

Site

HMP Dovegate

Name of project / initiative

Restart Dogs - dog training project

Overview

Restart Dogs provides vocational training to prisoners in dog training and behaviour. They work and train alongside experienced tutors to train puppies to become assistance dogs such as with wheelchair users, children with autism, and people with PTSD. The impact on the men involved has been incredible. Through training the dogs using positive reinforcement rather than violence or aggression, and learning about the dogs' behaviour and responses, they learn important lessons for themselves in how to manage their own behaviour, and how to deal with difficult situations they might encounter in their day to day lives. And working with the dogs, and their fellow trainers, they also learn about compassion and respect, and we have seen their teamwork and social skills improve, and seen them develop greater empathy, and feelings of self worth. This has all led to marked improvements in the men's wellbeing and behaviour, and many of them now act as role models and calming influences to their peers. On top of that, they are contributing positively to the lives of people in the community, and gain valuable experience and a qualification in an area where there is a real skills shortage, offering enhanced employment opportunities on release.

Longevity

It's been running since the end of 2021.

Benefits

As noted above, the positive impact of the programme are hard to overstate, both for the men themselves, the establishment as a whole, and the wider community.

Uniqueness

There are other animal projects around the estate, such as pat dogs. What's different about this approach is that it's about prisoners training the dogs, and learning from them as they do so. Werrington also run the programme, albeit on a smaller scale.

Applicability

This could be done in many prisons and we have had interest from other jails already.

Requirements

It does require suitably qualified trainers, and the dogs themselves. And as it's an 18 month programme, it does need people with at least that time left in the establishment.

For more information:

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See also: <https://bit.ly/restartdogs> [Video]

Submitted by:

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