

# PRISON ANIMAL PROGRAMS

A VOICE FROM THE INSIDE



Tom Mason with Lezlie Sage

# ***PRISON - ANIMAL - PROGRAMS***

***A Voice from the Inside***

## **This document has been created to:**

- Encourage the growth and implementation of prison-animal-programs in correctional facilities nationwide.
- Incentivize personal transformation in prison populations toward sentence and cost reduction.
- Present a case for the lowering of recidivism rates.
- Save animal lives while infusing prisons with a source of love, hope and renewal.

*The final product is a combination of the inmates' written words and oral interviews pulled together with connecting language from Ms. Sage. All sentiments directly reflect those of dog handlers Mason, Zyph, and Brady – no detail was fabricated nor fictionalized.*

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## **Letters of Support**



*I dedicate this body of work to Susan, Tim, and my daughter, Kira.  
They live in my heart and inspire me daily.*

*And to all the men and women who have worked to make growth a priority in America's prisons; to those fallen souls who have and will benefit from the healing nature of animals; and to the shelter dogs and cats themselves – discarded and imprisoned through no fault of their own. The power of love and the lessons they teach us can lead to transformative outcomes. May this information serve as a catalyst for increased support of existing prison-animal-programs and the implementation of such programs where none exist.*

# Forward

During my career in corrections, I have never witnessed the implementation of any program that has been as widely accepted by all parties as the dog program. This includes the Department of Corrections, the prison facility, staff, the community, stakeholders (shelters) and the incarcerated population. Next to Education and Correctional Industries, Ridge Dog participation is the most requested and highest valued program at Coyote Ridge Corrections Center (CRCC).

I have witnessed many successful stories of time spent in prison from individuals involved in the dog programs. This includes increased feelings of self-worth from knowing that they are giving back and making a difference during their incarceration. People involved in the dog programs change -- they change their actions, change their thoughts, change their behaviors, and most importantly, align their attitudes with right thinking and right living. There are no local statistics on recidivism rates for dog program participants but, by and large, they are better people while serving out their sentences. These individuals are more involved with the facility and they care more about others, the dogs, and even themselves. Of course, the dog programs also save many animals lives. The focused training turns unadoptable dogs into dogs who generally go on to find good homes.

Our department relies on Evidenced Based Programs and promising practices to help with offender change. The dog programs use evidence-based practices in rescuing animals and making them excellent pets. Dog handler programming is very much considered a promising practice as it catapults offender change in those who participate.

I confidently recommend the addition of animal programs to other states and facilities that are looking to expand their programming options.

*Andrew Sawyer*

Andrew Sawyer  
Associate Superintendent  
Coyote Ridge Corrections Center  
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## Tom Mason and Olivia



# Introduction

by Tom Mason

**This is my first trip to prison.** As God is my witness, it will be my last.

Like most, I knew nothing about prison life except for media portrayals which are quick to show a culture of gangs, violence, drugs, foul food, and cramped cells. And, like many, I felt that criminals were an easy spot -- shadow people -- the down-and-outers who never looked you in the eye for the shame of their last crime. Or, for fear that you might glimpse their brewing intentions. This separation of good and bad remained clear to me until July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, when my two best friends died in a house fire, and the state arrested me on two counts of murder. That was the day I lost everything.

*Lost everything.* The words are so easy to write yet almost impossible to endure.

For the first 38 years of life, I was you. . . a vital, contributing member of society, raised in the South Sound region of Washington State. As a boy, I grew up enjoying the simple pleasures of rural America. They called me Tommy -- shy, but athletic and popular. I had a steady girl named Susan who I later married. At 19, a well-known local firm offered me a job, and I moved into management quickly. Susan was the regional vice president of an insurance firm and worked from the 4000 square-foot home we built ourselves. Over our years spent together, the money poured in. We traveled, bought toys, doted on our dogs, and saved toward the goal of early retirement. To balance our prosperity, we volunteered regularly for Habitat for Humanity, and I coached 7<sup>th</sup> grade football. We lived a blessed life full of riches . . . until we sacrificed it all to a killer.

There were no back alleys nor hooded thugs pushing my introduction to meth. I first smoked the homemade crystals with my cousin, Timmy, and friends one casual Sunday afternoon before a round of golf. While we already knew the pleasures of pot, the intensity of the meth high was intoxicating, and we began indulging the drug about once a month. Then twice a month. Then weekly. Susan followed our lead, and within a year, we were all smoking both morning and night - making no connection to possible addiction. What we came to expect without fail was an energetic boost of epic proportions. What we did not expect were the voices . . . and delusions. No one said there would be voices. Yet three years into my habit, I had a full chorus directing my every move. I was clairvoyant. My senses fired at will. Hallucinations stalked me. The government planned my ruin, and Nano-bots racked my body causing me endless physical pain. Susan and Timmy were less affected, but still suffered from severe paranoia. Insanity stalked us until Susan and I lost our jobs. Thoughts of suicide were a comfort.

After 18 more months of torment, reality slipped away for good when our neighbors called the cops on Timmy who had threatened him with a machete. We had no intentions of surrendering ourselves or our home to the “enemy”. So, facing down a SWAT team camped on our front lawn, we retreated to the attic and prepared to leave this world together, consumed by the flames of our house that we had purposefully set ablaze.

But I alone lived. . .

I have been locked up ever since that horrific day in July, 12 years ago. And I can tell you that the portrayals of life behind bars are not stereotypes but as real as the inch-thick mat covering a flat iron slab that is my bed. In the end, I was sentenced to 20 years for two counts of manslaughter, with a count of arson thrown in. I atone daily for not only my own crime, but for the decisions made by Susan and Timmy as well. The Department of Corrections identifies me as inmate 315848 – Tommy Mason is gone.

Without a doubt, the first 5 years of lock-up were the worst of my life. Besides losing my two best friends, I lost direction, self-worth, hope, health, family, and, worst of all, my mind. Experts finally diagnosed me with meth-induced psychosis – a crisis that can last a lifetime. The voices continued to haunt me for two years after I stopped the drug, and I struggled day after day through thick, grey hopelessness, even while medicated. I wore depression like a cloak. Thoughts of suicide were still never far away.

Three years into my sentence, I arrived at Coyote Ridge Corrections Center. Over time, I ceased the medication and – through education – fought the delusions with reason. But my anguish continued. I was alone, abandoned. Each day was a hellish version of the one before, and I knew that this despair was of my own making. I desperately needed rebirth to survive – a sign to point me toward a future I could live for. That’s when I met Betty.

Betty was a beautiful girl with a contagious smile. One morning, as she sashayed across the day room, I went up to introduce myself. In a bold move, she leaned in close and kissed me on the lips. Then again. And yet again. She wouldn’t stop, and I didn’t want her to. And for the first time in five years, a sense of normalcy washed over me. . . all because of this beautiful white boxer pup. The year was 2011 and the Ridge Dog Program was in its infancy. I applied to become a dog handler that day and was accepted three weeks later. Salvation – veiled in a wet nose and a fur coat – was in sight!

Today I am proud to call myself a Ridge Dog handler. From my seven years spent with dogs, I have regained my sense of determination and direction. I now have a vision for my future that sustains me. And I have love . . . the most healing gift of all. I am focused on building a foundation of knowledge and support for the years to come. My sense of personal worth grows daily. And gone is the desire for drugs and artificial highs. Here to stay is the expansive joy that comes from a job well done and a dog’s life saved.

As for my previous views on criminals -- they have changed forever. I've learned first-hand that any of "*us*" are merely a mistake away from becoming one of "*them*". Society wants to believe that prisons punish the "evil other" – the inherently bad who know no good. And make no mistake, those people exist. But they also warehouse the lost, damaged – the hopeless and the tragic. And many times, the uneducated. They collect those who have never known love or joy or pride and store them until release hoping that, somehow, they emerge society-ready. I know first-hand that prison-animal-programs (PAPs) are a successful alternative to crossing one's fingers. The following is my petition that these programs be implemented and supported in our nation's correctional facilities wherever possible.



**Taking time to pose with Bear . . .**



**. . . and play with Lexi**





***TRANSFORMERS:***  
*Canine Edition*

*"I believe that of any course offered -- mandated or otherwise - prison-animal-programs are the most life changing. Why? Because they are not designed to change us, therefore, we offer no resistance to them. The change unfolds in us as we bend to help animals in need. And it is in the giving that we grow. These complimentary programs make it possible to create habits of selfless acts. For most inmates, that is where true change begins."*

**Tom Mason**

# Waking Up in Prison

Mason: # 315848

No Pho: # A29818933

**When I was a boy, my mother made a living killing rabbits.** Every morning, she left our modest single-wide trailer and drove five miles to the rabbit farm in a nearby town. There, she spent her days clubbing unsuspecting bunnies and, well, you can imagine the rest. Gratefully, I didn't know any details at the time. Back home, we raised animals on our family's five acres. Chickens, cows, pigs and rabbits – I tended to them daily. Along with my dogs Pepper, Mutt, and Cinnamon, they were my best friends. I was not close to my parents or siblings, so hanging with the critters was my love connection. Each night, like clockwork, the pigs took me down to the mud, hoping to secure an edge on the slop. Our chickens found great sport in chasing me around the yard, pecking my legs through worn farm-boy jeans. And I loved hand-feeding fresh grass and baby carrots to the rabbits, all the while running my crusty young fingers through downy fur as they nibbled away. Sometimes one would go missing, but I didn't know why and didn't think to ask until, at age 10, my mother assigned me a new chore – butchering. She handed me her club and blade and led me to the hutches. My innocent days on the farm were gone.

