FAQ’s about Starting Our Program Prison Dog Program:

What kind of equipment do you give to the inmates?

At the start of each program:
1. Crates – We had to provide a crate that made of plastic, no metal parts. The ones we found run approximately $350.00.
2. Two large plastic bins to store the dog food (prices can vary).
3. Three ring binders for handlers to keep their handouts and training plans. (Approximately $3.00/binder).
4. Treat pouch for each handler (Approximately $15.00/pouch).
5. Clickers for each handler (we have a large supply already).
7. Plastic Bin for each pair of handlers to store the dog’s food, supplies, etc. ($15.00/bin).
8. Food bowls (from the shelter)
9. Kongs and sterile bones (from the shelter).
10. No pull harnesses and leashes (from the shelter).
11. Dog brushes (from the shelter).

Per 10 week session with four dogs:
1. 1 – 3 gallons of Nature’s Miracle ($30.00 – $100.00).
2. 4 Composition notebooks for each team to document their dog’s progress and keep notes about the dog, which will be given to the adopter ($2.00/book).
3. 1 – 2 large bags of Dog Food (we use Science Diet from the shelter).
4. 2 – 3 bottles of dog shampoo (from the shelter).
5. 1 container of dog wipes for muddy paws for each team ($5.00/container).
6. 8 – 10 jars of peanut butter for Kong and sterile bone stuffing (from the shelter).

Per every week (for four dogs):
1. Individual rolls of paper towels, one roll per team ($1.00./roll or less)
2. 4 large baggies of high value treats. We use chopped chicken, hotdogs, cheese and dog food roll (approximately $4.00/dog).
3. 4 large baggies of non-perishable training treats and chews approximately $2.00/dog, depending on donations and what is available in the shelter.
4. 4 – 2 oz. bottles of hand sanitizer ($1.00/bottle)
5. Towels, blankets, dog toys, and Nyla bones we bring from the shelter.

How did you first get started with the program?
Our shelter trainer, Linda Hudson, CPDT-KA, had the idea. Here is her story: “I was inspired by news reports and videos I had seen about prison dog programs in the U.S. And, I had recently attended a presentation by Collen Pelar about a Prison Program she toured in Spokane, WA (Diamonds in the Ruff, Pawsitive Prison Dog program). I then contacted Carol Byrnes, the Director of the Pawsitive Prison Dog Program and she willingly answered our questions about starting a program at our shelter. I also
contacted a prison dog program in Gwinnett County, GA called Operation Second Chance - Jail Dogs, and their director shared information about how they run their prison dog program which was very helpful for us.

After studying how other programs started and run their programs we began a search of prisons and jails in our local area. I initially made multiple phone calls and also sent emails to all the prisons in our area. The prison where we now have our program was interested in talking to us and eventually we set up a meeting at the prison with the Director, Warden, Administrative and Public Relations staff to discuss our proposal. They were willing to allow us to start a pilot program with two dogs. We started with three weeks without the dogs to teach the inmates the basics of the program using Alexandra’s dog Digby (best dog ever!).”

**How is the program supported?**
Our shelter funds the program itself, along with outside donations from the community. We are currently seeking private donations and funding to help the program thrive. We also take in-kind donations from volunteers and the community, for the supplies listed above.

**How many dogs and inmates are involved in the program? How long does it run?**
Currently, there are 4 dogs in each round of our program. Each dog has a primary and secondary handler, who share the same cell and share care and training duties. Thus, there are 8 inmates in the program at this time. We hope to expand in the future.

**Is food stored in the cell? How do you make sure the dog does not get into it when the inmate is away from room? Do you have a specific system?**
We use a large bin that prevents rodents from getting inside of it, and the inmates have a small Tupperware container that is kept in their rooms, which holds the food for a week. The large bin is kept in a storage room in the prison, and the men are allowed to come down once a week and to refill.

**Is there a maximum time when the inmate is away from the cell?**
The dogs are left alone and crated when the inmates go to work and when they go to eat meals. They try to tag team so that the dogs aren’t left alone for longer than 4 hours at a time. The inmates work on crate training with the dogs, so they can be left alone and not get into things in the room.

**How do the prisoners get access to the yards to take the dogs out to potty? Are they on a set schedule? Do they have puppy pads in the cell for nighttime?**
The inmates take the dogs out on a schedule 5 times a day and are allowed to request that the dogs be taken outside; when they think the dog will need it. There is a memo that has been approved by the warden, which states the times when the dogs are to be let outside. They walk the dogs down the stairwell, and are allowed to accompany the dogs out into the yard on leash, to potty. After potty training, the dogs are allowed off leash to play. We do give the inmates puppy pads, if necessary, but try to make sure they can get trained to go potty outside.

