



Making life better...
inside and out

SAINT FRANCIS
SERVICE DOGS



The Prison Pup Program

With more than 170 people with disabilities waiting for a Saint Francis Service Dog, we have a critical need to raise and train more puppies. We can come closer to meeting that need with our Prison Pup Program. This vital program is a partnership between Saint Francis Service Dogs and The Virginia Department of Corrections at Bland Correctional Center, a medium-security prison that holds approximately 650 male offenders. The program accommodates the need for puppy raisers while providing the inmates with a meaningful and challenging job.

This thriving program began with 3 inmate puppy raisers in 2002 and has expanded to 24 puppy raisers.





The Puppy Raisers and Puppies

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There is an ongoing waiting list of applicants hopeful to gain a position as a Puppy Raiser. Prior to acceptance into the program, the prison program liaison to Saint Francis who manages the participants, selects the puppy raisers after an extensive screening. Participants must maintain near perfect behavior in all aspects of prison life to stay in the program. (To be eligible for the program, inmates must live in the Honor Dorm)

The puppies thrive in prison. They enjoy a consistent schedule, with lots of time for learning, playing and constant companionship. Applying positive training methods approved, taught, and monitored by Saint Francis staff, the puppies are gently guided in the areas of socialization, manners, and obedience, advancing them towards the ultimate goal of becoming a Saint Francis Service Dog.

In turn, the puppies offer love, comfort and humor. The men learn about dog psychology, teamwork, and social support. The program improves the morale of the inmate population as a whole and helps to break down barriers of fear and mistrust, while offering a positive, worthwhile link to the people we serve.

Raising puppies is an active way in which incarcerated men can contribute something extremely positive to society.

“To me this Pup Program means HOPE.”



“Working with the dogs has taught me patience, humility, compassion, consistency, accountability, work ethic, any how to be a part of a team.”

“This program is rewarding because I know I’m helping to improve someone else’s life.”

“I have never liked to read before, but now I read books on dogs. I’m learning about dog psychology, which is teaching me about myself and others.”

“This program has its own ecosystem within the prison...a community that helps one another.”

“The dogs look to me for leadership and guidance, so I step up to the challenge and raise my personal bar to be the best leader and teacher for my dog.”

“My dog thinks I’m a good person, so I try to live up to who she believes I am.”

“My challenges in society revolve around my lack of communication. Training dogs is teaching me how to be a better communicator. I am applying my new communication skills with the other inmates, and am looking forward to using what I’ve learned on the outside with my family and at work.”

“We work together, keep each other motivated and cheer each other on.”





Benefits to Saint Francis Service Dogs

- We need qualified and dedicated puppy raisers in order to meet the need for service dogs.
- The Bland Puppy Raiser's focused attention helps remediate behaviors that may prevent a puppy from becoming a service dog.
- Puppies trained by inmates often have better leash behavior.
- The dedicated training shaves months off of formal training, saving both time and money.
- The Bland Puppy Raisers become a special part of the Saint Francis Family.



Benefits to Inmates

- Caring for the puppies reduces stress level, isolation and fear.
- Raising a puppy for a person with a disability gives meaning and purpose to the lives of the inmates.
- The experience of nurturing a young puppy helps inmates get in touch with their emotions and learn to be caregivers.
- The program aids in the rehabilitation of the men by strengthening their interpersonal relationship skills, bolstering their self-esteem, and teaching them how to be a part of a team.
- The program helps the puppy raiser build useful skills that translate to life after incarceration, and for some, this is the foundation of their career plan upon release.
- They learn new skills, the building blocks of which patience, communications and teamwork can create a foundation for future jobs and careers.



Benefits to Prisons

- The program increases morale throughout the prison as a whole and is credited with the reduction of disciplinary actions across the prison population.
- Since people relate to dogs, the program improves relationships between officers and inmates, because they now have a common focus and interest.
- Inmates are more compliant in order to retain their jobs as puppy raisers.
- The program fulfills the Department of Corrections directive to provide programs that connect inmates to the community.

Benefits to the Community

- The program teaches the puppy raisers responsibility while they learn to focus their attention on something positive and productive. They are given an opportunity to make a course correction in their life, which benefits society.
- We believe that fostering a puppy renews an inmate's sense of hope that he can be successful in other personal relationships after his release.
- By teaching relational and vocational skills, people coming out of prison can break the cycle of poverty and unemployment.
- The program helps rehabilitate the men so that they can rebuild their lives, and has reduced the rate of recidivism with the participating inmates.



Our Future Together

The time and energy commitment from our Bland Puppy Raisers could not be replicated outside of a prison setting with any amount of funding. To sustain this vital program, we need dedicated private support. Contributions designated toward our Prison Pup Program will help us anticipate the needs of the future and allow us to continue to immerse our Bland Puppy Raisers in a rich and engaging environment. At the same time, they help provide specially trained dogs to support our mission.

We look to you, our friends, to become our partners in helping children and adults with disabilities live vibrant and independent lives with the help of a Saint Francis Service Dog.



*“This dog represents
all that is best in man.”
- Etienne Charlet*



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