I still have visceral memories of my first decapitation – the horror and disgust. I knew the violence leveled on my fluffy friends was wrong, yet I never said a word. That was not my way. No one was privy to my inner life, especially my sorrow or fear. I still fed them, watered them – led them to believe that life was good. And when directed – I killed them. After each killing, I hid behind the barn and vomited. I cried. My body trembled as if racked by fever. And in very short time, I came to understand that animals were not safe to love. None of them . . . save the dogs. The dogs were spared because, "We don't eat pets". I didn't get it -- how calling animals by different names either spared them or sentenced them to die. They were all pets to me. But I didn't question the logic and, by this time, didn't care. I focused on one thing -- dogs could be loved! And, so I loved them . . . with all my heart.

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October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015. A rising surge of adrenaline kept my legs pumping along the walkway leading to freedom. I was about to meet my new "cellie" named No Pho -- a recent refugee from the South Korean dog meat trade. Racing thoughts fanned anger, sorrow, and indignation for, true to my cultural upbringing – that collective knowledge of how a proper life is lived – I know that eating a dog is just plain wrong. And I am not alone. Westerners don't eat other meat eaters, and "we don't eat pets!". And in my world, dogs are more than pets – they are everything. Between this cultural taboo and my love for canines, my beliefs on the subject were set.

At the same time, pressure behind my eyes told me that other feelings were about to spill. A swelling of hope, excitement and appreciation formed tears I couldn't contain. And -- there

was love in the watery mix – a lot of it. Love for all the altruistic people in the world who strive to right wrongs and sacrifice on behalf of a greater good. Their kindness is contagious. No Pho hadn't come to us by chance. He and thousands of others had benefited from an immense humanitarian effort spearheaded by Humane Society International. Their goal – “to play a critical and expanding role in advancing the cause of animal welfare on a worldwide stage”, from companion animals and wildlife to those found in labs and on farms. They advocate for compassion at every level and are guided by scientific data to support their beliefs. Backing them is a vast benevolent network ranging from “boots on the ground” personnel working in foreign lands to transporters and rescue agencies throughout North America.

Benton Franklin Humane Society was one of the rescues in Washington State who stepped up to take four refugees into their facility. Once in Kennewick, the dogs were so shut down that they had to be carried into the building from the van – they just couldn't move. Focused time and care were invested to give these dogs their first tastes of normalcy. How to walk on grass. How to walk through a door. How to eat from a bowl. How to walk on leash. How to endure human sounds and loving touch. All the basics of life outside a cage had to first be learned at the shelter. Now, these dogs were at Coyote Ridge, and we had become part of the humane solution. Our task: to continue to refine their learning until a successful end was reached, and the rescue cycle was complete.

For the moment, I felt needed again. I had worth. Sensations that had been lost to time long ago. I -- inmate 315848 -- had been chosen to train this special-needs Tosa Ken – a dog raised solely on torture and deprivation. In Korea, No Pho was housed in a 3x6 foot raised wire cage with three other dogs. The cage floor was wire so that feces could drop into heaping piles below. What didn't fall through was stepped in by splayed feet. His cage was just one of hundreds on the property. No Pho was starved, fed only garbage and scraps, as he was not yet old enough to be fattened for market at age two. Had he made it to market, he would have been crammed into traveling crates where every inch of space was occupied. If he didn't suffocate during transport, then death by hanging, beating, live -skinning, or electrocution awaited him. Photos of dogs on their way to market made me sick. The suffering in their eyes tore at me. How could such brutality toward another exist? How could this culture call themselves civilized? Now, I personally had a chance to transform No Pho's trauma into joy through love and discipline. In the end, my efforts would liberate not only No Pho, but me as well.



Internet image: Korean Dog Farm

The steel door to the hallway released with a loud crack as the lock disengaged. And there, crouching at the threshold, were four Tosa Kens and a throng of shelter folks. By his

description, I spotted No Pho right away and instantly fell in love. I turned away for a moment to wipe my tears dry, then proceeded toward the door and the dogs who were stepping cautiously into the yard. No Pho's gangly, 75-pound body was lowered, his scarred, torn ears were back, and his high-stepping gait was that of a newborn calf exploring his legs. I could feel his fear. "Good boy!", I said, smiling and grabbing his leash. And I knew one thing -- my own mix of emotions must be set aside for now. I wanted only kindness and strength to travel down the lead. He didn't need my chaos. He had already endured so much during his seven months on earth.

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Exposing No Pho to life without fear was immensely gratifying. His training was 100% positive, and I taught him commands at his own pace. Tosas are an ancient Japanese breed -- often called the Sumo wrestlers of dogs -- that can easily weigh over 125 pounds when fully grown. Akin to Mastiffs, they were initially bred as fighting dogs, although fighting them is discouraged today. Now, they are considered loyal, sensitive, and quiet with a reputation for paying close attention to commands. A Tosa will quickly take control without a handler who consistently displays strong leadership -- a true pack leader. I was proud to know that I displayed these traits.

As expected, all four Tosa's faced similar training challenges. They were hand shy and unfamiliar with dog-to-dog interactions. Their introduction to gravel took weeks. Grass was still something to step on gingerly after lots of sniffs. Two of the dogs displayed resource guarding -- a byproduct of their previous deprivation. Yet, perhaps because of their youth, all of them learned faster than anticipated. And No Pho grew quickly into a curious pup who loved to explore. As he became more acquainted to the sounds and routines of prison, his world grew to include social outings. He was a big hit at the prison library, church services, and various classes. He ate up the attention.

Meanwhile, back in our 6x9 foot cell, No Pho's ever-growing frame made for cozy quarters. Especially when something excited him. Like newspaper. In his eyes, newspaper was a wonderful toy to destroy with his mighty jaws and claws. He would throw "play bows" and bounced around the cell like the puppy he was. Once demolished, strips of paper stuck



**No Pho as a pup**

firm to his snout, paws, and the once-bare floor via thick coats of drool. One day, feeling mighty proud of the mess he'd made, No Pho spun around and leapt towards me as I sat on my bunk. He pushed his soppy face into mine, mouth arched in a broad smile. And with his pup-eyes dancing, he looked straight at me and said, "thank you!". "Thank you!!!" The sentiment was clear. That's when the deep feelings hit -- without warning. I grabbed him and held him tight, burying my face and weeping into his already wet fur. Tears of happiness and liberation flowed for, at that moment, I was not a villain. I was not defined by my failings and frailties. Instead, I was part of the heroism that can pluck a soul from the edge of death only to offer him renewal. I was part of a solution -- of something greater than this prison. Time seemed to stall, and I experienced waves of release. I wanted my gratitude to last forever. The high from this moment was like no earthly drug could deliver. "This is what I want!", I said to myself. And when my crying stopped, I knew that this sweet boy had given me a gift that would change me forever.

Nights are never quiet in prison. But that evening, I woke in the darkest hours to a welcomed silence. And in that silence, I could hear No Pho's slow, rhythmic breathing as he slept on his oversized bed. I turned on my bunk to watch the rise and fall of his chest in the slim light streaming through my window. I watched for several minutes until a deep calm swept across me. How amazing the journey of a life can be, and how lucky I was to be part of his. No Pho was one out of 30 million Asian soup-dogs who somehow made it out alive. And not just alive, but with a wonderful new life ahead of him. He had left one prison only to enter another. Yet, in my prison, he was living the high life -- food, water, exercise, and love as desired. Compared to his previous conditions, Coyote Ridge was a veritable 5-star hotel. In truth, our prisons didn't compare.

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No Pho returned to the shelter after only three months and was adopted to a single man with fenced-in acreage. Today, "Opie" is fully integrated into family life and spends his doggy-days safely running free on his own farm. FREE! For one dog, the efforts of many brought him to an unlikely yet glorious end. And I had been blessed to be part of this collective success. It's not yet time for me to go home but, much like No Pho, I will be starting over with a new life upon release -- brandishing new skills, fresh insights, and a revised perception of what "home" means. My biological family deserted me long ago, but I've been blessed to acquire a new "family" of friends who love and support the person I am today. Much like No Pho, I've been adopted!

As for my views on Korean farmers, they have softened with time. No Pho's arrival triggered feelings that haven't changed. I still find the dog meat trade to be disgusting. Fortunately, young Koreans also find the practice of eating dogs distasteful, so there is hope that these farms will eventually die off. But I came to realize that I cannot cast stones. I have blood on my own hands, acquired when I was just a boy. And my family was raised on "blood money" earned at the expense of helpless creatures. Is beating rabbits somehow more acceptable than hanging dogs? Would the practice get an approving nod in some higher moral court? It takes multiple club-strikes to kill a rabbit, yet the world clamors when the

the same fate befalls young seals. As a dog handler, I have worked with US mill-dog failures who struggle due to their inbreeding. They are raised in conditions identical to Korean dog farms. We don't eat them, but they are shot if they can't be sold. And I know that, when consuming flesh-foods from stateside factory farms, there is no doubt -- we are eating misery. Where does acceptable killing leave off and brutality take over? Is it all just a matter of cultural perspective? The questions keep coming. . . I am not a vegetarian, and I have no brilliant commentary on such intricate issues. I also harbor no ill will toward my mother and the choices she made to support us. But my experience with the Tosas opened my eyes to an issue that is being addressed worldwide, namely, the treatment of animals. How we treat one another -- including other species -- is coming into focus as we collectively examine what it means to be civil in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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Through my work with No Pho and more than 500 prison dogs, I have cemented my personal vision for the future. I now know that I will train dogs *and* become an active member of that compassionate army that is the animal welfare movement. My life before meth touched on this inner drive through local volunteerism. Now, because of the Ridge Dog Program, I look forward to altruistic immersion. Whether it's responding to animals in a natural disaster or extracting them from a hoarder's grasp -- I anticipate creating a full, purpose-driven life. And, whereas I don't have big-picture answers, I can be the answer to specific animals when I'm called.

