

A New Leash on Life: Benefits of Dog Training Programs in Prisons

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Abstract

Dog training programs in correctional facilities (DTPs) where inmates groom, kennel, and train service, support, and companion dogs have become widespread. Prior research shows that DTPs are beneficial, and reported recidivism rates for DTP participants are lower than rates for more traditional vocational program participants and those of the general prison population. In this paper, I argue that DTPs are highly beneficial for participants due to the human-animal bond. Specifically, DTPs allow participants to build a relationship with a dog which brings them love and builds their confidence. Also, through teaching and training the dogs, inmates are able to gain emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. In particular, DTP participants learn good communication skills, how to work through behavior, how to regulate their own emotions and cause-and-effect relationships. Inmates' restored well-being as well as the vocational skills and certificates that accompany DTPs, allow participants a better chance when re-entering society. In making this argument, I draw on previous literature and five interviews I conducted with women who have either worked at or taken part in Prison Pet Partnership, the DTP at the Washington Corrections Center for Women.

Background

Traditional Vocational-Educational Programming in Prisons

Vocational-Educational programs (Voc-ed) in prisons provide inmates with the chance to learn a vocational skillset such as mechanics, sewing, computer-aided design, and cosmetology. They operate under a rehabilitative premise: by treating the conditions which contributed to an individual's incarceration, programs can allow inmates a better chance at re-entering society successfully (Gleason 1986). Commonly, there are many factors in someone's life that contributed to their crime and eventual incarceration, including job status, mental health, socio-economic status, and personal relationships. By teaching inmates in a certain skillset, voc-ed programs mainly aim at bettering one's job and socio-economic status to give participants a better chance at finding jobs and stable income upon re-entry. Since there is a documented negative relationship between employment status and criminal behavior, the ability to find and keep employment is directly related to a person's risk of re-offense (Andrews et al 2010). Targeting ability to find and keep employment is a large reason for the efficacy of voc-ed programs in reducing recidivism rates (Andrews et al 2010).

Research has shown that voc-ed program participants have lower recidivism rates, lower parole revocation rates, better release employment patterns and better institutional disciplinary records than the general prison population (Vacca 2020). These lowered rates differ from program to program since voc-ed encompasses many diverse programs. Different programs can have different effects on participants depending on vocational features that include applicability to job market (in terms of income and growth), length of time in program to grow marketable skills, and programming being close to release. Differing effects of programming can also arise

due to more personal factors, such as matching an offender's individual needs and their level of enthusiasm and connection to the work (Lawrence et al 2002).

Many studies have been done on the benefits of voc-ed programs. While decreased recidivism rates among voc-ed participants differ based on many factors, various meta-analyses have been done to try to approximate benefits. The Aos et al meta-analysis found that prison-based voc-ed programs produced lowered recidivism rates among participants by 12%, while the Bozick et al meta-analysis and Davis et al meta-analysis found a 5-10% reduction in recidivism among voc-ed participants, and the Boston Consulting Group found a 22% reduction in recidivism across voc-ed programs (Aos et al 2006, Bozick et al 2018, Davis et al 2014, Boston Consulting Group 2016). The Boston Consulting Group estimate should be seen as an optimistic outlier; based on sets of data which were over 20 years old, these statistics cannot be assumed to apply to current voc-ed programs as well as some of the other meta-analyses. While these estimates differ, they give us an approximate value for the effect that voc-ed programs have on recidivism rates.

While voc-ed programs do have a positive effect on participants, their effect isn't that large since they often do not target employment fields or skills which are conducive to finding and keeping post-incarceration employment. First, many voc-ed programs train inmates in fields which do not have many jobs available, are low paying, or don't have much room for growth (Gleason 1986, Lawrence et al 2002). In a study of a southern Michigan state prison, Gleason found that employment opportunities in Michigan were not consistent with areas voc-ed programs trained for like welding, small engine repair, office education, auto repair and optical lens grinding (Gleason 1986). The only employment opportunities favorable to the prison's voc-ed programming were in food service and custodial work, which participants were not optimistic

about in terms of pay or room for growth (Gleason 1986). Second, many voc-ed programs fail to personally connect inmates to the work, which subsequently prevents the programs from meaning more than a resume builder (Gleason 1986). Gleason found that only 41% of voc-ed participants at the southern Michigan state prison wanted to go into work in the fields they were learning (Gleason 1986).

For the purposes of this paper, when I discuss traditional voc-ed programs, I will be referring to vocational, skills-based programs instead of educational programs. Educational programs which allow participants to get high school diplomas and/or college degrees are different than voc-ed programs as they facilitate the development of critical thinking skills, create higher levels of employment marketability, and can allow inmates to work in high paying fields with the potential for growth.

