

PAWSITIVE DOG PRISON TRAINING PROGRAM—ADOPTERS TELL THEIR STORIES



by Val Hughes | @ | April 13, 2017 8:00 am



Photo by Carol Byrnes

resounding YES!

In the five years it's been operating, a dog training program at Airway Heights Corrections Center has graduated over 100 dogs. Seventeen of those dog graduates have been adopted by families of staffers at the prison. Four of the dogs were adopted by offenders' families. Over a hundred inmates have participated in the program at the prison, which houses over 2,000 medium- and long-term minimum-custody male inmates at its location near Spokane, Washington.

This week, I asked several families who've adopted dogs from the Pawsitive Dog program about their experiences—how they found out about the program, how they chose their particular dog, and how that dog has fit into their lives. I also asked: would they recommend that their friends and families adopt a dog from this program? The answer to this question was, in all cases, a

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Tom & Pam

We were told Jerry was found wandering the streets of Yakima. We had never heard of the Prison Pup Program before adopting Jerry. After our 17-year-old Jack Russell Terrier named Bailey passed away, we were looking to adopt a rescue dog. Several months had passed; we just happened to check the SpokAnimal website shortly before Christmas 2013, and there was Jerry's picture. When we arrived at SpokAnimal, they told us he had graduated from the Prison Pup Program and they let us read his journal. We decided to foster him under the 'Home for the Holidays' program, and Jerry went home with us that afternoon. We finalized the adoption the day after Christmas.

It is very difficult to really get a good idea of a dog's personality when they are in a kennel environment. At SpokAnimal, we sat on the couch with him for a long time and read his journal. The minute we got Jerry in the car for the ride home, he fell asleep in the back seat. When we arrived home with him, we put a dog bed by the couch. He immediately went to that and slept some more. The next few days we took him for walks and car rides. He was very hesitant to leave the house for several days and always seemed happy when we returned home, possibly because after leaving the program he was at SpokAnimal for several weeks waiting to be adopted.

We knew that when we adopted a dog we did not want to go through the "puppy stage" again. Jerry was so well trained, well behaved, and personable. He never had an "accident" in the house, seemed to know which toys were his, and, best of all, wanted to sleep in his kennel at night! The transition from having an active 17-year-old dog to adopting a new member of the family was seamless; it was as if Jerry had been with us for a long time.

When we adopted Jerry, we knew from SpokAnimal that it was best he not be placed in a home with other dogs or children. We had always walked three to four miles with our Jack Russell Terrier, so we continued that tradition with Jerry. In the beginning, he reacted to big trucks, bikes, skateboards, some dogs, and people. We have continually worked with him to overcome that. Now he has even made a few new dog and people friends on our daily route. He will never be a "dog park" dog, but that is okay, since we enjoy our daily walks and meeting new dogs and people, one at a time. When my mom passed away last year, we inherited her seven-year-old chihuahua named Bella. Jerry accepted our new family member very well; they even learned a few new things from one another. Bella taught Jerry how to lie by the fireplace in the winter and Jerry has taught Bella how to go outside to potty!

My sister, Paula, adopted Newman from session 7, and my longtime friend Denise adopted Dixie (now Kona) from the last session. They, of course, both love their prison pups! I jump at any chance I get to talk to people about the program. I love the idea that when you adopt one of these special dogs, you are getting a dog that has been temperament tested, is trained, and comes with an owner's manual! Thank you for giving all of us adopters an opportunity to brag about our dogs!

Paula

My dog's name is Newman. He actually started out late in session 7 but he was kept over for session 8. He was a year and a half old when we got him and we have had him for three years this April. We don't know anything about his background.

I found out about this program though my sister, who was looking for another dog. She adopted Jerry from session 7 at Christmas-time. Session 8 was graduating and she saw that Newman didn't have a home yet. I was kind of looking for another dog as my 17-year-old schnauzer was showing signs of age and I didn't think

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he was going to be around much longer. I put in an application for Newman because my sister begged me to adopt him and it was her birthday. They had had Jerry for four months by then, and she didn't want Newman to be without a home. SpokAnimal had several people interested in him but they kept passing him up, so it was our turn to go meet him. Newman is a very excited pup when he meets people. When we met him he was all over the place—a crazy, happy, whining, nutso dog. It was hysterical. We spent some time with him at the shelter and decided to give him a chance.

When we took him home, he met our other dog and they got along wonderfully. Newman was still whiny and after about three days I thought, 'Oh, my, what have I done?' But we continued to love him and he settled down after a few weeks. He just needed some time to settle in with us. He is such a loving, sweet dog, He is very affectionate.

He does a few things that the guys at the prison trained him to do. One is when it is time for his dinner. I get the cup of food and he runs for the 'settle' mat that is by his food bowl, then lies down and waits for his food to be put in the bowl. He waits until we say it's okay to eat. The other cute thing he does is when he needs to go out, he very gently paws at my arm to go out. He can sit, lie down, high-five, high-ten, and shake. I would highly recommend adopting from this program. The prisoners do such a good job training the pups. It is a win-win situation for both—they help each other. I can't say enough good things about this program.

Karen

Scooby, adopted in 2014, was found a few blocks from Canyon County Animal Shelter in Caldwell, Idaho, when he was just a little pup. He was transferred to SpokAnimal when he wasn't adopted there, and then he went into the prison program.

My other dog, Scout, has had many training classes with Diamonds in the Ruff so I was familiar with the program. My older dog passed away and I decided to get another dog to keep Scout company. I've always adopted from rescues/shelters.

