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A History of Prison Inmate–Animal Interaction Programs

EARL O. STRIMPLE
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Interest is growing in establishing animal-facilitated programs in prisons. Although food animals have been maintained by prisons for years, few have looked at the benefits inmates derive from working with animals. Recently, prisons have started dog and horse training programs. Preliminary evidence indicates that inmates benefit, learning life-enhancing skills and lowering the recidivism rates. Shelter dogs and wild horses trained by the prisoners help people with physical and emotional needs. State and federal funds are needed to further study the benefits derived for prisoners, animals, and society.

Keywords: *domestic animals; therapeutic use; pets; human-pet bonding; prisons*

Generally, the public is motivated by one concept in dealing with prisoners: punishment. There are three objectives for the federal prison system: to have prisoners recognize authority, to instill "an inmate work ethic," and to enhance the morale of the prison staff (Allen, 1989, p. 8). The public gives little thought to rehabilitation until confronted with the escalating cost of incarcerating these individuals. Although rehabilitation of prisoners is not a goal, it must be if we want to make these individuals functioning members of society and lower the financial cost to the community. We must consider novel approaches to rehabilitating felons, including using dogs, horses, and other animals to teach inmates life-enhancing skills.

To date, no one has attempted to survey all prisons to find out which ones have animal training programs for inmates. The benefits include lower recidivism rates and concomitant lower costs to the state. In private communication with Robert Kent, superintendent of the Sanger B. Powers Correctional Center in Oneida, Wisconsin, he said, "Since our dog training program started in 1997, we've had 68 inmates released who were involved in the program and not one has reoffended and returned to prison." This success translates into reduced cost when considering that nearly two thirds of state and federal inmates nationally are recidivists. Based on the potential benefits for both prisoners and society, this papers discusses successful programs where inmates train animals in correctional facilities.

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HISTORIC PRECEDENTS

In the United States, using dogs in an institution where individuals were confined was first described in letters exchanged between the Secretary of Interior Franklin K. Lane and William Alanson White, M.D., superintendent, Government Hospital for the Insane (renamed St. Elizabeth Hospital) in Washington, DC. On August 12, 1919, Lane wrote,

> Would it not be practicable for you to have some dogs over there that the men could play with and chum with? . . . Has this thing been tried in any of our institutions? (D'Amore, 1976, p. 2)

Dr. White responded on August 18, 1919,

> I have your letter of the 12th instant, suggesting the use of dogs at this hospital as chums and playmates for the patients. Such an experiment, so far as I know, has not been systematically tried out, but I see no reason why it should not be. . . . I shall be very glad to try it. (D'Amore, 1976, p. 2)

During World War II, animals played an important role in the prison camps maintained in the United States for German prisoners of war (POWs). In New Hampshire at Camp Stark, animals brought guards, POWs, and the local town inhabitants together. The horses the prisoners used for logging led to interaction with the townspeople who would wave as the prisoners and horses would pass by in the morning. In addition, the German prisoners adopted wild animals found while working outside the compound. One inmate found a pair of rabbits; when the population reached 30, he let the rabbits go, but not without crying. A pet crow named Jacob had "PW" painted on his back and loved to tease the other animals. One day the German prisoners found a bear cub, brought it back to camp, and tamed it. Americans and Germans posed with the cub for pictures. The cub stayed with them until the mother bear dug under the fence and retreated with its offspring (Koop, 1988, p. 79).

Usually when people are queried about using animals in prisons, they think of Robert Stroud, the "Birdman of Alcatraz," and a book by the same name. Written by Thomas Gaddis in 1955, this book was a fictional account of using animals in a U.S. prison. Later, it was made into a movie starring Burt Lancaster. However, the true story of Stroud is one of failure. There were not pets at Alcatraz because it was a maximum security federal penitentiary with minimum privileges. Before going to Alcatraz, Robert Stroud had raised some canaries at the Leavenworth Federal prison. While in Alcatraz, he did write a 500-page book, *Digest of Bird Diseases*, from which he received royalties and the nickname "Bird Seed" Stroud (DeNevi & Bergen, 1974, p. 207).