Dog Training Programs in Prisons

Dog training programs in correctional facilities (DTPs) allow inmates to take classes and learn to train dogs for service, emotional support, or companionship. Some programs also have a track for grooming classes and work in grooming. Currently, there are 290 DTPs across the US which differ in program content, capacity, and entry requirements (Cooke & Farrington 2015). DTPs were first implemented in 1981 at the Washington Corrections Center for Women in Gig Harbor, Washington (Cooke & Farrington 2015). The idea behind DTPs derived from research on animal therapy in other rehabilitative areas, such as dogs use as service or emotional support pets (Wormer et al 2017). The first successful animal therapy program in the US was at the Lima State Hospital for the criminally insane in 1975. They tested two nearly identical wards and after a year, the ward with animals required 50% less medication and had less suicide attempts than

the ward without animals (Harkrader et al 2004, Britton 2005). This example highlights the impact the presence of animals can have on one's mental health. The positive effect of animal therapy comes from the human-animal bond, "a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors considered essential to the health and well-being of both" (AMVA 2020). Research on the human-animal bond has shown positive psychological effects, improvement in mental health, and even an improvement in physical health (Wormer et al 2017, AMVA 2020, Harkrader et al 2004, Britton 2005).

Similar to voc-ed programs, research has shown DTP participants have lower recidivism rates, lowered rates of parole violation referrals, better release employment patterns and better institutional disciplinary records than the general prison population (Cooke & Farrington 2016, Chianese 2009). There are studies which track recidivism rates for DTP participants. While these studies are all based on a singular program and there are not many studies, we can still utilize their data to approximate the effects of DTP participation on recidivism. Moneymaker and Strimple followed 96 participants at the People, Animals, and Love program at Lorton Correctional Complex. They found a 46% lower recidivism rate for DTP participants when compared to the average prison population (Moneymaker & Strimple 1991). Merriam's evaluation of Project POOCH, reported that none of their 89 program participants had recidivated, showing a 38% lower recidivism rate than the average prison population at the same facility (Merriam 2001). Chianese's evaluation of A New Leash on Life also reported no recidivism among the 28 participants, which is 13.8% lower than the population's recidivism rate at the same facility (Chianese 2009). Hill's assessment of a Florida based program assessed that recidivism rates were between 6% and 47% lower for DTP participants (Hill 2020). While these recidivism statistics are vastly different from one another, they have a higher average than those

of voc-ed programs. These DTP statistics on range from 6% to 47% lowered recidivism (Moneymaker & Strimple 1991, Merriam 2001, Chianese 2009, Hill 2020) while those from voc-ed programs typically range from 5% to 22% lowered recidivism (Aos et al 2006, Bozick et al 2018, Davis et al 2014, Boston Consulting Group 2016). Even at the most optimistic outlier, voc-ed programs' recidivism rates are lower than those of DTPs.

The efficacy of DTPs is two pronged; they give personal benefits stemming from the human-animal bond and vocational-educational benefits which increase participants' employment marketability upon release.

The personal and emotional connection that stems from the human-animal bond allows inmates to gain emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. The unconditional love that animals give allows participants an outlet for their love and need for physical touch, and can alleviate some of the stress of the prison environment. Since inmates live their lives absent of touch and acceptance, dogs can "stimulate a kind of love and caring that is not poisoned or inhibited by the prisoners' experiences with people" (Beck & Katcher p.153, 1996). The love also allows them to grow in their confidence (Lai 1998, All et al 1999, Herzog 2011, Cooke & Farrington 2016). Their relationship also contributes to both the growth of the inmate and dog. Training the dog allows the inmate to engage with positive reinforcement (Furst 2006, Harbolt & Ward 2009), communication (Chianese 2010), emotional regulation (Cooke & Farrington 2016) and cause-and-effect relationships. These lessons become internalized until it becomes natural for participants to understand them not just in relation to the dogs, but in relation to their own actions and relationships. The lessons become internalized because the relationship with the dogs and the lessons they are teaching the dogs matter to them. In this way, DTPs can be viewed as a successful due to the human-animal bond.

DTPs vocational-educational value goes past that of traditional voc-ed programs due to the range of marketable job skills they provide, the state of the pet industry, and the high interest levels which participants have surrounding future animal work. DTPs provide a variety of marketable job skills including dog handling, grooming, training, office work, problem solving, and communication (Furst 2006, Cooke & Farrington 2016). This differs from many traditional voc-ed programs which train in one skill such as computer-aided design or sewing. Also, the pet industry is growing which allows DTP participants to easily find well-paying employment after release (APPA 2020). Further, employment in the pet care industry often provides opportunity for promotion into managerial positions which is also due to the growing nature of the industry (APPA 2020). Lastly, participants in DTPs are often passionate about working with dogs during and after release due to the bond they have with animals (Cooke & Farrington 2015). Their bond makes going to work more than merely a job that they are obligated to attend. Although this passion for work can exist in other voc-ed programs, it does not exist at as high of levels (Gleason 1986). While some people can connect deeply to the work they are doing such as mechanics, computer-aided design, cosmetology or sewing, it is far easier for people to connect with work when it includes a connection with someone else. The connection that DTP participants have with animals allows the vocational-educational benefits to be heightened.