When I first saw Scooby, I asked Carol Byrnes about him. He was supposed to be a "hearing helper" dog, so was spoken for—but he was pretty skittish and afraid, so when the session was over he did not have a pending adoption. That's when Carol called me. I took Scout to visit and Scout almost literally said we should adopt Scooby.

When I came to pick him up he was a very frightened dog—of me, of my SO, and even of my grandchildren, much to their dismay. It seems he was kind of "on and off" in the program as far as fear issues go. It did not take too long to help him feel safe with lots of love.

I was surprised at how hard he tried to get Scout to play. Despite teeth showing and growls from Scout, he would break off and then return until Scout finally would play with him. "Now will you play?" "No. Back off." "How about now?"

Scooby now knows Canine Freestyle moves such as scooting backwards around me. He can retrieve toys and put them in a basket (or bring them to me), turn on the light switch, run an agility course, dig up gophers, find a hidden scent, and so many more things. He had gotten a great start in training at the prison and already understood the clicker and had many basic skills.

I have encouraged many friends to adopt a prison dog graduate. The prison dogs are wonderful. They come with socialization, potty training, leash training, basic obedience skills, and even some tricks. Once Scooby got over his initial fears, he showed his stuff! Most of my family and friends already have dogs but would probably

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WANTED
Wanted for excessive cuteness and good manners.

**SESSION 18
Pawsitive
Prison Pups**

GOLIATH - 4 year NM
Chihuahua x

BANDIT 1 year NM
Chihuahua x

NOAH - 2 year NM
Chihuahua x

BUG - 2 year NM
Chihuahua x

DORI - 2 yr SF
Doxie / Chihuahua

BEAR - 1 year NM
Doxie x

MOJO - 6 year NM
Chihuahua x

Currently serving a 10-12 wk sentence at
AIRWAY HEIGHTS CORRECTIONS CENTER
in cooperation with
SPOKANIMAL & DIAMONDS IN THE RUFF

**DONATIONS TO HELP WITH BAIL
ARE GREATLY APPRECIATED!**

For more info visit www.spokanimal.org/prisonpups.php

consider a prison dog for the future. When we were performing with Ruff Revue for retirement homes people were always interested in his story.

I would certainly consider adopting another prison dog in the future. It was so nice to get an older dog that already had some training. He never chewed up our things, never had any "accidents" in the house, and came ready for training. He is great entertainment and keeps us seniors active and busy.

Carol Byrnes (one of the trainers who supervises the program)

Kim [Imel, the second trainer in the program] spotted Ellie as she was previewing potential dogs for the coming session and told me about her. I fell in love with Ellie when we went to "interview" dogs for Session 3. I was leaving for the month of January to attend an instructor course in India, so I missed most of her class time while she was at the prison. I got back to the States in time for her graduation and took her home that day.

When we got home, I quickly discovered that she had really benefited from the tall prison fencing. She was fixated on squirrels to the point of climbing trees and she could scale fences like an American Ninja Warrior over a warp wall.

Some creative fencing later, Ellie stays safe inside her yard.

Her foundation training while in prison has made her a joy to live with, and her love of training continues. She demos with me in classes at Diamonds in the Ruff.

People often ask, "Are the dogs safe in the prison? Do they enjoy their time there?" I can answer with an unqualified "Yes!"

Ellie gets to go back in between sessions as a demo dog for classes. She can't wait to get inside the prison and see the guys. At the end of class on her first visit back, she strained at the leash, wanting to go with the handlers when they filed out to go back to their units. The prison was her first home after her shelter stay, and she can't wait to go back to visit.

To read more about the Pawsitive Dog Training Program, visit SpokAnimal's website at <http://www.spokanimal.org/prisonpups.php> or the program's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/PawsitiveDogPrisonProgram/>.

Donations are always needed. No taxpayer funds provide supplies or support for this program. Donations can be made to SpokAnimal, 710 N. Napa, Spokane, WA 99202, or through PayPal. Pawsitive Dogs' prison page on SpokAnimal's website (www.spokanimal.org) features a special PayPal link on the program page. Be sure to note PRISON DOGS in the comments section if you send in a check.

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For information on the program or to become a Half Way Hounds prison dog foster home, contact MJ at halfwayhounds@spokanimal.org.

To Adopt a Prison Pup

For more information on adopting a prison pup and to download the application, go to <http://www.spokanimal.org/adoptprisonpup.php>. Email your application to halfwayhounds@spokanimal.org.

Send a Care Package to a Prison Pup!

Check out their Amazon Wish List

at https://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/2WTKHYWSDYY01/ref=topnav_lists_1

Val Hughes

Val Hughes has been training dogs and their people in the Spokane area since 1980. In 1990, she started her own business, The Family Dog, which offered dog owner counseling and training classes in three locations around the area. Val's golden retriever Jack, certified as a Delta Pet Partner, was one of the first two dogs in the pilot program for pet-assisted therapy visits at local hospitals. Val trained hearing dogs for five years through Pacific Northwest Hearing Dogs. Her own dogs have appeared in print, TV, and billboard advertising, in two movies, and in many local stage productions for Spokane Children's Theatre, Spokane Civic Theatre, Spokane Falls Community College, and Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre. Her dog Teasel appeared as Chowsie in Gypsy at Spokane Civic Theatre. As editor of the professional journal of the National Association of Dog Obedience Instructors, Inc., Val won three Maxwell Awards from the Dog Writers Association Of America.

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