they have been recognized for their ability to form strong relationships with humans.

<b>Effects of Incarceration</b>	<b>Benefits of PAP</b>
Social Isolation/Lack of Family Support	Attachment to animals often helps individuals feel socially supported.
Lack of Trust	It helps create a more open and trusting feeling toward other humans.
Low Levels of Empathy	It increases empathetic feelings through identifying themselves within the animal (rejected, isolated, and confined).

(Beetz, 2017; Hart, 2000; Leonardi et al., 2017; Mills & Hall, 2014).

## FEASIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION IN MEMPHIS/ SHELBY COUNTY

Memphis/Shelby County is an example of a community that could benefit from an animal-focused prison program. While there has been an attempt to launch this form of intervention within the Shelby County Division of Corrections (the PAWSitive Training Program), various logistical barriers limited its effectiveness and long-term sustainability. One notable challenge involved the adoption process. The dogs involved in the program were still listed as adoptable through the partnering agency. When potential adopters would want to schedule a meeting with the dog, the partnering agency found some difficulty in not having access to enter the correctional facility on short notice. Logistical and operational barriers such as this can complicate community engagement and adoption outcomes, which will need to be considered during the establishing period. With a strong foundation and partnerships this style of program will be able to have various benefits not only for the inmates enrolled in the program but for the animals as well.

When considering an animal-focused prison program for Memphis, it is important to recognize that the model should meet the needs of the incarcerated individuals, the capabilities of the correctional facilities that house these programs, and the partnerships that are available to help the program continue. Various program types exist across the country, each one has its own unique benefits and challenges. To be the best model for Memphis, it should focus on rehabilitation, skill development, and community impact. By emphasizing rehabilitation, the program can help focus on the behavioral and emotional needs of the incarcerated individual; by having skill development, it allows the individual to have marketable skills to help increase employment opportunities after release; and by addressing community impact, it can help strengthen community connections to help contribute to both correctional interventions and local animal welfare efforts.

One of the more immediate and lower-cost options would involve partnering with local animal rescues. Incarcerated individuals could work with dogs that may have some behavioral issues or work with dogs on basic commands (stop, sit, drop) to make them more adoptable to potential families. This model has been successful in programs like Cell Dogs (Orange County, CA), Pawsitive Change Program (California), Tails of Redemption (Chicago, IL), and more. Many of the benefits of this model are that it directly benefits local shelters, increases the chances of the dog being adopted from the shelter, and provides participants with vocational training. Some of the challenges include the requirement of an ongoing partnership with shelters and a structured intake and exit process for animals.

### Partnerships With Local Organizations

For an animal-focused prison program in Memphis to be successful, partnerships with various local organizations will be essential. These collaborations will not only provide the program with expertise but be able to open the door for shared resources and longer-term sustainability. Local organizations such as animal welfare groups, educational institutions, and reentry support organizations can help increase the program benefits.

Partnering with these organizations or other veterinary clinics and animal hospitals would also be beneficial as these organizations could assist with veterinary care, health screenings, and educational workshops on animal welfare topics. Businesses in the pet care sector such as pet food/toy manufacturers and grooming services may be willing to help assist with the program through funding, donated supplies, or employment opportunities.

There are additional organizations that could help elevate the program. For example, educational and workforce training companies may be able to offer coursework or certification programs in animal care, pet grooming, or veterinary assistance to help increase their employment opportunities post-release. Depending on the structure of the program, additional partnerships could be created with national organizations specializing in animal-assisted therapy to help provide structured certification pathways for these animals.

### Funding & Resource Considerations

While the program should be housed within an organization with the means to budget for it, establishing an animal-focused prison program in Memphis will require a combination of funding and resources. Successful programs across the country have relied on a mix of grants, private donations, corporate sponsorships, and government support to help cover the wide array of costs. Although these programs vary in their style of funding sources, one of the inventive options listed by Han et al. (2018) is to allow individuals and companies the chance to sponsor a dog in the program. The exchange would be to allow sponsors to receive updates on the dog and be able to attend a graduation ceremony or adoption process as a way to see their donations in action.

One of the more promising opportunities would come from state and federal grants that aim to help rehabilitation and vocational training initiatives. Agencies such as the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance offer grants for programs that help reduce recidivism and provide workforce training. Various organizations that are focused on animal welfare (such as the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty



to Animals, the Humane Society of the United States, and PetSmart Charities) have been known to help fund initiatives that support rescue animals and rehabilitation programs. Exploring these and other local/national nonprofits with a focus on prison-based service animal training could also open for more funding opportunities. Corporate sponsorships from businesses geared towards the pet care industry such as pet food/toy manufacturers, grooming supply manufacturers, and veterinary clinics may be able to offset costs through donations of food, supplies, or equipment. Large pet care brands have a history of supporting programs that align with their mission, making them valuable sources for funding. Local businesses in Memphis may also be willing to contribute through various manners such as sponsorships, funding events, or direct donations.

## EXAMPLES OF ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS

### **Canine CellMates** – Atlanta, Georgia

<http://www.caninecellmates.org/>

Canine CellMates works with inmates in Fulton County jail and rescue shelter dogs from the Fulton County Animal Control. During the ten-week course inmates work on education, training, and care for dogs. The goal is to help foster a positive change in the inmates, and for the dogs to pass an obedience program to make them better candidates for adoption.

### **Cell Dogs** – Various Locations in Orange County, California

<https://www.celldogs.org/>

Cell Dogs rescue dogs from local shelters and enroll them in basic obedience training programs. These programs are housed within correctional facilities and work with incarcerated individuals in a four-week class to help them become trainers. Then over the next 8-10 weeks the trainers work with their assigned dog to help teach good manners and basic obedience.

### **Prison Pet Partnership** – Washington State Corrections Center for Women

<https://www.prisonpetpartnership.org/>

The Prison Pet Partnership identifies dogs in shelters and purpose-bred puppies to <sup>help</sup> train them to be placed as service, facility, and therapy dogs. While in the program the goal is to provide incarcerated individuals with the opportunity to learn pet care skills to help increase their employment opportunities once they are released.

### **Puppies Behind Bars** – Various Locations Nationwide

<https://puppiesbehindbars.com/>

Puppies Behind Bars requires participants to attend a mandatory weekly class as well as reading assignments, homework, and exams. The trainer and their dog are housed together within individual cells in a dedicated cell block within the prisons. These dogs go through various training programs for placement in different focuses such as service dogs, facility dogs, and explosive-detection canines.

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