No Pho and his buddies introduced me to the complexity of cultures -- how they intersect *and* stand-alone. And how one culture can house another. I have thought a lot about the culture I currently live in -- prison -- and the desperate need for reform if the highest outcomes are to be achieved. And how every dog and cat we assist also changes prison just by their presence. Here at the Ridge, they bring love to those who have none, as well as a much-needed sense of "normal". They also bring challenge to men who must awaken to their potential. No other job on campus changes lives and sways inmate behavior like the Ridge Dog Program. How we treat one another *is* important and ,in prison, animals lead the transformative process. At the same time, we give them skills to live in human society and save their lives. I believe in both prison reform and animal welfare -- the overlapping of two movements toward a more humane world.





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Opie, AKA No Pho, today





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## Jonathan Zyph and Frenchie



# My Mentor Maya

Zyph: #372966

Maya: #A31596987

**I was born in a quaint, rural town in Eastern Washington.** I was also the reason that neighbors bought security systems and kept their homes locked tight. By my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, I was a budding meth addict without a conscience. You were lucky if you didn't know me. In truth – I made a habit out of hurting people wherever I went. Every choice I ever made – every action taken – was motivated by selfishness. I never accepted accountability for my actions, nor did I learn from my mistakes. I stole, manipulated, and justified my way through life. I also lied . . . primarily to myself. In my eyes, I was never wrong. And my so-called friends – the people I surrounded myself with – were quick to reinforce my warped perspectives. We fed off each other's support to no good end.

My life of deception and crime led me to prison, and today I write from a 7x9 foot cell at the Coyote Ridge Corrections Center, not far from my hometown. I have a lot of time to reflect as the days tick by, and sometimes thoughts of my crimes make life almost unbearable. Guilt and shame haunt my restless nights, and I regret every day of my wasted youth. I wrestle with images that I cannot shed. I long for the chance to right the wrongs I've done to others. Fortunately, torment can be interrupted by good decision-making and, recently, I've made two very good choices. First, I decided to surround myself with the quality inmates in the dog program, of which there are many. And, second, I accepted the case of a dog named Maya.

Maya arrived at The Ridge in the winter of 2016 from Benton Franklin Humane Society in Kennewick, WA. She was a short-haired Anatolian Shepherd Dog with intense eyes and a handsome face. Anatolians are bred to be working guard dogs and are typically known for being calm, watchful, loyal, and smart. They can also be protective and territorial. Upon entering the program, Maya was assessed with severe anxiety issues which can lead to other negative behaviors. In no time, she showed signs of aggression toward her two handlers and had to be moved.

I began tracking Maya's progress when our two program mentors assumed her case. They created a training plan founded on trust which is essential for a successful dog and, over time, I watched her become a relaxed, happy pup. The mentors helped Maya access her true spirit by keeping her experiences fun, positive, safe and full of rewards. Gone was the dog who lunged and barked at strangers and staff – a dog who was always on guard in the cell. Now, she could hang out comfortably wherever she went and was happy to receive pets, even from strangers. I was excited by the behavioral shift and, frankly, inspired by the skill of the handlers. I thought, "that's what I want to do – change dogs' lives!". I was good at basic training, but now I wanted to effect change for them at the deepest levels.

After Maya had stabilized, the mentors placed her with two new handlers to assess her transition skills and to generalize her behaviors. But, the transition did not go well. Trust was not established, and her behavior deteriorated so . . . she came to live with me. I wanted to help her regain her stability. I'd have the chance to prove myself sooner than imagined. I was pumped! But intimidated too.

At first, everything went great. Each morning, before meeting my own needs, I took Maya out to the gravel yard where she could relieve herself and stretch her legs. When winter winds called – we went out. When snow covered my boots – we went out. When sleet pelted us – we were outside playing tug-o-war until my bare hands turned numb from the cold. She adored the routine and was progressing well. And so was I. I was in full-on learning mode – asking lots of questions and drinking up the lessons. I acknowledged that, for the first time in my life, I'd chosen to put the needs of another living being before my own. Because it felt good! With ego set aside, I had sacrificed myself for another. And as the weeks passed, a fast bond formed between Maya and I which was unexpected but wonderful. The experience made me question if I had ever really loved before . . .?

Then, everything changed.

One morning, Maya was startled by an officer who unexpectedly rounded a corner. For the rest of the day, she snapped, paced, lunged, panted and became leash reactive. She was on guard. And to my frustration, the trend continued. Soon, her only stress-free zone was the cell. This decline was exactly what I didn't want, and I panicked – what was I doing wrong? My cellmate suggested that she was protecting me, and I became hot at the idea. If that was true, that meant she didn't trust me as her leader and that she sensed my insecurities. My anger simmered, and his words ground on me for days. What if he was right? How did that reflect on me as a person? Or on my handling abilities? Maybe I shouldn't have cared . . . but I did.

The day finally came to test Maya on her skills. Moments before the test, she jumped up and snapped, almost biting an elderly inmate in the face. The test was cancelled, and our supervisor was forced to make the hard call - Maya was a danger to the program. With great regret, she arranged for Maya's removal to occur the following Monday. That afternoon, I sat alone in my cell dwelling on all the what-ifs and shoulda-couldas. I began a wicked spiral into denial and anger . . . grief. I concocted a fistful of excuses for Maya's decline and dove deep into the blame game. Hatred and resentment stewed inside me. Anything was better than feeling the pain of failing her. The challenge I'd so anticipated had gone so wrong.

Shortly before lights out, something shifted, and the anger I had harbored began to sift away. There was subtle movement at work – like the tumblers of a lock easing into place. Sorrow replaced hostility. And I thought to myself, "If I really care about this dog and the lives of dogs to come, then I need to be honest with myself and learn from my mistakes. I have to look at what I did wrong so that no other dog will ever suffer from my shortcomings." And that's when I stopped looking for a scapegoat. In truth, I had worked with Maya 90% of the time, and I had controlled the leash. Did I want to excel at shirking responsibility or training dogs?



There was only one answer. And it is probable that, without the support of the good men in the program, I would never have felt safe enough to face this truth.

On my last night with Maya, she sat calmly at my feet while I stroked her sweet-pup face. She smiled at me with her innocent doggy eyes, and her tail swept back and forth across the floor in a wide arc. She was relaxed. Safe. And unaware of the events to come. "I'm sorry Maya," I said, crying and not caring, "so very sorry." I had broken her trust and failed her as a leader. Now, her future was uncertain. She would go back to a society intolerant of aggressive dogs. And I was to blame.

I'd heard that you can die from a broken heart, but never gave it much mind . . . until they wheeled Maya out of our unit. Because she had been deemed dangerous, she was not allowed to walk off the grounds on leash. Instead, she was placed in a carrier that sat in a rolling laundry bin which would make the quarter-mile journey to the exit easier. The crate was too large for the bin and, under Maya's weight, it shifted to an unnatural angle, placing her on her side. She pressed her snout up against the air vents and whined and howled. I can still hear her cry. I walked with her for a bit until I couldn't continue, then said my goodbye as she licked my fingers. And I thanked her for everything – for teaching me how to welcome mistakes as growing experiences – for showing me that I have an inner drive to do good – and for giving me the chance to engage stress in a healthy way. As I turned around, I prayed that she would be given a fighting chance. And at that moment, I felt a burning ache in my chest – a consuming pain I couldn't shake. And I finally understood.

At the next training session, I had to come clean with my peers about Maya. What had I learned? What lessons could I apply so that I never failed another dog? With eyes damp from anticipation, I laid it all out. My initial discloser dealt with the idea that less is often more – that when a dog amps up, I must calm down. And that through example – in time – the dog will follow my lead. I know that hormones can affect a dog for days after a good scare. Yet I'd pushed it. I had become insecure myself from the idea that Maya was regressing, and she sensed it. A nasty cycle had been set in motion, and Maya was the victim. . . . Moreover, I had learned to follow instructions and accept coaching even though I initially questioned the logic, and I thanked my mentors for giving me confident guidance. I'd used my time more productively by finding creative ways to advance Maya through tough situations. I'd learned that sacrifice can actually feel good. Finally, I admitted that, like every other man in the room, I had weaknesses that I would sometimes have to accept and process – no matter the difficulty. From the tears and the confessions, I left the meeting spent, knowing that I had tried. I did care. I'd given it my all in the face of great challenges. And I found solace in that. With any luck, I had shed my last tear over that sweet dog.

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I told my supervisor that I didn't want to know what happened to Maya once she left the prison. Period. I was sure she would be euthanized, and I wanted to avoid a full-on depression from any news of her death. The memories of our time together were still fresh and raw. Maya had shown me what she had shown few – her playful, loving, relaxed pup-

nature. She would rocket around our tiny cell, knocking over anything and everything. And in the silliest, goofiest way! She had left me behind as a rare witness to her potential. And as days turned to months, the shelter offered no word of an adoption. This solidified my assumption that she was probably gone from this world.