While the vocational benefits of DTPs should not be discounted, the main difference from traditional voc-ed programs is in the emotional and behavioral changes the human-animal bond brings out in people. The human-animal bond should be seen as the most beneficial aspect of dog training programs in correctional facilities.

Research Methods

In order to understand more about DTPs and what factors contribute to their efficacy, I conducted five interviews. These interviews were conducted with women who have first-hand experience with Prison Pet Partnership (PPP), the DTP at the Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW) in Gig Harbor, WA. Two of the interviews were with women whom were or currently are non-incarcerated staff members of PPP. The other three of the interviews were conducted with women whom had taken part in PPP during their time at WCCW. These women all participated in PPP for at least three years and re-entered society at least three years prior to the interviews.

PPP is a non-profit DTP which allows up to 20 women at a time to interact with dogs and cats. There are two different tracks: boarding/grooming and training. Before women are able to participate, they must pass a basic pet care course. Women then learn about kennel management, are able to earn certificates in these areas and are subsequently able to work in the kennels with dogs which are boarded there from the public. The kennels are in a building separated from the prison. Women also have the opportunity to take grooming classes in order to gain three levels of grooming certificate; after this is completed, they can then work on grooming dogs. In addition to the work in boarding and grooming, women can participate in the dog training program. Here, women are able to train dogs for service, emotional support, and companionship. The dogs are with their trainer full-time and live in their trainer's unit with them. The full-time aspect of PPP is similar to about half of the existing DTPs across the US (Furst 2006). One of the women I interviewed who runs PPP mentioned that in the time she has worked there, they have had only 3% recidivism for program participants. While this is on the upper end of decreased recidivism

rates among DTP participants, it is consistent with previous research showing that DTP participants have significantly lower recidivism rates (Moneymaker & Strimple 1991, Merriam 2001, Chianese 2009, Hill 2020).

In the interviews, I asked the women a series of questions about their participation in PPP including daily tasks, motivation, and benefits. For the three women who had been incarcerated at WCCW and been in PPP, I also asked a series of similar questions about other voc-ed programs they participated in. Lastly, I asked the women about their time since incarceration and long-term benefits. These three interviews gave me important insights on the feelings and internal change that accompanied their participation in PPP. For the two non-incarcerated women who had worked at PPP, I asked about their overall experience and their observations of women who had been in the program. These two interviews gave me indispensable information about the broader picture of women who had been in PPP and their lives since incarceration.

After the interviews were completed and transcribed, I analyzed trends within the data. Strong patterns arose in the interview data which allowed me to ascertain beneficial aspects of DTPs and how they differ from voc-ed programs. Since the sample size for interviews is relatively low, I have analyzed these trends with previous research and literature on DTPs.

Limitations

One possible limitation of this interview research is self-selection bias. Interviewees all consciously chose to take part in these 45-minute long interviews, leaving the possibility that the women whom chose to complete interviews are not representative of the whole population of women who have experience with PPP. It is possible that the women who chose to participate in

interviews are the ones that reaped the most benefits from PPP and were eager to talk about their experience.

The low number of interview participants also provides a limitation. The small sample size may decrease the accuracy of the study since trends were only analyzed over the five interviews. Lastly, all of my interviewees were women who completed the DTP at PPP. While PPP is similar to other DTPs nationwide, this certainly limits the generalizability of results across diverse programs and populations. The results from this study are reliable and give us insights on DTP benefits across programs due to the parallel benefits observed in research on other DTPs but, it is important to note that they came from a distinct program (PPP) with a distinct population (adult women).

Key Findings and Discussion

Why are DTPs so effective in reducing recidivism rates among participants? Throughout the five interviews, several themes emerged. Each of the women mentioned the strong impact of their bond with the dogs, including the love from the dogs and their growth through training the dogs. As well as this, each of the women mentioned the marketable job skills they gained through the DTP, including pet care, grooming, kennel work, office work, communication and problem solving. The vocational-educational aspect of DTPs should not be underscored as each of the women was able to quickly find work in animal care after re-entering society. However, based on the data, it is clear that the larger beneficial aspect of DTPs emerges from the connection women formed with the dogs and their internal growth through those relationships. In this sense, DTP's benefits are holistic, they provide both vocational-educational skills and the basis for internal growth and interpersonal skills.