**How do the inmates care for the dog? Do they rotate days or weeks?**
The inmates coordinate between themselves to handle daily feeding and potty walks. We have an officer who checks in on them regularly to make sure things are going smoothly when we are not
around. Generally, they will trade off, to make sure someone is there as much as possible and that the dogs are always following their feeding or potty schedule. We ask both of the inmates to train the dogs for about 10 minutes per day. The 2 handlers are responsible for the dogs 24/7, for the entire approximately 10 week program, unless the dogs need to come back to the shelter for vet care or another reason.

**How often do the trainers meet the inmates for instruction?**
We meet with the men and women separately each week, for an hour-long training session, with each group (male trainers and then female trainers).

**Do you use a specific curriculum? What types of skills do you teach and over how many weeks? Do you ever have a dog go longer than other dogs or do they all “graduate” in a certain number of weeks?**
We work based off of a Basic Manners curriculum, focusing on sit, down, stand, stay, leave-it, no jumping, loose leash walking, come when called, eye-contact and focus, and mat work. First we work to install the behaviors, and then proof them against distractions. Our program typically runs for 10-14 weeks, depending on scheduling, and some dogs will arrive one week ahead of others, depending on logistics with the shelter.

**Do you have multiple trainers who teach the classes or do you have one trainer for each session?**
We have two trainers that go together to each training session. One mainly handles logistics and material resupply, and assists with training, and the other mainly focuses on leading the training class and any special focus in the curriculum.

**What types of behavior issues would you place in the prison?**
Because the prison can be an overwhelming place and the fact that the dogs live in the prisoner’s cells and often accompany them out to common areas, we have found that fearful dogs often do not do well in the prison setting, although they can sometimes do well in the women’s prison, which is a little quieter. However, highly social but energetic and mouthy dogs can often do very well, and it helps us provide them with more stimulation than they would otherwise get in the shelter. We can put one dog in the women’s area, who does not like other dogs, because that dog will not have to see other dogs on a regular basis while in the program. If we had dogs that don’t like other dogs in the men’s prison, we would keep them on leash around other dogs, and be cautious of distance.

**Are there any other constraints on what kinds of dogs you can put into the prison dog program?**
We have to put dogs that are smaller into the program, because of the living space constraints of the inmates. Typically, that would be dogs under 40 pounds.

**Do you have different levels of trainers that deal with differing levels of dogs?**
Yes, our more experienced trainers take on the more difficult dogs, if we have a choice at the time in who we can bring.

**Do you have a recommended book list for the inmates to read during the program?**
Yes, we have given the inmates, *Don’t Shoot the Dog*, by Karen Pryor, *The Culture Clash*, by Jean Donaldson, *The Other End of the Leash*, by Patricia McConnell, *How to Behave So Your Dog Behaves*, by Sophia Yin, and we are going to read *Beyond the Backyard*, by Denise Fenzi.

**For first time dog handler inmates, how many days of instruction do they get before they are given a dog?**
New handlers will receive a binder with training plans, AVSAB position papers, handouts on how dogs learn and positive reinforcement training, and body language, and behavior issues. We also go over the contract that all inmates sign about the principles, risks, and requirements of the program. We spend 2 weeks going over the basics of training, caring for a dog, and body language before the inmates are given their dog for the first time.

**Does the prison warden have an emergency contact number to call if a dog becomes sick during the weekend/evenings/night, or they need to contact someone about a behavioral issue or concern?**
Yes! Our phone numbers are with the warden, chief, and one of the officers, and also at the main control office. The two trainers who run the program are always on call if there is a problem. It is our responsibility to come to the prison whenever there is a question about their health or behavior, even if it is minor and people want us simply to check it out. If necessary, we will then bring the dog back to our shelter and medical center, so that one of the veterinarians can examine the dog.

**What kind of crates do you use?**
We use a plastic crate with some metal on the door. We try to use the least amount of metal possible.