News of Maya finally arrived seven months later in a most unexpected way. My mentor, Tom, was meeting with a Benton Franklin Humane Society representative as she toured the program. I wandered over to the table to say hello, and Tom pointed at me, saying, "Hey! I'd like to introduce you to the guy who trained Maya. Would you like to tell him about Opie's new friend?" The impact of her words hit me like a slow-motion gut punch. Maya was alive and living happily with a dog that Tom had trained named No Pho, now Opie. It had taken time, but the shelter staff had done their best to promote Maya, knowing that she would be the perfect companion to the right person. And that right person, it turns out, was a single guy named Jayson who fell for her just as I had. Opie and Maya now spent their days on a small farm -- sparring in the dirt and causing general mayhem until nap time when they'd spoon together in front of the couch. And when I thought the news couldn't get any better, she added, "and Jayson was very happy with her training. Great job!" I staggered backward uttering, "Oh my God!" and felt tears of joy flood my eyes! My beautiful Maya -- who I had grieved away -- was now back from the grave! And I could breathe again.

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My neighbors are murderers, rapists and thieves -- most of them injured themselves in some way. Some will never get a second chance to walk free, but they give well deserved second chances to the innocent animals in our care. And through the act of giving, they also receive. I am unable to express how proud I am to be part of this program. Perhaps my smile says it all. Through service, we give back to a society that we've taken so much from, and redemption is sweet. I will never tire of watching an inmate ease his eternal sense of guilt by rising to the needs of a lost creature. Neither Maya nor Opie -- who was destined for a dinner table in South Korea -- had much chance of survival in this world. Yet, with hard work and collaborative good intentions, their lives have been renewed. "Who rescues who?", people ask, and rightfully so. In the end -- everyone wins.

I know that it takes more than the love of one dog to change a lifetime of criminal ways. There are still many challenges and triumphs in store for me. But through Maya and the support of my mentors, a door to awareness opened -- one that I would never have walked through had it not been for the Ridge Dog Program. Today, I consciously embrace new habits which allow me to be productive, accountable, empathic, kind, patient and understanding -- with the ability to exercise impulse control. For the first time in my life, I've been able to set a goal and achieve it. I coach and mentor program newcomers, so they too can be successful. And I am happy to say that the skills acquired toward the goal of being the best dog trainer possible have morphed into a generalized way of living. I am a better man for the effort. And finally, my mom has her son back.

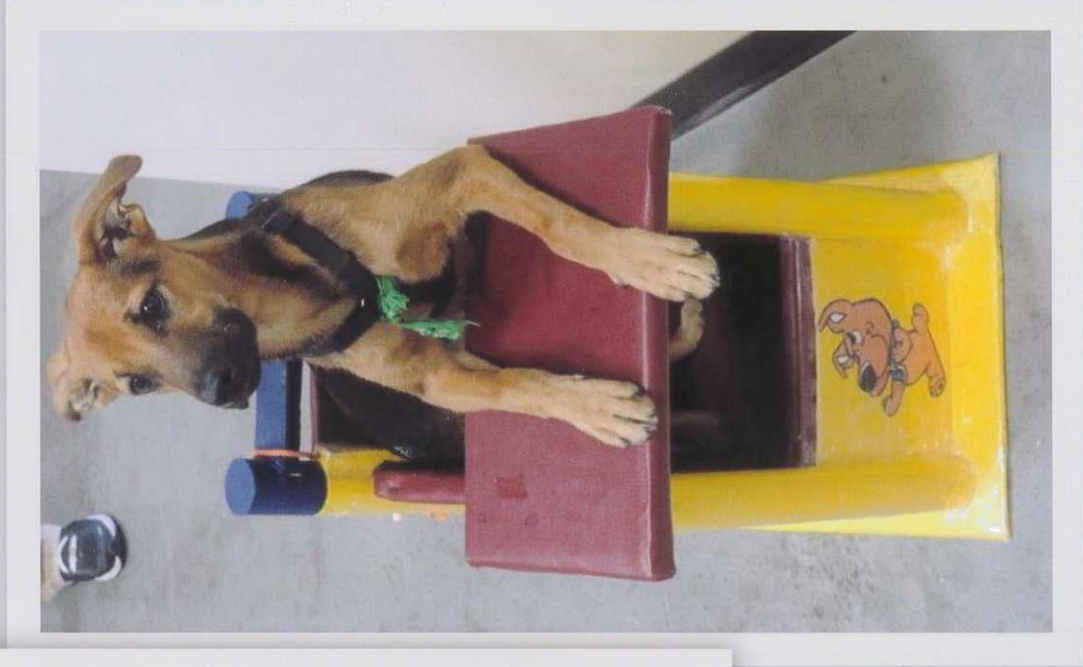
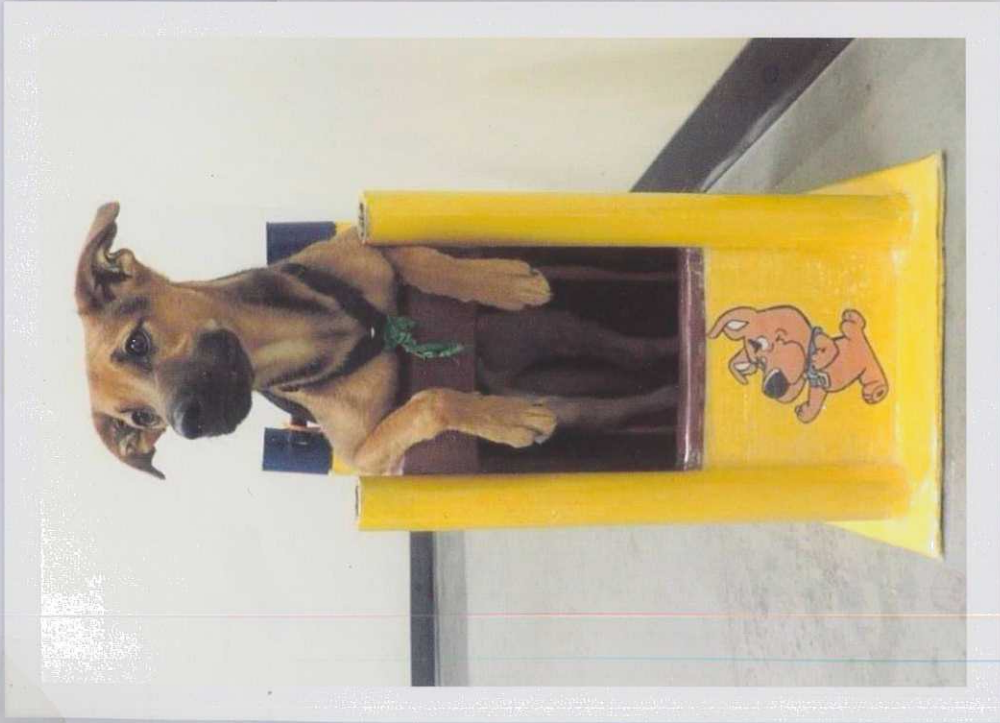




Maya (top) and Opie (Bottom)



# Scrappy



# Special Needs Measophagus



# A Scrappy Kind of Love

Brady: # XXXXXX

Scrappy: A44978330

**I am what some people call a career criminal.** At age 40, I am 11 years into a 30-year sentence for the drug-related shooting death of my dealer. This is my third trip to prison. The first stay – at age 18 – was a sentence of 12 months and a day for domestic violence, unlawful possession of a firearm, and possession of stolen property. At 19, I was back in on a robbery charge, sentenced to 90 more months. I was out for only a year when drugs removed any form of rational thought from my brain, and I committed murder. During my years of lock-up, I did nothing but learn innovative ways to break the law. I studied up on how to become the best criminal possible. I judged and punished other inmates for the nature of their crimes as if it was my duty. I was an ugly, selfish person who had given up on love long ago. Strangely enough, it was a throw-away pup named Scrappy – a dog who sat tenuously on death row – that helped me understand my life could be saved.

Three-week-old Scrappy arrived at the Ridge in early 2014 from Adams County Pet Rescue. He and his several siblings had been recently orphaned. From the start, we could tell that something was wrong -- he couldn't keep his food down nor gain weight while his litter mates flourished. The shelter vet examined Scrappy and diagnosed him with Megaesophagus – which literally translated means “big esophagus”. This condition results in an esophagus that malfunctions and interferes with normal peristalsis. Simply put – food won't go down or stay down. The vet wanted to euthanize Scrappy and allowed him to come back to our unit only to say goodbye. He felt that the care Scrappy needed would be too time intensive, and his quality of life would suffer. That didn't sit well with us, and the dog handlers protested saying, “No!” We had nothing but time to devote to Scrappy's care -- 24 hours a day if needed. We wanted to save him and petitioned hard. And gratefully, our supervisors agreed to let us try. Of course, his reprieve depended solely on his ability to gain weight. If we could not fatten him up, it meant certain death. The rescue of Scrappy was on! Little did I know at the time that this baby pup would rescue me as well.

Only a few days into my new job as a dog handler, our supervisor entrusted me with Scrappy's round-the-clock care and, from then on, my outlook shifted. No longer did I solely focus on my own creature comforts or prison yard politics. I had one specific goal and that was to keep Scrappy alive. We found that he could eat dry food from a bottle if it was first soaked and made into a slurry. So, at each meal – sometimes for 30 minutes at a stretch -- I held him upright on my lap and fed him through the bottle. Admittedly, I had to feel my way through the process and sometimes I feared he would drown. Once the food entered his mouth, I held his head straight up and stroked his throat to help move the food into the stomach. If all went well, he ended up with a full belly and we began our day. If not, he vomited the food and we'd start over again. I didn't care. My eyes were on the prize. And, over the unfolding days and weeks, my efforts paid off with the needed result – weight gain!

