

Community Contributions

Founded by The Evergreen State College
& Washington State Department of Corrections



Prisons Can Contribute

The Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) believes that all sectors of society should be a part of social and scientific initiatives. More than 17,000 adults are incarcerated in Washington State, and we recognize their ability to make meaningful contributions to society. Many incarcerated individuals are enthusiastic and relieved to be able to give back to the community. We provide them the opportunity to do good while doing time.

SPP's Community Contribution Programs

SPP values stewardship and volunteerism for all participants and most of our programs contribute to the community in some way. We raise plants and frogs for ecological restoration. We save tax dollars and reduce the environmental impact of prisons. SPP also has programs *dedicated* to giving. Most of these are unique to each prison: a partnership between the correction center and nearby organizations. These alliances allow community organizations to increase the scope of their work—to train more dogs, provide more food assistance, or give working bicycles to kids.

Community contribution programs are supported by *hundreds* of organizations across the state. Many of these programs are well-established. SPP's goals are to support these productive partnerships, and to document their achievements and best practices.

Dogs & Cats

Nearly all Washington State prisons host programs training dogs or cats for service animal or general training adoption. Inmates receive training and support from partners and provide excellent animal care and obedience training. These programs are based in living units and each is uniquely adapted to the needs and capabilities of resident inmates and unit staff. Staff tell us that the programs reduce stress and increase well-being for everyone involved. Inmate trainers are even more positive about the impacts of these programs:

IN 2011 I WAS HIRED INTO THE COYOTE RIDGE
CORRECTIONAL CENTER DOG PROGRAM. IT WAS A LIFE
CHANGER.
PRISON WAS NOT SO LOVELY NO MORE. AS THE
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE THAT THESE "BROKEN DOWN DOGS"
PROVIDED ME WAS TRANSFORMING IN MY BEHAVIORS.
MY 2ND CHANCE AT LIFE HAD BEGUN!



Sustainable Practices Lab

Washington State Penitentiary's Sustainable Practices Lab (SPL) started up in 2013 and grew quickly to become a hive of activity and productivity. The lab employs 139 inmates working in numerous sustainability programs. Several SPL programs repurpose donated and reclaimed materials to create crafts such as teddy bears and quilts; these are donated to more than 90 community organizations in the area. Others fix equipment for state agencies. From a technician refurbishing a large wooden sign:

"We are much like this wood—we have our issues. But is someone going to take the time to bring the good out?...[this program] taps into my inner goodness. It believes that there is something of value in us. It's an avenue; it gives us the psychic tools to do the positive."

The Sky is the Limit!

There is human potential behind the prison fence: like any group, inmates and corrections staff have much to offer. They are eager to grow, build, train, and work for the community, and these activities can provide a welcome relief from an otherwise stressful and stark environment.

More examples of successful community contribution programs include:

- Growing vegetables for local food banks
- Salvaging fabrics from worn clothing and sheets and sewing them into quilts for donation to community shelters
- Assisting Washington State Parks with prescribed tree thinning for forest health, processing the downed tree material for firewood, and delivering it to low-income families
- Starting seeds and growing plants for local non-profits
- Restoring bicycles for community donation
- Salvaging used shoes for recycling or donation
- Creating coloring books for children and inmate families
- Refurbishing wheelchairs and other durable medical equipment

These programs aid community organizations and the people they serve. At the same time, they are an asset to corrections. By supporting inmates' and corrections staff's ability to contribute, we support their productivity and humanity.

Photos: Mike Kane (front), Benj Drummond & Sara Joy Steele (top), Andy Porter (2nd and 5th), Cyril Ruoso (3rd), and Joslyn Rose Trivett (4th)

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