There was also significant testimony about benefits reaped due to PPP's full-time nature. For women who train service dogs at PPP, they have their dog live with them in their cell and they are with them at every moment throughout their week. Lastly, there was some testimony about PPP's high entry requirements. Similar to other DTPs, PPP has high entry requirements to ensure the safety of the dogs so, it is possible that this has some bearing on program efficacy if the women participating are those which likely wouldn't have recidivated anyways. In this section, I go over all of these key findings in-depth.

Effect of the Human-Animal Bond

The main theme in the interview data was the impact of the bond with the dogs. DTPs are effective at lowering recidivism rates among participants because of two beneficial pathways stemming from the human-animal bond. First, the loving and supportive relationship with the dogs allows women to avoid the emotional hardening that takes place in prisons and enables self-esteem growth. Second, through working with and training the dogs, the women were able to engage with communication, working through undesirable actions, emotional regulation, and cause-and-effect relationships which allowed them to grow personally in these areas.

Formation of a Loving and Supportive Relationship

a. Avoidance of Incarceration's Emotional Hardening

The loving and supportive relationship with the dogs is impactful for women in prison and was mentioned in all five interviews. The love of a dog is unconditional; they don't care that someone is in prison or treat them any differently because of their previous criminal actions. The love, affection, and joy that dogs bring into people's lives is rare in correctional facilities. Most prisons in the US are cold, hard, and mostly devoid of caring relationships, often leaving those incarcerated in worse mental and emotional state than when they came in (Crewe et al 2013). All three women I interviewed who had been incarcerated at WCCW discussed how doing time hardens people, and how inmates must put up a tough front to survive. Further, how their relationships with the dogs in PPP helped them avoid this hardening effect of incarceration. One woman I interviewed described the following:

The system of incarceration has a tendency to harden people and I desperately wanted not to be hardened ... by being able to be in relationship with these

animals I was able to circumvent that kind of natural petrification that happens inside prison.

The relationships formed with the dogs and the ability to give and receive love allowed the women to feel positive emotions during their time in prison, which is usually so devoid of positive emotions. These emotions allowed the women not to be further hardened by the experience of incarceration.

b. Physical Touch

Another way that dogs provide an opportunity for positive emotions in prison is through physical contact. Physical contact is not allowed in prisons for the safety of prisoners and staff, although it is important for mental and emotional health. Studies show that touch reduces stress, anxiety, depression and releases serotonin and dopamine which are contributors to positive mental health (Ellingsen et al 1986). So, having a dog to hug and pet can be impactful for prisoners' emotional and mental well-being. The impact of a relationship with animals on someone's well-being is not a new concept, animals have been used for emotional and mental support for decades. For incarcerated populations, this impact cannot be understated. Since prison is often devoid of affirming relationships and support, having a dog to fill their emotional needs can be highly beneficial. Research on the incarcerated populations shows that incarceration can cause psychological stress, harm someone's ability to cope with life and regulate their emotions, ultimately impacting their ability to re-enter society successfully (Haney 2002). The relationship the women had with the dogs allowed them to not become hardened by incarceration by giving them love, comfort and physical touch. These afford them an overall better emotional well-being and a better chance at re-entering society.

c. Increased Confidence

The loving relationship with the dogs can also help an individual redefine the way they see themselves, effectively helping build their self-esteem and confidence. Since the dogs give unconditional love and believe in the women, this allows the women to start to believe in themselves again. Re-gaining a sense of confidence, self-esteem, or worth featured prominently in the interviews I conducted. One woman I interviewed described the following:

I [did] work that allowed that mostly broken animals – because we were working with rescues most of the time – to believe in me ... and then they would mirror that to me to the point that I learned how to believe in myself.

Being in a relationship with and working with the dogs mirrored her worth back to her. An increased sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and confidence can be deeply impactful, especially for those incarcerated. This can be really important for incarcerated individuals, since the justice system and incarceration can often reinforce low self-esteem (Haney 2002). So, by allowing participants to build self-esteem, DTPs can potentially circumvent some of this effect. This increased sense of confidence and well-being is a critical capacity utilized in a variety of occupational and interpersonal settings, thus often giving people a better chance at re-entering society successfully.