Scrappy and I spent three months together in the spring of 2014 – 24/7 – and my dedication to the pup never wavered. We were inseparable. In time, lap feedings became impossible because of his size, so a couple of handlers built a structure called a Bailey chair which is essentially a high chair for dogs. Now he sat in his chair to eat his meals from an elevated bowl, and feedings became easier. Once full, Scrappy would sit at my side and gaze up at me with eyes that said, “I love you” and, “I need you” and, “I am so thankful for you”. He didn’t judge me for my past mistakes. He adored me, and I’m so blessed to know what that feels like. To say that this pup pulled at my heart strings is an understatement! However, his unconditional love also triggered a deep sadness in me. I couldn’t escape the fact that I’d never known such love for my children. Unlike Scrappy, they never received my adoration or nurturance – or even my time. And, if they loved me, I couldn’t tell you – I didn’t allow myself to feel it.

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I became a father for the first time at age 17. Then again at 20. And yet again at 22. Three kids with three different baby-mamas, when I was basically a kid myself. I had no parenting skills and offered them nothing but my name -- no emotional or financial support. We never lived together, and I avoided the two youngest kids. On rare visitation weekends, I took my eldest son to the mall to spoil him, even if it was only for a few hours. I hoped it would somehow make up for my overall absence in his life. Of course, I was always high when we were together. I got high as much as I could. I felt like such a miserable failure that I didn’t have to face myself when stoned.

In truth, I never saw good relationships modeled as a kid. My father and mother divorced when I was five and, prior to that, they fought. A lot. Memories of early family life are painful, and I can see now that there was not only physical abuse, but emotional torment between them. After the divorce, I lived with my mom and only periodically visited my dad. I can’t say why it happened, but over the years of separation, I formed a strong attachment to him. He wasn’t perfect. And he lived a colorful lifestyle, keeping company with bikers and druggies. But he was also my rock and kept me in line whenever we were together. I adored him, identified with him. So, I was elated when, at age 11, we moved in together. With the move, came a growing rift between me and my mom’s side of the family. I’d grown up hearing how unsavory my dad was from relatives who chose to overlook his many talents, including his ability to make the most of any situation that came his way. I reacted by being hyper-protective as well as resentful – not only for their criticism of him, but of me. I identified so strongly with him that when they called him a loser, they called me the same, and I grew to hate them for it. Looking back, I now know that I internalize these lies even though I fought so hard against them.

My world disintegrated in 1992 when a drunk driver killed my father. I was at a friend’s house when I got the news that hit me like a boxer’s punch. My mind couldn’t grasp the words. . . *your father is dead*. I remember . . . running across town to my grandma’s house, smashing car windows in my wake. My heart would not be the only thing to break that night. I shook with rage and confusion and, realistically, I never recovered. The rage never

left. It was easier to feel than the pain. At age 15, I shut down emotionally and removed myself from everyone I loved — I could not risk another loss. I submerged myself in a world of drugs and, ultimately, crime. Soon, I became homeless -- couch surfing and living with various acquaintances, often for sexual favors. I was welcomed at my mom's home, but I felt estranged from her and ashamed. Yet, did the shame stop me from continuing my ways? No.

Over time, my father's death became a convenient excuse for my corruption. The world owed me. I became a first-class liar and a thief. I used and sold every drug that came my way. And today, I deeply regret that my actions reflected so poorly on my father's legacy. I lived up to the worst of expectations, becoming the loser that I — that we — were accused of being. We both deserved better. And the sad thing is that, it never had to come to this. I had been afforded the opportunities that accompany a large family of good people — my aunt would have gladly helped me if I'd wanted to help myself. Ultimately, the taking of another life and the intervention of the state stopped me. After the shooting, I tried to kill myself with an overdose of heroin. Twelve hours later, I woke up. In custody. Facing 30 years of imprisonment. And endless days to contemplate a discarded life.

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So, how did Scrappy move me to change? I don't really know. I've been asked if I was primed for a shift — if I'd been seeking some sort of salvation. But it wasn't like that. He just melted me -- without warning. In him I saw a life about to be given up on and, at that moment -- with all my heart -- I couldn't let that happen. And by coming to his defense, I came face to face with potential I didn't know I had. Eventually, I accepted the fact that Scrappy had touched a part of me I had not yet killed off. Innocence to innocence. I've shed many tears since this realization, and there are many more to come.

In September 2014, a sanctuary representative came to visit our program. We put on a training demonstration and introduced her to our dogs. Some of the handlers spoke of their individual experiences and how the dogs enriched their lives. Near the end, we asked if Scrappy might be a candidate for the sanctuary due to his special needs. She listened carefully then surprised us by saying that he would in fact have a good chance at adoption if two things happened. First, she challenged us to train Scrappy to eat upright while standing on his own — that the chair might inhibit his full integration into family life such as when taking road trips, etc. Then, she suggested that Adams County Pet Rescue video tape him in action and get his story on the internet. If needed, she could help promote him through her contacts.

For this second part of his training, he was transferred to the Ridge "Camp" (where some inmates/handlers live when they have fewer than four years remaining on their sentence.) Within a few weeks, both challenges had been met, and he was adopted shortly after the video hit the web by a family of angels! They understood that Scrappy would be special needs forever. But — like us handlers — they didn't give up on him. Instead, they found a vet who agreed to try a surgical procedure to reverse his condition — and it worked! Scrappy is

now a happy, healthy dog and the joy of their lives.

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I know I'm not perfect. There are many demons I must still face. But I'm not the person I was either. I have Scrappy to thank for showing me that I can love and am worth loving – that I'm capable of selflessness instead of mere selfishness. I have 19 years left on my sentence, but I also have a growing vision of my future that is happy and productive. And drug free. I recently married my childhood sweetheart who, like Scrappy, loves me – flaws and all. I am making amends with my kids after a lifetime of separation. I live and work with men I would have once chosen to hate. I can love and endure the pain of letting go. And I am learning what true friendship means through the bonds forged with my fellow handlers – a brotherhood of fractured souls finally doing good works.



# *Four Paws to Freedom*



*"People involved in the dog programs change -- they change their actions, change their thoughts, change their behaviors, and most importantly, align their attitudes with right thinking and right living."*

Associate Superintendent Andrew Sawyer

# Incarceration Nation

*“Just the facts, ma’am.” Sergeant Joe Friday, Dragnet, 1987*

**I am one of 20,000 criminal offenders** held in confinement in Washington State. And, the Coyote Ridge Corrections Center (CRCC) ranks among the largest of its minimum/medium security prisons. According to a 2017 Washington State Department of Corrections (WSDOC) statistical fact sheet, 92% of us are male and, collectively, our 12 facilities operate at 103% capacity. Contrast this with the claims made in the 2016 National Geographic expose’, *Prison Nation*. The documentary reports that there are almost 2.5 million offenders nationwide. In California alone, prison operational capacity hovers at 200%. And while the United States owns 5% of the world’s population, so it owns 25% of the world’s incarcerated. This is due in part to a “crack-down” on crime initiated 30 years ago. The crack-down ushered in practices like the “three strikes” laws and mandatory sentencing. In the past three decades, prison populations have risen 1000%. And crime continues. Society is now grappling with a monster of its own making. Most agree that no one is safer for it.

The earliest recorded prison “facility” consisted of iron cages built into the sewer systems deep below the bustling city streets of pre-Christian Rome. An inmate could endure a lifetime of squalor and hard labor until his or her death, often at an early age. We should all be grateful that times have changed. But -- prior to this -- the customary practice was to house a convict not as punishment, but as a holding state for trial or execution. The Romans came to understand that confinement itself could be a particularly brutal form of punishment. We hold true to this belief today.

Most prisons in Washington State are called “correction centers” and, as the name suggests, the aim is not one of punishment alone but of rehabilitation as well. This shift is a recent outcome of prison reform – an ongoing movement that has fueled prison evolution. With each idealistic attempt to improve societal outcomes, policy makers must acknowledge when goals are not met. Revisions are made, and prison systems change. Due to the unprecedented growth of prisons, reforms and innovative practices are seeing a surge in application as well.

## A Public - Public Partnership

**Washington State is known for many things:** copious amounts of rain, designer coffee, grunge bands . . . plaid flannel. But more importantly, Washington is a leader in intellectual export, evidenced by tech giants like Microsoft and Amazon.com. It is a state of forward thinkers who make themselves at home outside the box. In 2008, the Washington State Department of Corrections and The Evergreen State College forged a joint commitment

to an innovative and substantial reform effort called the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP). It is under this collective umbrella that the Ridge Dog Program operates.

