



Prison dog training program expands

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CONNELL, Wash. -- Sometimes saving another life will end up saving your own. Inmates at Coyote Ridge are finding this is true.

Inmate David Williams said, "The dogs always come first in this program."

He is one of a few prisoners paired with a canine companion. He's been working hard to help "Juno" get through her fears.

"She tends to work really well with people that are wearing our clothes because we all pretty much wear the same clothes in here," he said.

<http://www.keprtv.com/Inmates--235500191.html?tab=video&c=y>

Juno was too skittish to be adopted. The goal is to have David work with her so she can regain trust of people and find a permanent home.

The "Ridge Dogs" program started three years ago. Back then it was just a handful of dogs and inmates. The animals learn basic obedience. The offenders, a bit of patience.

Program director, Lori Telleria, "Any new program like this is definitely looked at by staff with an eyebrow up at first."

Despite running almost entirely on donations, the program has grown. Ridge Dogs partnered with two more rescue groups, extending their network to get more dogs to loving homes.

Mikki Kinson, with Adams County Pet Rescue said, "They give their heart and soul and they're always ready and eager for anything new. They can contribute and give back to the dogs. Their commitment is phenomenal."

Training lasts a few months. Inmates are now acclimating dogs to a nursing home setting.

The dog program now sends animals for older inmates to have as therapy dogs. The elderly and sickly inmates enjoy the visits.

Staff says the program has eased aggression and depression. It's given people like Zeb Schilperoory a reason to stay hopeful. He said, "Just being able to experience having a puppy and the sensation that comes with it in a place like this, it's good for the spirits."

For many dogs in this program it is the last chance to be saved. They can potentially be put down if they aren't adopted.