**How do you advertise the dog when it completes the program? How does the potential adopter meet the dog and learn from the inmates what the dog has learned, and the special needs of the dog?**
The inmates keep adoption applications in their folders, for any officers or people who have affiliation with the prison to adopt before the last two weeks of the program. Two weeks before the program ends, we put the dog on our website to attract interested adopters. We have scheduled visits for people to come to the prison to meet the dogs, if they want to adopt before the dog gets back to the shelter. Our trainers talk with potential adopters about the dog’s behavior, and the inmates keep a journal of the dog’s behavior during the program, for the adopters. After adoption, we also have a session with the adopters to show them the behaviors that the dogs learned.

**How did you screen dogs for placement with the inmates?**
We look at general fearfulness and excitement level, during our shelter assessment process. If we have other questions, we will take the dog to other environments easily accessible to us, to see if they seem like a good fit for the program. We try to get dogs that will be comfortable around each other, but we will work with whomever we have, based on our best judgement.

**Do you give the inmates certificates of completion when they finish the program with a dog?**
Yes, we give the inmate and the dog their own certificates of completion, and the certificate will specify areas of dog training that we covered during that particular session, for instance, practical skills, and learning theory, etc. We give the certificates to the inmates as well as the certificate for the dog to the adopter.
Do you provide another set of dogs immediately upon graduation of the prior set, to prevent an emotional letdown?
We considered doing that, but we found that the inmates actually like a week or two off from the program before the second round. Sometimes, we will wait two weeks, depending on logistics, and it has never been a problem for us.

After the dog goes through the Basic Manners class, does the inmate keep the dog until an adoptive family is found or does the dog go back to the shelter?
The dogs do not remain with the inmates. They typically find homes before the program is over, or we try to place them in foster. If we cannot find foster, they will sometimes go back the shelter, but typically, they find homes soon after returning.

Has a placement of a dog with an inmate ever not worked? Have you ever had a dog not graduate?
Yes, we have had to take animals back the shelter before the program ended, because the environment was too overwhelming for the dog. We will typically try to find another dog to take their place as soon as possible. It has never been the fault of the inmate that something didn’t work out; it just wasn’t the right fit. The inmates do everything they can to make things work out well.

How are the inmates screened for the program?
Patuxent Institution is a psychiatric-based maximum security prison, so all of the prisoners are psychologically screened, and many of them meet with a psychologist regularly. The inmates have to have a history of 1 year without any infractions, and never any violence toward animals or children in their past. Typically, this program is a reward for inmates for a track record of good behavior, so they are the cream of the crop at the institution.

Do you have any other words of wisdom about beginning a prison program?
Keep trying to connect with an institution until you find the right match. We contacted many different prisons and jails before we found the one we are currently with. Also, stay very organized with materials, because everything coming into the prison needs to be approved. Having a good relationship with the officers at the institution really helps to make the program work. We would not be able to make the program work without the buy-in of the officers and prison administration. If you don’t have buy-in, it is very difficult to institute the necessary changes to the prisoner’s schedules for the dog’s care, so wait until you find an institution that understands the benefit of the program, and then build your relationship as best you can. Finally, follow all of the rules the prison has laid out, and be careful about establishing boundaries with the inmates.
I understand that by participating in the WARL/WHS TRAINING PROGRAM as a volunteer I will have close and regular contact with dogs selected for this inmate program. I further understand that as a volunteer in this program I will be assigned responsibility for handling or assisting other inmates with the day-to-day care of one or more dogs which include, but may not be limited to, grooming, training, feeding, washing and cleaning kennel areas. I promise that I will not provoke, abuse, or harm any dog with which I have contact in this program, and I understand that if I do I will be removed from the program immediately and subjected to disciplinary action and/or criminal prosecution.

Furthermore, I understand that this program only uses training techniques that are force-free (without intending to inflict pain or fear in the animal). Therefore, I agree not to use any force-based techniques in this program, including but not limited to collar corrections, leash jerks, hanging the dog by the collar, pinning the dog, using spray bottles, shake cans, shock, hitting, kicking, or yelling at the dog. I understand failure to adhere to these agreements will result in my immediate dismissal from the program.

I understand that dogs, by their very nature may be aggressive and unpredictable. By accepting the opportunity to participate as a volunteer in the inmate program known as WARL/WHS TRAINING PROGRAM I accept the risk that I may be bitten, attacked, mauled, or injured by a dog. I voluntarily release and hold harmless the Washington Animal Rescue League, Washington Humane Society, and its employees, and the Patuxent Institution and its employees from any and all liability for any injuries to my person caused by one or more dogs during my participation in this program.

Volunteer-Participant Date

Witness Date