The Sustainability in Prisons Project is a prototype for progress which took root in 2003 with an early partnership between key Evergreen personnel and the Superintendent of Cedar Creek Corrections Center. Their mission statement reads, *"We empower sustainable change by bringing nature, science, and environmental education into prisons."* Early sustainable operations programs focused on composting and water catchment as a means of saving money and offering inmates meaningful work. At the same time, Dr. Nadkarni, a faculty member at Evergreen, led the first ecological conservation program: she was granted inmate help with a study on native mosses. Both pilot projects were welcomed by inmates who seemed to thrive with the new challenges. Regarding their early days, the SPP website states,

*"With growing interest and efforts, SPP added new programs, new partners, and new prisons. A model took shape in which the needs and abilities of all participants shaped the programs. This meant that every initiative brought benefits to all involved: incarcerated students and technicians, WA Corrections staff, Evergreen faculty and students, partner scientists, and the outside community."*  
<http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/about/spps-history/>

In 2018, SPP expanded their vision statement to read:

*"In response to the dual crises of ecological degradation and mass incarceration, we aim to reduce recidivism while improving human well-being and ecosystem health. SPP brings together incarcerated individuals, scientists, corrections staff, students, and program partners to promote education, conserve biodiversity, practice sustainability, and help build healthy communities. Together, we reduce the environmental, economic, and human costs of prisons."*

Today, a wide range of community/inmate programs populate the 12 participating Washington State prisons. (see <http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/what-we-do/spp-programs-in-washington-state-prisons-v2/>). Although vocational in nature, they are considered "complementary" when compared to state-mandated courses that can show evidence of change. Here at Coyote Ridge, the Ridge Dog Program is by far the largest and most sought-after sustainability program. And, I believe that of any course offered -- mandated or otherwise -- it is the most life changing. Why? Because it is not designed to change us, therefore, we offer no resistance to it. The change unfolds in us as we bend to help animals in need. And it is in the giving that we grow. These complementary programs make it possible to create habits of selfless acts. For most inmates, that is where true change begins.

## Enter the Dogs

*"Words can't say what love can do." Jon Bon Jovi*

**Caring for animals in prison is not new.** Farm animals were tended by inmates as far back as the 1800s. Yet it is widely accepted that the current trend in prison-animal-

programs began in 1981 here in Washington State at the Washington Correction Center for Women (WCCW). Their service dog training program grew out of an alliance between Dominican nun, Sister Pauline, and the former Chair of Washington State University's School of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Leo Bustad. Both were committed to the idea that animals could help inmates – and vice versa. Their highly successful program matured over time into the non-profit, Prison Pet Partnership. Following their lead, dog and cat programs began populating the 11 remaining correctional facilities. In 2012, these animal programs were assimilated into the SPP collaboration.

At Coyote Ridge, we get our share of the cute and cuddlies – pups who are born in prison or otherwise abandoned by their mother and in need of care. But most of the dogs are funneled to us from three local shelters for behavioral reasons. Some arrive needing minor adjustments, and some challenge the best handlers. For many, the Ridge Dog Program is their last chance. We handlers are especially sensitive to the dogs who have made bad decisions since we've all done the same.

Cody is a good example of the type of dog we help. At 14 months old, this sweet lab mix had been through five shelters in both Texas and Washington before coming to Adams County Pet Rescue and, ultimately, our program. Gratefully, he had managed somehow to avoid the poison and the burn pile. Like many dogs we see, he was terrified of life in general and had to be carried into the prison in a crate which was full of feces – a behavioral byproduct of fright. And, this elimination behavior was not a one-time shot but continued daily for a month until he began gaining trust. I was assigned to be Cody's trainer and, for two months, I utilized all the knowledge I had to bring him around. At the end of that time, Cody went home to a new family. In truth, it might have been his first. He has a yard to run in and is getting used to an active family life with children. We are lucky to receive happy updates.

Although I was Cody's lead trainer, his success was truly a team effort. Everyone played a part in his rebirth, from prison staff to the entire Ridge Dog team to the general prison population. Yes – even non-program inmates help by taking direction from us on what is needed, then being sensitive to the dog. And in turn – they derive benefit from the animals who have a calming effect, counterbalancing tensions and the harsh realities of incarceration. This secondary environmental benefit is unique to prison-animal-programs.

For me and others, giving and receiving love is the greatest benefit of working with the dogs. Love can heal the most hardened soul and is critical for transformation. Followed closely on the heels of love is the sense of normalcy they provide. To be clear, there is nothing normal about prison, yet the dogs can break through dense walls of isolation to touch us. Once calm, it is easier to reflect on our crimes, our guilt and our futures in a way that we cannot access when consumed by rage, depression, or revenge. These are but two of the many ways dogs – and cats – help the incarcerated. Others include:

<u>INCREASED</u>	<u>DECREASED</u>
Social Skills	Loneliness
Self Esteem/Confidence/Pride	Anxiety
Sense of Responsibility	Depression
Patience/Parenting Skills	Violent Behavior
Empathy	Idleness
Selfless Behavior	Selfish Behavior
Job Skills/Leadership	Impulsiveness
Respect for Authority	Ideological Segregation
Ideological Integration	Recidivism
Conflict Resolution/Conflict Prevention	
Impulse Control/Delayed Gratification	

You will notice that the above list has everything to do with emotional intelligence (EQ), which has recently come to light as being of equal importance to IQ. Personally, when speaking of the value to most criminals, I believe EQ is more important. As mentioned in the book, *Emotional Intelligence, 2.0*, "Emotional intelligence requires effective communication between the rational and emotional centers of the brain." Math, English and science classes are important. But most inmates lack education in social awareness, self-awareness, relationships, and emotional control. Skill building in these areas is key to true behavioral transformation. Prison-animal-programs are an exception as they provide critical education in the EQ realm along with classroom education like no other prison offering. And, rather than studying abstract concepts like geometry or sentence structure (which may be temporarily memorized then forgotten), handlers working one-on-one with dogs engage in real time application of a craft. Our theoretical studies – integrated with EQ challenges -- are put to work immediately. There are no years spent between the training and our release to forget what we've learned. In dog training, it is common knowledge that subconscious emotional cues "travel down the leash" and register with the dog. A successful dog indicates a successful handler – and vice versa. Our strengths and weaknesses surface daily. And if we are up to the challenge, they are examined and growth emerges.

That dogs can so positively affect inmates should not be a surprise as society in general is similarly affected. The benefits of caring for an animal are now widely acknowledged from lowering blood pressure and heart rates to bringing a suicidal veteran back from the brink. When a tragedy unfolds, teams of dogs are dispatched to ease pain. And sometimes, only an animal can loosen the grip of a crippling illness like autism. Not only do they love us unconditionally, but they influence us therapeutically. We are finally starting to understand and appreciate them for the gifts they are. The Prison Pet Partnership speaks directly to this point on their website,

*"Studies on the human-animal bond have reached the not surprising conclusion that humans benefit from the unqualified love and acceptance that only animals can provide. Animals need to be loved in return. The shared bond between our dogs, their trainers, and above all, their eventual owners, provides a feeling of satisfaction that directly contributes to the mental and physical wellness of all who are involved."* <http://www.prisonpetpartnership.org/html/about.html>.

Giving to them as they give to us is the least we can do as life-saving flows both ways.

## Cost: One Day I Could Be Your Neighbor

**There are generally two camps of thought** when it comes to crime and punishment: 1) retaliation/retribution and 2) rehabilitation. If you haven't yet taken a stance, consider this – over 96% of all incarcerated men and women will one day be released back into society. And into your neighborhoods. Nationally, this translates into 700,000 offenders each year, two-thirds of which will return to prison within three years after committing another crime. So -- you must ask the question, "Who do I want these people to be?" Men and women who have spent 20 years steeping in despair, planning revenge and sinking further into criminality? Or, a returning population equipped with tools and knowledge to help them transition successfully into a community as law abiding citizens? Latest trends favor the latter since society currently spends more than 60 billion dollars a year to support this revolving door of crime and punishment.

Why offer educational opportunities to criminals – the very people that society fears most? Because society is safer for the effort. Most of those who are released hit the streets with no money, no place to go, and no potential work, often due to lack of education. And this is where prison-based programs come into play. Do they work for all inmates? No. But for those who are salvageable, they can offer vocational training and help with a myriad of emotional and inter-social woes. Of course, it is correct to ask, "How much does this cost? Aren't we spending enough already?" Let's look at this question further by examining the Ridge Dog program:



The 2016 average yearly cost to house a prison inmate in Washington State was \$36,000.00. There are approximately 50 men in the Ridge Dog program on any given day, and the entire program costs Coyote Ridge roughly \$6,000.00 per year to operate.

When talking about recidivism (the return to criminal behavior after release from incarceration within a predetermined period), let's assume that for that \$6,000.00, 10 percent of the inmates – or 5 men – are so greatly changed by the program that they never re-offend. The \$6000.00 yearly investment yields a future collective savings to taxpayers of \$175,000.00 for each year these 5 men are not in the Washington State correctional system. And, imagine what the savings would be if the recidivism rate was even lower. Hopefully these men become gainfully employed, paying taxes back into the system. The payoff seems obvious.

In Washington State, each facility can decide how to fund their prison-animal-program. Generally, shelters that supply animals to the programs also pay for the associated costs of care. Food, medicine and medical treatment, toys, treats, kennels, and litter are all furnished by the shelters. At Coyote Ridge, additional costs are carved out of the prison's Violence Reduction budget which, as the name implies, finances strategies for reducing violence among inmates. We also receive public donations and are exploring opportunities for inmate fundraisers. In the case of the Prison Pet Partnership at the Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW), they petitioned for and received non-profit, 501c3 status and are therefore eligible to actively fundraise and write grants. Some participating animal rescues secure program grants through their own funding sources since the greater animal welfare movement finds these programs to be valuable toward their collective goal of saving every animal life possible. Considering the many funding streams available to prisons, the potential cost of financing a prison-animal-program should not be a deterrent, especially when the benefits to all are weighed.

## DATA: Where is It?

**When I was a kid**, the only thing we knew about “data” was that science and math classes were full of it. It was dry, boring, and only nerds cared about it one way or another. If you were witty, you could skirt around it altogether by taking Spanish or shop or serving as a teacher's aide in PE. Yet today, most kids relish data and want as much of it as possible. Society swims in data and is becoming increasingly driven by it. Gone are the days when anecdotal observations could prove a point.

