

Local News

## Stray dogs become inmate therapy at Airway Heights prison

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Posted: Dec 15, 2016 07:02 PM PST Updated: Dec 16, 2016 09:48 AM PST



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AIRWAY HEIGHTS, Wash. - Christmas has come early to the Airway Heights Corrections Center. On Thursday, Spokanimal delivered five unwanted dogs to prison inmates who will teach the strays to be more obedient and adoptable.

But, the hard case pups aren't the only ones learning about how following the rules can lead to a second chance at a happy life.

The Airway Heights Corrections Center is a place where people who have bad attitudes have a chance to adjust their behavior. Well, now the institution is doing the same thing for unwanted dogs.

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Jorge Sosa is a senior handler here at the Airway Heights facility and Thursday, he presented a stray named Stella to a trio of offenders who will spend the next 10 weeks training her.

“You get to interact with dogs that you would never thought you would see in prison, it's joyful for us you know?” said Sosa.

This actually the 17th time specially trained offenders have taken strays from Spokanimal and enrolled them in the Pawsitive Dog prison training program.

Like some of the inmates themselves, these pups have grown up in houses with too few rules or too much abuse.

Correctional unit supervisor Dave Window explained about the dogs, “they don't really have any obedience skills and that makes them unadoptable.”

Offenders have to complete a 30-day dog training class before they can get their leashes and kibble packs, let alone an actual dog.

Ruben Flores is on the downhill side of a first degree murder rap.

The inmate said, “it helps lighten the mood also because it gives the inmates a chance to help the community and to better themselves to get dogs adopted to good families.”

As the dogs get better at following commands, other inmates are allowed pet them. But, one has to wonder, who is really rehabilitating who?

Sosa said, “if you care for your dog, that's what changes you. Like me, I could just go out there and fight everybody but it's not what I want, because I have somebody to live for now, my family and my dogs.”

Surprisingly, in a world of concrete, steel and razor wire, these dogs bring out the best in the prison population.

“Prison's changed. I was incarcerated before the dog program and now, it's changed everybody drastically. I've seen people who were supposedly hard core, change completely,” said Sosa.

Ninety percent of the people doing time here at the Airway Heights Corrections Center will eventually walk out these doors and be released back into our community. Prison officials think having these dogs behind bars will make the inmates who are getting out less angry and less likely to re-offend.

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