Training the Dogs Allows Participants to Gain Emotional and Interpersonal Skills

By working with and training the dogs, DTP participants often develop interpersonal skills and emotional understanding. In order to work with the dogs, DTP participants must learn how to communicate, work through undesirable behaviors, regulate their emotions, and understand cause-and-effect relationships. Since DTP participants are using these skills to teach

the dogs, they also learn how these skills can be used in their own life. Throughout my interviews, all five women noted how they grew interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence through their engagement in the program.

a. Increased Communication Skills

Most of the women I interviewed mentioned that the DTP helped them with their communication skills. Since the women were not only in a personal relationship with the dogs, but a professional, training relationship, they had to learn how to effectively communicate positive and negative feedback. If they did not provide the correct feedback, the dogs would not be able to understand commands or basic behavioral expectations. The women had to learn how to communicate and signal to the dogs with their words, actions, tone of voice, and body language. If they could effectively communicate to the dogs what actions were desirable and undesirable, the dogs could become trained for service. At PPP, since the training dogs lived with the women in their units, the communication was non-stop. Even in the little moments, like at dinner surrounded by hundreds of people, or at nightly room checks, the women had to communicate with the dogs about how to act. Learning how to communicate with the dogs helped the women learn how to effectively communicate with other people. One woman I interviewed described the following:

When you take your dogs back [to the unit], you're still working with the communication, you're having a communication. After you do it, after you train two or three dogs, it becomes natural. You start communicating with everybody like that.

In her case, and that of many other DTP participants, communicating with the dogs made effective communication second nature. Understanding how to communicate strengthens one's ability to build strong relationships. Since criminal behavior is directly and strongly related to antisocial potential, strong relationships could help lower one's chances of committing crimes (Zara & Farrington 2015).

Communication is also a marketable job skill. Many of the women I interviewed noted that learning how to communicate with people through the DTP changed their ability to work professionally after re-entry. Further, the type of communication they learned by being in the DTP was rare for other voc-ed prison programming. Since the communication was personal, as they were in personal relationships with the dogs, they believe that the DTP helped with their communication more than any other voc-ed program.

b. Increased Problem Solving Skills

In most interviews, the women noted that teaching the dogs using positive reinforcement helped them learn how to work through undesirable behavior. Participants in PPP learn about positive reinforcement in their 2-week dog training class. They learn about and adopt use of the clicker technique, which is where dogs are conditioned to understand how the distinct noise of a small, metal clicker means they did the right thing. At first, the dogs are taught with the sound of the clicker and a treat, so they begin to associate the clicker noise with positive behavior and reward, until the trainer can move on to just use the clicker. Through this process, the women learned to work through undesirable behavior with the dogs in a positive way. Instead of thinking they needed to punish a dog's undesirable actions, the women had to reframe their thinking and view behavior as an area for improvement. Viewing these actions as one step in the learning

process instead of failures completely flips the script from the way they were previously taught to view undesirable behavior, which is the criminal justice system's emphasis on punitive measures to correct behavior. One woman I interviewed described how her perspective changed while using the clicker:

“the clicker put it into perspective ... changing the way you perceive progress, it's a step at a time. It's very slow at first ... and this helped me learn how to process the concept of: ‘OK this is the behavior is something that I don't want, how do I extinguish it?’ Not a correction, you can't look at it as we're going to correct something, you work through it.”

Instead of using punitive measures to correct dog behavior, DTP participants such as this woman learn how to work through undesirable behaviors in a different manner. Further, they learn that the road to positive behavior comes step-by-step. The dogs could not learn to be a perfect service dog by someone correcting them once – it took months for them to master. Understanding this slow progression towards success, allowed the women to think about their own actions and progress differently. The same woman as from the above quote went on to describe how she started thinking about her own progress as step-by-step, which helped her work towards her goals.

Since offenders are likely to have some sort of problems in their life that led them to crime, the ability to problem solve can be largely beneficial for them (Dowden & Andrews 2004). Further, the understanding that they will not be able to solve the problem immediately, that progress will come one step at a time, can allow them to work steadily towards their goals. For these reasons, the problem solving skills gained in DTPs are beneficial for participants and have implications for recidivism.

Much like communication, problem solving skills are also a soft skill which increases overall employability. Some of the women I interviewed did note that their problem solving skills have helped them in other vocational fields after re-entry. These soft skills provide an important distinction from voc-ed programming because voc-ed programs often do not teach inmates these skills to the same degree. When someone is trained in one skillset and they are just performing this skill day in and day out (take sewing or computer-aided design for example), they will not be provided with the same problem-solving opportunities as training a dog provides.

c. Increased Emotional Regulation

DTPs and working with dogs allows women to learn to regulate their emotions and relationships with others. In most of my interviews, the women discussed how dogs mirror the energy around them. The dogs adopted the woman's energy and reflected it back to them. So, if they were anxious, the dog would be anxious and not ready to train. Or if a woman had a bad relationship with another inmate or a guard, the dog would also adopt this relationship with them. One woman I interviewed who worked at PPP described how the dogs would synchronize with the trainer's emotional reactions:

There was one woman who was very fearful, particularly of men. And every dog that she was with, very quickly became fearful of men ... so that was another aspect that was very interesting, seeing them emotionally doing feedback loops with each other.