In contrast to Alcatraz, animal therapy has been used in prisons. Despite opposition from those who believe prisons should only punish, people with vision have operated animal programs for the Department of Correction in at

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least 15 different states and in one Federal Penitentiary. As with any animal-associated program within a prison, the inmates are taught the appropriate way to interact with the different animal species. The first successful animal therapy program in a U.S. prison occurred at the Oakwood Forensic Center (formerly the Lima State Hospital for the Criminally Insane), Lima, Ohio. Although this institution was part of the State's Mental Health Department, it was the most secure facility in the State. David Lee, a psychiatric social worker, initiated a therapy program in January 1975 after noting improvement in some men who had cared for an injured bird. A patient had found a hurt sparrow in the prison yard. Although no animals were allowed in the wards at the time, the inmate smuggled the bird into the building and hid it in a broom closet. This ward housed the institution's most depressed and noncommunicative patients. The patients adopted the bird and caught insects to feed it. For the first time, the inmates began acting like a group and related well to the staff. When the staff realized animals could be effective therapy, the hospital proposed a study to evaluate the benefits and wrote guidelines to protect the animals. The hospital conducted a year-long comparison study between two identical wards, except one had pets and the other did not. The ward with the pets required half the amount of medication, had reduced violence, and there were no suicide attempts. The other ward had eight suicides attempted during that period (Lee, 1983, pp. 23-24).

The idea of introducing animals to the Washington Correction Center for Women (WCCW) in Gig Harbor, Washington, was a dream of Kathy Quinn (now Sister Pauline), who has since helped start more than 17 dog-training programs in various correctional facilities. A dog trainer herself, she learned of Dr. Leo Bustad, then Dean of Washington State University Veterinary College, and a program he started where dogs were used to help others change their lives. She talked to Bustad and, together, they established a dog training program at the WCCW run by Tacoma Community College using dogs rescued from the Tacoma–Pierce County Humane Society (Bustad, 1990, p. 72; Hines, 1983, pp. 7-11).

The benefits of this program for the prisoners were threefold. The women experienced increased self-esteem, developed a marketable skill, and earned college credits. The community gained as well. Dogs that would have otherwise been killed were trained to help people with special needs. For example, Sue Miller, a woman convicted of murder, became a successful dog trainer. The first dog she trained was Glory, who was given to Burt, a young man with severe birth defects who was unable to walk and was confined to a wheelchair. Glory was trained to carry books, to help negotiate sidewalk curbs and elevators, and to pick up dropped objects. Sue also trained Sheba, a dog given to Angie, a 14-year-old girl who suffered from severe epileptic seizures. These seizures were so severe that a parent had to be with her constantly. Sue trained Sheba to recognize a seizure. Fortunately, with time, Sheba intuitively recognized an impending attack. Being reassured by the presence of Sheba, Angie had a decrease in the number of seizures and is leading a happier life.

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Although not as widely used in prisons as dogs, horses have become more significant in programs. The first such horse partnership was started by Dr. Ron Zaidlicz and his nonprofit foundation, the National Organization for Wild American Horses (NOWAH), in the late 1970s. In response to a request from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Zaidlicz helped the state penitentiary in Canon City, Colorado, which had bought three mustangs from the BLM but did not know how to train them. Zaidlicz joined the prison staff and instituted a horse training program. Although it was not designed to impart vocational skills, the program enabled prisoners to learn all aspects of equine husbandry, including treating injuries and illnesses and gentling horses. Some inmates became adept ferriers. Through Zaidlicz's effort, inmates learned to care and trust. Not only was there success with the prisoners but the Professional Industries in the Department of Corrections made money to support the prison (Zaidlicz, 1988).

Another important program was started in 1982 at the Central Facility of the DC Department of Corrections in Lorton, Virginia. The program was discontinued in 1998 when the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBP) took control of the facility. I had been cooperating with the local humane society to care for injured cats that colonized at Lorton. Because animals already lived there, I felt it would be possible to organize an animal-facilitated program similar to the one at the Oakwood Forensic Center in Lima, Ohio.

I was concerned about feeding the cats at Lorton. When I asked one inmate how it was done, he said, "I eat my breakfast, the cats get my lunch, and we share my dinner." He then demonstrated this to me: He went to the yard, whistled, and five cats went scrambling, not to him but his dorm. Therefore, to provide adequate nutrition, I asked Dr. Jack Mara from Hill's Pet Nutrition for help. Hill's Pet Nutrition supplied Science Diet cat food for more than 10 years. Dr. Ted Lafeber provided a pelleted diet for the birds. Vaccines and other medications were supplied by various drug companies. These donations were essential for a viable program.

The Lorton project demonstrated that animals produced a sustained interest for the men. Some men asked how their animals might help them get a job. The idea of job training led me to approach the local chapter of the American Association of Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS). The association recommended the Assistant Laboratory Animal Technician course, which is used to teach entry-level people the fundamentals of laboratory animal care. Lorton men who did exceptionally well and received excellent teacher recommendations were eligible for work release at a local laboratory. For men serving longer sentences, the knowledge gained in this course helped them take better care of the prison animals. A number of men left prison and found employment in animal-related fields. When they applied for these jobs, although they did not have an AALAS Certificate, they had a certain self-confidence that gave them a "leg up." The animals in their care were better off and the men had a more promising future (Hines, 1983, pp. 7-11; Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991, pp. 133-152).