Especially when it comes to funding . . .

If you read the academic work by the authors listed at the end of this document, you will notice a common concern: there are no mechanisms for collecting hard evidence when it comes

to the effectiveness of not only animal programs, but complementary prison programs in general. There have been several national and local studies designed to provide the data that is lacking. Unfortunately, most studies have been too small or otherwise skewed to be meaningful. A recent study meant to deliver some quantifiable trends on intermediate outcomes was published in 2017 by Jacqueline van Wormer, Alex Kigerl, and Zachary Hamilton from Washington State University's Institute for Criminal Justice. This study was initiated at the request of the WSDOC toward the goal of finding evidence which could corroborate a myriad of subjective success stories. The researchers based their findings on an impressive study of 1001 offenders and, at conclusion, the results did indicate that prison-animal-programs produced results favorable to inmates and the general prison climate. (For a copy of the complete document, please visit <http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/van-Wormer-prison-based-dog-handler.pdf> "Digging Deeper: Exploring the Value of Prison-Based Dog Handler Programs".) In summary, the authors make this conclusion:

*"... the program has clearly succeeded in building a higher level of accountability, as witnessed by the statistically significant decreases in infractions, grievances and sanctions among the dog handlers. The program lends to a safer and healthier prison environment in those pods and facilities where the programs are offered, at least among this selected population. Further research should include targeting measures of psychosocial changes (via survey assessment) in participation, as well as following the treatment and control group post release to measure for potential recidivism reduction."*

Currently, there are no standardized definitions for what constitutes recidivism which makes tracking offenders and their behavioral patterns extremely difficult. Because of this, the sharing of data from state to state is quite meaningless. In Washington State, the average three-year recidivism rate is about 32% -- far less than the national average. Yet, recently, officials at WCCW tracked and compared their recidivism rate against participation in animal programs and found the outcome to be impressive: only 5% of former animal handlers reoffend. Unfortunately, the fact remains that comprehensive data just isn't there. I am hopeful that this will change in the years to come.

## Conclusion: Be the Tail that Wags the Dog

**There is a well known saying that goes,** "If you want to change the world, start in your own back yard." For me, that is a prison yard. And I assume that, upon my release, friends will want to know how prison changed me. I should have plenty to say. But I also want to tell them how I helped to change prison because, if true prison reform is to be realized, we must all do our part. Sharing my words with you is just one way I am working to effect change – change for the dogs, the community, and the inmates like me who will one day be released.

While writing this paper, I stumbled upon a question that I couldn't answer, namely ... who is responsible for reducing recidivism in America? Perhaps the obvious answer would be that offenders choose to go straight, and the need for prisons simply fades away. But – short of

that — who is accountable and answerable for tracking policy efficacy and the achievement of goals? Is it law-makers? The Department of Corrections? Our mental health system? Maybe schools? Once again, I think that the best answer is all of us. So much of society is stuck in reactive thinking like, “There’s nothing I can do,” and “That’s just the way things are,” or “The problem is just too big.” But it is critical that we change our language to one of empowerment --“Let’s look at our options,” or “I can choose a different approach.” Each inmate, citizen and lawmaker must confront their internal talk to make a shift possible.

In the 1970s, animal lovers were faced with a staggering truth of their own: 20 million of our best friends were being euthanized in the United States each year. That’s about 100 animals for every 1000 residents. Fifty years later, that number is down to two million. The Animal Welfare Movement’s goal is to achieve a 90% live release rate in America’s shelters and rescues by the year 2025. Any way you look at it, this will be a grand achievement when it is realized. Progress didn’t happen overnight, but proponents possessed a dedicated vision supported by creative effort on national, regional, local and grassroots levels. To make this kind of headway, leaders employed an aggressive, multi-pronged approach to end the killing: increased adoptions, spay/neuter (S/N), trap-neuter-return of feral cats (TNR), animal transports, and large-scale disaster response. At the same time, they worked to eliminate the puppy mill industry, and supplied pet stores with adoptable rescues. They brought light to breed discrimination. And -- they took their message to the public through educational, celebrity, and social media campaigns to affect a mind shift. Through grants they support smaller, creative efforts such as prison-animal-programs and pet food banks. Essentially, they are re-writing public awareness with the message that, “It’s cool to be kind!” And who are these warriors battling against what might seem to be insurmountable odds? For the most part, they are volunteers or those working the humanitarian front lines for non-profit wages.

In 2004, Animal Welfare leaders came together for the first time to create a common set of definitions and ways for reporting shelter activity. They called it the Asilomar Accords. Not quite a decade later:

*“A steering committee outlined a vision and, in the Fall of 2012, adopted a formal governing Board of Directors and incorporated Shelter Animals Count, a new, independent, non-profit created to share and steward a national database of sheltered animals that provides facts and enables insights to save lives.” (<https://shelteranimalscount.org/who-we-are/about>)*

Currently, SAC collects data on dog and cat rescue/shelter intakes along with a wide variety of outcomes. Soon, spay and neuter surgeries may also be monitored. Not every shelter or rescue feeds into the database, but participation continues to grow. And to be eligible for grant funding, many grantors seek a grantee’s statistics in SAC before they decide on who to support. Certainly, that is an incentive to participate. In short, the animal welfare nation has come together on this critical social issue to statistically track their progress toward a well-defined goal. And they are winning the battle against mindless killing.

I understand that the interplay of crime and punishment is complex, and that there is a dense web of factors influencing justice, correction, and reform. But I also believe that the same type

of creative approach shown by the animal welfare movement can be embraced when it comes to criminality and the tracking of not only recidivism, but how complementary programs effect outcomes. I don't profess to have a remedy for it all. But based on personal knowledge, initial data trends, and mounting subjective observations, I know that prison-animal-programs can be integral to successful criminal rehabilitation, serving as a lifesaving tool as we strive toward ending recidivism while helping our best friends flourish. To that end, I implore all state Departments of Corrections to support and grow prison-animal-programs within your respective institutions. So much good can follow.

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As part of my restitution to society, I want to give back however I can. Please reach out to me with questions or feedback on this paper. Or – perhaps you have ideas to share. If so, I want to hear them. You can reach me at:

Thomas Mason, #315848 F-B-16  
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Visit us at: <https://www.facebook.com/Ridge-Dogs-219301358080610/>





# *Addendum*





The change unfolds in us . . .





... as we bend ...







... to help animals in need.



# About the Contributors

**Lezlie Sage** is the Director of Development for Benton Franklin Humane Society and a volunteer for the Ridge Dog program at Coyote Ridge Corrections Center. She is also a Certified Interfaith Chaplain specializing in the animal-human bond. As such, she conducts classes at the Center on Grief Work as well as writing workshops that help inmates tell their stories.



Originally from Olympia, WA, Lezlie graduated from The Evergreen State College in 1999 with an emphasis in writing, psychology, and art. In 2000, following the abrupt death of her beloved cat, she left for Utah and Best Friends Animal Society, where she worked for 16 years alongside leaders in the animal welfare movement. Lezlie spent nine years as the Cat Adoption Manager at the Sanctuary, then served for seven years as a Network Specialist for the West Coast region. In that role, she helped rescues and shelters define and achieve their lifesaving goals.

Lezlie is passionate about transformation and healing in both humans and animals, and this passion serves as the driving force behind her professional and volunteer pursuits. Today, she shares her Kennewick home with her aging cat, Bella, and cannot imagine her life without an animal companion.

**Judy Devine-Geuther** is a professional photographer who has volunteered her services at Benton Franklin Humane Society since 2006. She is also a volunteer at Coyote Ridge Corrections Center where she photographs shelter animals in the Ridge Dog program. Judy is a member of Hearts Speak, a world-wide group of artists/photographers who donate their services to help shelter animals find new homes.

Born in Manhattan and raised in New Jersey, Judy originally spent her days as a secretary at a police precinct until she married her husband John and moved to Washington State. Shortly thereafter, she began a pet sitting business in the Tri Cities area. Her interest in photographing animals grew out of this business. Judy went on to study photography at a local college and attended key workshops around the nation.

Judy currently lives in Richland, WA and spends her free time with her husband, two dogs, three cats, and a parrot.



# Acknowledgements

I want to offer my thanks to so many. . .

To **Superintendent Jeffrey Uttecht** and **Assistant Superintendent Andrew Sawyer** for their support of the Ridge Dog Program. And to all the supervisors over the years who have voluntarily worked to keep the program thriving:

<b>Richard Karten</b>	<b>Denise Cook</b>	<b>Phillip Cook</b>	<b>Jennifer Lynch</b>
<b>Tracey Stuenkel</b>	<b>Kendra Mullins</b>	<b>Madison Murphy</b>	<b>Lori Telleria</b>

To **Krystal Ellingston** and **Elaine Allison** for their training expertise. And to **Benton Franklin Humane Society, Adams County Pet Rescue, and Grant County Animal Outreach** for trusting us with their dogs.

To **Judy Devine-Geuther** for her professional photographs that bring our program to life.

To my **fellow dog handlers** who have helped build the Ridge Dog Program into a model system through their dedication and willingness to grow. Not only did you positively impact me, but the overall prison culture. Through your efforts, the Ridge Dog Program has shown that men of many cultures and persuasions can live together in harmony when called to a higher purpose, even when faced with the many challenges of imprisonment.

And – of course – I want to thank **the dogs** themselves. They have offered me unconditional love and, in doing so, saved my life. They taught me lessons in tolerance, patience, and compassion and have shaped me into a better man.