On the flip side, if the women are calm, the dogs would also be calm and more receptive to training. In order to be an effective trainer, the women had to learn to regulate their emotions and

their relationships with the people around them. One woman I interviewed explained this effect to me:

My dog could also be a mirror to me in that if I wasn't right, my dog wouldn't act right. So I had to be like, "What's going on with me? It's affecting my dog." And then I would have to address those things within myself.

She felt that her dog would synchronize with her emotions, and if she wasn't 'right', her dog's well-being would be negatively impacted. And when her dog wasn't able to train as effectively, she was forced to work through her emotions or relationships with others. Since the dogs synchronize with their trainer, the women in the DTP have to learn how to regulate their emotions as well as their relationships. The emotional regulation participants learn becomes second nature, until they find themselves carrying this tool in their life outside of the dogs.

Since emotional instability can be a factor contributing to criminogenic behavior, increased emotional regulation can be thought of as an effective intervention (Zara & Farrington 2016). Increased ability to regulate emotions can also contribute positively to one's well-being and relationships.

d. Increased Understanding of Cause and Effect Relationships

Lastly, most of the women I interviewed mentioned how working with the dogs helped them understand the implications of their actions. Through following protocols, understanding effective communication, and emotional regulation, the women learn that if they are not doing these things, there will be an effect on their dogs. And then they will not be able to train the dogs as effectively. One woman I interviewed described the following:

If you follow these protocols as far as what they eat, the training and the way that works – when you don't it's a ripple effect. The cause-and-effect is something that when you're in your early 20s you just don't really think about and you get lost when you're being warehoused.

Learning about how their actions, communications, emotions can have an effect on their dog, helped the women understand that they have an effect. Their actions can have an impact on others, as well as themselves later. The women who spoke on this effect above, mentioned that was something she had previously not thought about. But after participating in the DTP and being in relationship with the dogs, she began to think about her actions. And understanding the idea of cause and effect, helped the women understand and cope with their time in prison better.

Vocational Benefits of DTP

While the main benefits from DTPs come from the relationship with the dogs and the interpersonal skills learned through these relationships, the vocational benefits of DTPs should not be taken lightly. All of the women whom I interviewed who spent time at WCCW and were in PPP worked with dogs after they re-entered society. And the women I interviewed who worked at PPP asserted that almost all the women who get released from the program go into work with animals. All three of the women I interviewed whom participated in PPP worked in a kennel job or grooming job after being released from prison. They said that their time in the DTP allowed them to gain marketable job skills and certificates surrounding dog care, grooming, and kennel management. They were also able to gain broader marketable job skills like communication and responsibility. Although the certifications earned in the DTP are not mandatory to work with animals, the women told me that they are great resume builders and those, combined with their years of experience, position them well to be hired.

DTP participants' increased employability and the fact that the pet industry is currently growing creates an environment for successful re-entry. One principle of effective intervention that research has identified as underlying effective prison programming is focusing on skills applicable to the job market (Cullen & Gendreau 2000). When inmates are trained in jobs which do not match the job market, they will be unable to find substantial work. This is the case for some voc-ed programming which trains participants in fields which there is not much work available in (Gleason 1986). In contrast, the growing nature of the pet industry means ease of job search for many DTP participants. One woman I interviewed who ran the program summed this up and said:

The pet industry is growing ... The inmates get out and most of them can just walk into a job because of their experience with pets in prison.

Her sentiment rang true in my conversations with the women who had been in the programs. Most of them said they had jobs in the pet industry lined up before they left prison.

It is significant not only that these women were able to get jobs in the pet industry after release, but that these were jobs they were excited to have. Since many of the women grow to love their work with the dogs, many of their long-term goals are to work with animals in some capacity. Even for the women who had different long-term goals, the love they have for animals has kept them in some sort of relationship with animals. One woman I interviewed talked about how she has a completely different career now, but still has some clients that she dog sits for because she loves being around dogs. The dogs she watches are ones that she worked with right after re-entry and formed an especially strong relationship with. Her experience highlights how the human-animal bond gives DTP participants an excitement for working with animals in a professional manner. The excitement has significant implications for the efficacy of DTPs since

one factor that lowers the efficacy of traditional voc-ed programs is that participants are not interested in the jobs they are trained for (Gleason 1986). Obviously, there is success within many voc-ed programs and some people find a passion in and later work in the fields they are trained in. However, since most voc-ed programs focus on training inmates in a skill, they often do not feel very connected to the skill; the programs are not personally engaging (Gleason 1986). So, when participants are released, even if they are able to find a job, they often do not feel excited about the work they are doing. In contrast, the DTP participants I interviewed were excited to continue to work in the pet industry; pet industry work gave them an excitement for life outside prison.