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CURRENT PROGRAMS

Animal training programs in prisons will certainly increase in number as the benefits become known. Already a variety of programs have developed through the effort of individuals who, for a variety of reasons, overcame resistance of the correctional system. (Resistance is often encountered when programs are provided by outside organizations. Correctional officers perceive that they are losing some control of the correctional facility.) There are some important individuals who had the vision to see the benefit that would occur to society.

There has been only one dog training program in a federal prison. Changes were made in federal prisons once an assistant encouraged Donna Bucella, the U.S. Attorney in Tampa, Florida, to intervene. Bucella was able to convince the FBP to drop the ban of animals in prisons. Working with Julie Aichroth, director of Southeastern Guide Dogs, Inc., dogs were brought into the Coleman Federal Complex, a minimum-security work camp for women located in Coleman, Florida. After being trained as dog handlers, the inmates housebroke and socialized the dogs. Leaving Coleman, the dogs return to Southeastern Guide Dogs for 6 months of advanced training before being given to individuals with impaired vision (Brink, 2001).

There are many pluses to this program. Not only do the visually impaired benefit but the inmates learn how to become dog trainers and counselors and they receive training as veterinary assistants. After their release, some women can attend a 2-year vocational school and earn a certificate as a veterinary technician.

At another federal institution, assistance dogs for the physically challenged are trained by U.S. Army inmates at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and Fort Knox, Kentucky. In 1994, the Animals in the Military Helping Individuals (AIMHI) was established at Fort Knox, Kentucky, through the combined effort of the medical, law enforcement, and veterinary commands. In 2000, the AIMHI was expanded to Fort Leavenworth to enable the army to provide an increased number of trained dogs and to involve more inmates as dog trainers.

At these facilities, animals are trained for military veterans and family members. According to Susan Bass, director of the AIMHI program, dogs are not only trained as service dogs, hearing dogs, or social therapy dogs but prisoners receive instructions on animal husbandry, human and animal behavior, and dog training. This program provides vocational training and helps the men in their transition back to civilian life.

As of 2001, Bass says that 112 dogs have been trained and 44 have graduated. Fifty men have received certificates of training out of the 128 men who have been involved. She says the cost of the program is kept low because the only expenses are the professional staff salaries, dog food, and supplies. Although the normal expense of training a service dog may run $10,000 to $12,000 in the civilian world, the cost in the military will average $4,000.

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Project Pooch was one of the first programs to bring incarcerated juveniles together with abandoned and abused dogs. Joan Dalton started this program in 1993 at McLaren Juvenile Correctional Facility in Woodburn, Oregon, where she was the principal of the school. In 1999, Project Pooch obtained nonprofit status and hired a project manager. Students learned real-life skills. Not only did they learn dog grooming and training but they studied the health needs of the animals. The inmates learned by running a boarding kennel where the dogs received training and were bathed on discharge. The skills these young men learned and developed can be put to use in most communities because boarding and grooming facilities are always needed (Hill, 2001, pp. 8-9).

Fortunately for Dalton, she had her program evaluated; it was probably the first program that studied the effects of dogs on incarcerated youth. For her dissertation, Sandra Merriam-Aduini studied the difference Project Pooch made on adjudicated, incarcerated, violent male juveniles concerning recidivism, reformation, and behavioral changes using human-animal interactions and emphasizing responsibility, patience, and compassion for all living things. The study intended to place the value of reformation in a context underlined by judicial order by the Oregon Youth Authority and the Oregon Department of Education. As reported in Merriam-Arduini's dissertation abstract,

> The findings indicate that there is zero recidivism of POOCH participants, that the program assists to meet judicial orders and educational expectations with high percentages. Based on survey responses from the adults there appears to be a marked behavior improvement in areas of respect for authority, social interaction and leadership. The youth provided descriptors of change and growth in areas of honesty, empathy, nurturing, social growth, understanding, confidence level and pride of accomplishment. (Merriam-Arduini, 2000)

The State of Ohio has been exemplary in introducing dog training programs in 26 state and 2 private prisons. In 1991, Governor George Voinovich wanted the prisons in Ohio to be "good citizens" in the communities where they existed. He mandated that all inmates must do community service (Suber, 2002).