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Finally, I have an overwhelming sense of gratitude toward **Ms. Sage** for her volunteerism. She spent countless hours of her free time over the better part of a year assisting me with the development of this document. She’s a poet and a storyteller and helped me tell my own story through a broader lens. She was my teacher, editor, researcher, publisher, collaborator, and in the end, my friend. Thank you for your belief in me and my message.

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# *Letters of Support*





UNIVERSITY of  
DENVER

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
Institute for Human-Animal Connection

September 8, 2018

To Whom It May Concern.

I am writing this letter in support of Tom Mason's initiative to highlight the impacts of prison-based dog training programs on himself and other inmates. I am a Research Associate Professor in the Institute for Human-Animal Connection at the University of Denver. Part of my research focuses on the impacts these programs have on inmate outcomes. In our initial study of these programs in Washington State, we measured a statistically significant improvement in infraction rates after inmates joined the dog training programs compared to their infraction rate prior to participating in dog training. Inmates in the dog programs also had lower infraction rates than inmates not in these programs. In addition, a series of self-report instruments measured higher empathy and lower anxiety for the inmates participating in dog training, suggesting a possible mechanism for the differences. We are now conducting a study to determine if the programs result in lower recidivism rates. Both of these outcomes, infractions and recidivism, directly impact prison and community safety as well as incarceration costs.

Mr. Mason's experience, as well as that of thousands of inmates across the US, also highlights the positive impacts of these programs have on the dogs involved and the community at large. First, the programs change the lives of dogs by making them more likely to find homes as adopted pets. Many of these animals come from local animal shelters that struggle to adopt dogs out into the community. Second, many prison programs train dogs to be service animals for individuals that need help navigating daily life. These programs help both the dogs in need of homes as well as the human companions they serve. Finally, in addition to increasing community safety, the programs lower costs for local animal shelters by helping to increase these dogs' chances for adoption into homes.

I applaud Mr. Mason's initiative to highlight the impacts of prison-based dog training programs through his own experience. I hope you take his advocacy into consideration as you evaluate the potential for these types of programs in your own community.

Sincerely,

Kevin N. Morris, PhD  
Research Associate Professor  
Institute for Human-Animal Connection  
Graduate School of Social Work  
University of Denver



July 31, 2018

To whom it may concern,

As co-director of the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP), a partnership between Washington State Department of Corrections (Corrections) and The Evergreen State College (Evergreen), I am pleased to endorse publication of Mr. Mason's writings. He has created a body of work that illuminates the value of prison-hosted animal-programs—their value to incarcerated individuals, Corrections facilities and staff, and ultimately, to society at large.

Eleven of Washington State's twelve prisons host pet programs, and programs are popular among staff and incarcerated handlers. Dogs and cats graduating from these programs also are very popular among potential adopters, as these pets are exceptionally well socialized and trained. Statewide, more than 574 animals were trained and became available for adoption in 2017, and of these, 272 puppies, dogs, cats, and kittens came from Coyote Ridge Corrections Center's "Ridge Dogs" program. Ridge Dogs is a successful and productive program, yielding wonderful outcomes for animals and humans alike. For many inmates, the experience of saving lives and contributing to society is life changing, as is true for Mr. Mason.



*A dog stands amidst incarcerated handlers during a Ridge Dogs graduation ceremony. Photo by J. Devine Photography.*



SPP did not start and does not operate any of the prison pet programs. Part of SPP-Evergreen's role and responsibility in these programs is to maximize statewide research, information dissemination, networking and reporting. It is in that capacity that we provide support for these essays. To date, first-person accounts from program participants have been under represented. Mr. Mason's impassioned personal essays give voice to experiences and stories resulting from these programs. SPP regularly interacts with incarcerated people willing and eager to contribute to solving societal issues, and we applaud efforts to tell their stories. These stories demonstrate redemption and bring our common humanity to light.

Please reach out to us to learn more about the SPP partnership and programs.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Kelli Bush", is displayed on a light gray rectangular background.

Kelli Bush  
Co-Director  
Sustainability in Prisons Project  
A partnership of The Evergreen State College & WA State Department of Corrections

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*Animals and People Living in Harmony*

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Lezlie Sage  
Director of Development  
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Dear Lezlie,

I am pleased to offer comment in support of the importance of Prison Animal Programs (PAP). Having read parts of his book, I think Mr. Mason has done a very effective job describing the merits of his employment on a very personal basis by means of sharing his own story. I appreciate the opportunity to read highlights, and your effort to guide this important message to become better understood for what PAP's can do for governments struggling with the ever-significant costs of housing inmates in association with high recidivism rates.

Below is a statement of support that provides some detail.

*Richard Haines*

Richard Haines  
Board Chair - New Hope for Eastern Oregon Animals  
Founder - Powder Pals Dog Program

My name is Richard Haines. I am a member of a 501C3 nonprofit titled New Hope for Eastern Oregon Animals (New Hope) located in Baker City, Oregon. A principle goal of New Hope was the establishment of a dog training program in a local state correctional facility to help facilitate dog rescue of unclaimed dogs in our community, their care, training and eventual adoption. It was deemed a much more desirable alternative to euthanasia in coping with unclaimed dogs.

The program was established in February of 2011. It was titled the Powder Pals Dog Program. It is a result of a cooperative venture between the Oregon Department of Corrections, Powder River Correctional Facility and New Hope. Over the ensuing years, an estimated 150 dogs have been served by the program and hundreds of inmates have been employed as dog handlers and trainers. Men who work for several years reach a point in knowledge and skills that they are able to work and correct dog behavioral issues that might otherwise limit the ability to successfully place a dog.

I have been to the Coyote Ridge Corrections Center several times. Once, about 3 years ago, with a number of other correctional facilities in Oregon and Washington that operate dog programs. The intent was to see and compare our approaches and successes. My second visit, more recently, was a request to come and speak to Coyote Ridge dog handlers about our dog program and share perspectives. In that process, I have met and spent time with Tom Mason and Lezlie Sage. Both have served as an inspiration to me. And while our program is much smaller than Coyote Ridge in terms of dogs and dog trainers, the programs are very similar. A positive reward-based training program is one such feature.

Things that stand out about such programs, from my experience, are many. In one category, it provides meaningful work. It provides the opportunity to apply oneself and learn, to problem solve, and in the words of a senior Correctional Officer, gives men the opportunity to think. In this different way, men learn to work together as a team which makes communication, conflict and anger resolution necessary. The ability of dogs to read and sense human emotions very well makes men and their human behavior and emotions strongly accountable. In coping with this, most dog handlers and trainers begin investing in personal growth, sometimes growing and changing as much or more than the dogs under their care. I call this "time well spent". The other category is the power of the relationship between men and their dogs. Mr. Mason spoke to it. I see men having a nurturing relationship with a dog. I see it reducing stress in their lives. I also find it helpful for men to see dogs change their behavior to the good, serving as an inspiration for the men to invest in the same.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the work is to see the self-confidence of the individual rise, taking pride in their work and in their ability to apply themselves and be feel successful. I sense this carries over upon release. While my information is anecdotal, I estimate the rate of recidivism is significantly reduced, perhaps as low as 5% or more. If this is indeed true, the savings recognized appear to have significance. I have heard of similar results in music and art programs where volunteers work with inmates. The initial motivation appears to be someone, a volunteer, caring and showing confidence in their capability. And treating men with respect, while holding them accountable.

I hope Mr. Mason's book serves to inspire.

# In Support of Prison-Animal-Programs

I had worked for the Department of Corrections for 10 years when I was asked to help create a dog training program for the offenders at Coyote Ridge Corrections Center (CRCC). I was skeptical about being a part of a program like this since I would have to deal with the behaviors and issues that come with offenders and their programming. Up to this point, I had yet to see any special program work for offenders or do anything to change their behaviors. But I decided to give it a go to see what would happen.

I took part in creating and managing the Ridge Dog Program for 6 years and, during that time, I began to see offenders changing and really being excited about something. For some, they hadn't been excited about much in their entire lives. The program was very structured, and the expectations and standards for participation were set high. Any infractions, disrespectful attitudes reported by staff, or failure to program in other areas were grounds for termination.

I watched some offenders come into the dog training program just wanting a job and nothing more. However, the longer they participated . . . the more they began to come out of their shells, take on leadership roles within the program, train other handlers and assist them in areas where they struggled. While the program wasn't for everyone, for those that continued – I watched it change their lives. I watched men who didn't think they had a purpose begin to believe that they did. I watched quiet, shy and passive offenders move up to mentors and trainers and take pride in their work.

I really enjoyed sharing updates from adopters and shelters with the dog handlers. For those who had taken part in the training of a dog – you could see the pride in what they had accomplished, and they felt good about giving something back to the community. I truly believe that because of the structure and the offenders holding each other accountable, the outcome of their work changed them in many ways. Some offenders released from prison and continued with dog training in their communities, while some realized they could have a purpose and began to plan for their future upon release. Some offenders had to leave the dog program while planning their release to participate in vocational programs, to further their education, or to earn more money. Most who left for these reasons continued to work with the dog program voluntarily and continued to teach other handlers and work with the dogs. They saw their work as important.

After 6 years, I was no longer skeptical about being a part of the process as amazing as this one. Watching offenders change their behaviors for the better and gain a different outlook on life was not something I expected to see within a prison environment. But it was happening, and I'm glad I was able to be part of it.

Jennifer Lynch, former Ridge Dog Program Manager and Developer

*Thank You*