Some of the women I interviewed had long term goals unrelated to animal work, but they still emphasized the vocational benefits of DTPs because they were able to use their jobs as a stabilizing point once re-entering society. Having a good paying job right when being released from prison is rare. So for them to save up money in dog work, they were then able to move into other goals like school or other industries for work. In this way, DTP training can be a helpful vocational stepping stone.

Overall, the vocational benefits of DTPs are vast and can launch participants into meaningful work or a long-term career when re-entering society.

Dogs Living in Units

Another major finding from the interview data was an emphasis on the benefits of the training dogs living in the units with the DTP participants. All five of my interviewees discussed that since the program is 24/7, the beneficial elements of the programming are heightened. The benefits of the dogs being with DTP participants were two-fold.

First, when the dogs are with them all the time, it strengthened their relationship with the dogs further and increased their personal investment in the program. The program was no longer just another prison program, it was engrained in every part of their lives. The comforts that the women got from their bond with the dogs were able to be enjoyed at all times, which led to greater overall well-being. The unconditional love and opportunity for physical touch that the dogs brought them were abundant so the women were able to feel that joy at every time of the day. So, the program became that much more personal and meaningful. One of the women who worked for the program witnessed this effect:

I don't know how to say this but like, it follows them home with them. They get to have the benefits in their room, in their tiny little cell, they get to also have a dog. So in that way, I think it's not something that they just go and do during the day.

She saw how the full-time aspect of the program made it into something more than just their day-time work.

Second, when the dogs were with them at all hours, many of the women mentioned, this increased their sense of responsibility and accountability. They had to constantly be responsible for the dog, which meant being aware of what is happening around them, effectively communicating, and regulating emotions at all times. So, in this sense, the full-time aspect of the program allowed their learning to become even more natural to them. One woman explained how responsibility becomes more natural when you're always responsible for another life:

Having that constant and raising a puppy and [when] you have to wake up 14 times to ask the guard to let you out to let your dog go to the bathroom, it's like there's a different kind of responsibility than some of the other voc-ed programs.

In voc-ed programs, as well as most other prison programs, once you leave for the day, you are done. You would not have any further responsibilities and you would not have to think about the program again until the next time you go. So, in this sense, DTPs can teach inmates about the types of full time responsibilities that they will face after release.

While the beneficial effect of the dogs living in the units with the women is important, as it was mentioned in every interview, this does not mean that DTPs where dogs do not live in the units are not beneficial. Further, DTPs are still beneficial if participants are not trainers, but groomers, kennel workers or office workers – effectively making the program part-time. These DTP participants get the same benefits stemming from their relationships with the dogs and the human-animal bond they have formed. They also would receive the same vocational benefits from their time with the dogs. While DTPs are still beneficial when the dogs do not live in the prisoners' units, this research finding implies that some models of DTP – those where the dogs live in the units – are more beneficial.

High Entry Requirements

In some of my interviews, the idea of high entry requirements to DTPs being a possible cause of their success came up. Since the requirements are pretty stringent, people who are able to participate are possibly the inmates who were already unlikely to recidivate upon re-entry. In past studies, researchers have often compared the DTP participant's recidivism rate to that of the general prison population instead of similarly situated inmates (Dunidam et al 2020). Research studies analysed by Dunidam et al's meta-analysis suggest that this is a limitation to recidivism reduction findings of the research. At PPP, all program participants must: have either their high school diploma or GED, be serious infraction free for one year, be minor infraction free for six

months, and they cannot have crimes against animals or other vulnerable populations. One woman whom worked at the program described what implications she thought these barriers had:

I saw a very specific population of people in the prison. I worked with a very specific population and those were people who had been in quite a while and who had worked through a lot of their shit and had spent a lot of time working on themselves and had gotten to a place where they were ready.

Even if DTPs only include a select group of people, it is clear that they are still quite beneficial for the participants. DTPs and the bond that participants build with the dogs is beneficial to their well-being and brings them greater vocational opportunities which they may not have had otherwise. However, these barriers to entry could provide a limitation to the therapeutic success of the human-animal bond. It is clear that more comprehensive research needs to be done in this area.

Program and Policy Implications

Expanding Access to DTPs

Based upon my interview data and findings, DTPs clearly have wide benefits for participants. However, not many prisoners are able to take part in DTPs for various reasons. First, since most DTPs are non-profit programs (Furst 2006), they are often underfunded, which can lead them to have small capacity for participants. For example, PPP has room for 15 women to participate while WCCW has a capacity of 740 women. Across the US, programs range in size from 5-70 (with outliers of one program with two and another with 300) participants (Furst 2006). Given the size of prison population is usually hundreds if not thousands, 5-70 participants are only a sliver of the prison population. The small size means that some women who wish to participate may not be able to. Some of the women I interviewed highlighted the long waiting process to get into PPP because of how small it was. Since it appears there is a want among the prison population for expansion, yet they have not expanded, we can assume that a lack of resources is preventing this expansion. In order to expand access to DTPs, I first recommend that the DOC allocates them with more funding and resources. These would allow them to grow their facilities, staffing, and training classes which would then allow more space for more women to participate.