In personal communications with Wanda Suber, administrator for the Bureau of Community Service within Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC), she reported that the animal training program is one of the most important programs in their cooperative venture with nonprofit organizations. Not only do prisoners train dogs to be good citizens but also to help people with special needs. Dogs are trained to assist people with visual deficits; mobility problems; and hearing, neurological, and emotional problems (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections [ODRC], 2000).

One of the significant dog training programs that has been developed is Pilot Dogs, Inc., of Ohio (PDIO), located in Columbus, Ohio. In talking with Laurie Schott, the director of the training program, she explained that PDIO initiated its first puppy training class at the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville,

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Ohio, in 1992. Currently, PDIO is working with only 7 out of 28 prisons in Ohio and with 1 prison in West Virginia where dogs are being trained. PDIO thinks only five dogs can be effectively managed at any one prison. Schott said Pilot Dogs is satisfied with the way the dogs are trained no matter which prison is involved.

In 1982, the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF) was founded in the state of New York by Monique Koehler to provide a safe home for race horses after finishing their racing career. To locate a place for these horses, Koehler talked to New York State Senator Howard Nolan, who suggested she look at prisons with farmland. She approached the Wallkill Correctional Facility in upstate New York and negotiated an agreement to use the 72-acre farmland next to the prison (Thomas, 2000, p. 8). Koehler started a program to train inmates to care for horses with a curriculum developed by TRF and accredited by the New York State Department of Education. The program had a profound effect on the men because for the first time in their life they were learning a good job skill and caring for other living things.

In 1991, TRF opened their second facility at the Charles Hickey School in Baltimore, Maryland, a facility that housed boys between the ages of 14 and 17. Working around the horses had a calming effect. With patience, understanding, and a kind hand, the kids and the horses bonded. The juvenile offenders received unconditional love, something that was missing in their home life (Pedulla, 2001, p. C3).

In November 1999, the Kentucky Thoroughbred Foundation (KTRF) opened their Blackburn Operation, a correctional facility in Lexington, Kentucky. With the urging of Governor Paul Patton, the Department of Corrections decided to start a program there (Blowen, 2001, p. A1). Each inmate was expected to work 7 days a week looking after four or five horses and making $2 a day. Jeff Oliver, a long-time correctional employee and the farm manager, said that some prisoners in this group reported that "never in their life had anyone or anything been dependent upon them and now they do" (Adams, 2001, p. 32).

Inmate Scott Williams said, "Horses demand respect and through them I've learned respect for life. Some horses we got were on their way to the killers. You never can do enough for them." Williams sees the horse farm at Blackburn as a vocational school to learn equine care. Few people would describe prison as a positive experience but Williams feels Blackburn has taught him vocational skills and has changed him for the better (Adams, 2001, p. 35).

Our federal government, through the BLM, has established a partnership with prisons for horse training programs. At the present time, four prisons are actively involved. Horses are kept at the Wyoming Honor Farm in Riverton, Wyoming; East Canon Correctional Complex in Canon City, Colorado; Hutchison Correctional Facility in Hutchison, Kansas; and in the James Crabtree Correction Center in Northwest Oklahoma.

According to Don Glen, a regional supervisor for the BLM, the prison program is quite beneficial and cost-effective. For example, the Wyoming Honor

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Farm will feed, provide veterinary care, and train a wild horse for $3 a day, the same amount of money it cost the BLM to keep a horse in a corral. At the Wyoming Honor Farm (WHF) inmates work with their horses for 60 to 90 days before the animals are adequately trained. Since the inception of the program, nearly 3,000 horses have been trained there. According to Mike Buchanan, director of the horse program at WHF, there is very little tension among the men on the farm. BLM is very happy because with the money they save and the expert training the horses receive, they are more readily adoptable (http://doc.state.wy.us/prisons/horse_training.html).

CONCLUSION

At a time when prisons are becoming more expensive to operate and there is little change in the high rate of recidivism, new thought should be given to alternative prison programs. Animals are part of the American culture and by working with animals in prisons, inmates are receiving vocational training and psychological rehabilitation. Not only do they save unwanted dogs and horses from sure destruction, these animals are trained for people with various physical needs. As reviewed in this article, there is evidence from firsthand experience that animals and animal training programs can change the atmosphere of prisons and provide meaningful work and training for inmates. The wardens and superintendents who pride themselves in the improvement they have seen in their correctional institutions need to speak out. State and federal funds should be made available to develop and evaluate animal programs in correctional facilities. Animal programs appear to be an effective cost-saving way of training inmates and keeping them from returning to prison, but research in this area is desperately needed.

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