Second, as I previously discussed, DTPs usually have demanding and highly restrictive entry requirements. Around 60% of DTPs make certain crimes ineligible for participation, and 74.7% have additional eligibility requirements surrounding the participant's behavior, work history, education, and custody level (Furst 2006). These requirements are a barrier to entry which contributes to the lack of access to DTPs for inmates. While it is understandable that

requirements are in place for the safety of the animals, programs or requirements could be modified in order to allow other inmates to participate.

Third, DTPs which have a limit on the amount of time inmates can participate pose an access problem. No body of research suggests that participation time limits are prevalent in DTPs, but they could be becoming more prevalent. The women I interviewed spoke of the recent Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) decision to limit participation in DTPs to two years. DOC is attempting to orient the program towards re-entry, so that those who are releasing soon can participate and reap the benefits, and then new participants can come in afterwards. At first glance, this seems understandable. However, two years is not a lot of time for participants to procure the benefits of working with the dogs. In the beginning of most DTP programming, the inmates take and pass certain classes in pet care, training, and sometimes grooming. After the time spent doing this, they aren't left with much time to build up grooming or training skills that are sufficiently marketable upon release. Also, when participants do not receive a substantial timeframe for training, they may not gain as much emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills as when they are immersed in their relationship with the dog and the teaching they are doing. DTPs are most effective when inmates are able to participate for a sufficient amount of time. The amount of time is unspecified because people are different and will begin to feel the benefits at differing lengths in the program. However, the fact remains that two years is not enough time.

I recommend that the Washington State DOC remove the time constraint of two years from PPP and all other DTPs in Washington. Further, instead of providing a time constraint to try and rotate more people through the program, set forth plans to expand programming. Again, this would require an increase in funding and other resources.

Dogs Live in Units

Lastly, I recommend that all DTP programming adopt the model in which dogs live with the inmates full time. In a 2006 review, around half of DTPs had adopted this model (Furst 2006). While DTPs where the dogs live in separate facilities are still impactful, the benefits for both the participants and others in the prison are heightened when the dogs are around at all hours. For participants, the program and relationship with the dog becomes more meaningful and there is an increased sense of responsibility.

For the greater prison population of other inmates as well as staff, seeing animals around and being able to interact with them increases morale (Harkrader 2004). Pet visitation is a form of pet therapy that research shows gives pleasure, fosters socialization, and other therapeutic benefits (Barba 1995, Savishinsky 1992). My interviewees also noted this effect at WCCW; the other inmates would become warmer during and after interacting with the dogs and the corrections officers would become kinder in these interactions. So, having dogs live with the general prison population can also increase well-being among others not in the program. Based upon this effect and the increased benefits for participants, DTPs appear to be more effective when dogs live in the units with their trainer. I recommend that all DTPs adopt this model and that DOC aids in making this transition.

Conclusion

On average, research shows that DTP participants have lower recidivism rates than participants of other voc-ed programs (Aos et al 2006, Bozick et al 2018, Davis et al 2014, Boston Consulting Group 2016, Moneymaker & Strimple 1991, Merriam 2001, Chianese 2009, Hill 2020). The findings of this report indicate that dog training programs are more successful than most traditional vocational-educational programs due to the holistic nature of the benefits. Not only do they provide vocational benefits, but they also provide emotional benefits from the human-animal bond, and interpersonal/life skills through training the dogs. Specifically, DTPs allow participants to build a relationship with a dog which brings them love and builds their confidence. Also, through teaching and training the dogs, inmates are able to learn emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. DTP participants learn good communication skills, how to work through behavior, how to regulate their own emotions and cause-and-effect relationships. Working with these skills to train the dogs allows the skills to become natural to DTP participants, until they are utilizing them in their everyday life.

The research-proven benefits and efficacy of DTPs imply that greater access to them should be provided. Currently, access is limited because of small resource allocation, stringent entry requirements, and time limits for program participation. While small resource allocation and time limits for program participants could be solved by greater allocation of government funding for DTPs, there must be more research done to see where entry requirements could be relaxed.

Although this study can only contribute modestly to research on DTPs, it highlights their wide benefits and potential in the sphere of effective intervention. While there has been substantial research in the realm of DTP benefits, none to my knowledge have focused on

differing program aspects. Since DTPs differ in size, teaching, eligibility requirement, and time limits, further research should be done on how these affect the benefits received.

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