2013

VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES ACHIEVEMENT AWARD SUBMISSION

A COLLABORATION OF MUTUAL BENEFIT: ORANGE COUNTY'S "COFFEEWOOD CANINES" TRAINING PROGRAM

Orange County's "Coffeewood Canines" Training Program: Application Overview

The Orange County Animal Shelter is an open-admission municipal facility handling an annual average of 2,200 animals. Because the canine population consists of predominantly large breeds lacking in basic obedience and social skills, they are more difficult to place in lifelong loving homes in a timely manner. The Coffeewood Correctional Center, located in Mitchells, VA, has a history of promoting public service and boasts a total of six inmates trained as canine handlers by both the Virginia Department of Corrections and the Department of Homeland Security.

The Orange County Animal Shelter partnered with the Coffeewood Correctional Facility to create the *Coffeewood Canines* training program with the first shelter dogs in residence at the facility by July 1, 2009.

As the *Coffeewood Canines* training program approaches its fourth anniversary, in excess of two hundred dogs have been rehabilitated and adopted through this initiative. Success has been achieved in large part because the participating inmates have demonstrated great skill and compassion in their work with dogs of all different breeds, needs and ability. They have achieved such remarkable feats as instructing a deaf Border Collie in sign language and training several unruly Retrievers for service as therapy dogs.

In turn, the presence of the dogs at the facility has reinforced positive traits in their human companions such as patience, perseverance, teamwork and problem-solving.

The significant social contributions of the inmates related to *Coffeewood Canines* are evident far beyond affecting each dog's personal growth. The multi-faceted objectives of the *Coffeewood Canines* program serve to benefit both the residents of the affiliated institutions as well as the at-large communities of Orange and Culpeper Counties.

In addition, the plight of animals lost, abandoned or seeking sanctuary at local shelters is brought to the forefront through dialogue relating to *Coffeewood Canines*, resulting in increased adoptions and public awareness.

The *Coffeewood Canines* program has proven a successful model of regional collaboration between the Orange County Animal Shelter and the Coffeewood Correctional facility, benefiting both humans and homeless animals alike.

A Collaboration of Mutual Benefit: Orange County's "Coffeewood Canines" Training Program

The Orange County Animal Shelter is an open admission facility housing stray and unwanted companion animals and those brought in as seizures due to neglect or abuse. Staffed by three full-time employees and six part-time, the Shelter is currently operated as a no-kill humane care facility where every effort is made to find lifelong, loving homes for an annual average of two thousand two hundred animals in need. The Shelter relies heavily on rescue agencies and a dedicated team of volunteers.

Located in a more rural community, the Shelter is predominantly populated by larger breed dogs and those with histories of being kept as backyard pets or used to hunt deer and rabbits. As such, they are often difficult to place without the significant investment of time and training necessary to render them marketable to the majority of clients who are seeking well-mannered, indoor family companions. A small staff and an open door status makes safe, expedited placement essential in fulfilling the Shelter's mission.

In need of a solution, the Orange County Animal Shelter partnered with the Coffeewood Correctional Center located in Mitchells, Virginia to establish an inmate dog training program. Entitled "Coffeewood Canines," this flagship program became operational July 1, 2009, and has proven a highly successful tool in addressing this challenge.

The Coffeewood Correctional Center, under the direction of Warden Samuel V. Pruett, has a history of promoting public service and now boasts a total of six inmates formerly trained as canine handlers by both the Virginia Department of Corrections and the Department of Homeland Security. With a notable track record of having qualified numerous detection dogs, these men are skilled canine behavior analysts.

Under the auspices of Coffeewood Canines, six dogs are selected from among those residing at the Orange County Animal Shelter and are transitioned into housing at Coffeewood where they undergo one-on-one training for up to six weeks. Criteria for eligibility are social compatibility with other dogs and the potential to acclimate well into a family setting upon completion of the course.

As with all animals available for adoption from the Orange County Animal Shelter, these dogs have been spayed or neutered, tested for heartworm and treated as necessary, vaccinated, given parasite control, microchipped and behavior assessed. Cost associated with maintenance of this program is minimal.

The Shelter supplies dry and canned food, bowls, leashes, enrichment items (toys and treats), grooming products, training aids and veterinary care as needed; Coffeewood residents and staff provide hours of love, attention, training and targeted coping techniques. Handlers bathe the dogs regularly, monitor their health, weight and habits, and author highly detailed exit reports for each dog in order to facilitate their adoption into appropriate home environments.

Aside from learning the basics of housebreaking, crate-training, name recognition and the rudimentary commands of "sit," "stay," "down" and "come," lucky canine participants are also educated in accordance with specific individual need or talent.

Those demonstrating an aptitude for agility, for example, are taught to play fetch, to "wait" and retrieve their favorite toys upon command, to distinguish which ball is theirs and which are not. As each dog progresses, they are further taught the limits of proper indoor etiquette (stay off the furniture, no counter-surfing, no chewing) and are desensitized to crowds and strangers. For those afraid of thunder, who are head-shy or even living with a physical handicap, problem-solving and patience facilitate amazing change. Examples of the program's many successes include a deaf Border Collie who was taught sign language, a previously unruly Labrador who became the protector of a girl managing epilepsy and a young Retriever mix who graduated with the skills necessary to transition into service as a therapy dog for autistic adults.

The objectives of the Coffeewood Canines program are multifaceted and serve to benefit both the residents of the affiliated institutions as well as the at-large communities of Orange and Culpeper Counties. Aside from rendering adoptable often-overlooked dogs such as hounds, black Labs and mixed breeds, great benefit is derived by the human participants across the board. In his memo of July 15, 2009, Coffeewood Counselor Charles E. Seal wrote, "In the short time the dogs have been here the building has taken on a more positive light. Their presence has been good for both the inmates and staff."

On-site, Coffeewood's new canine companions provide comfort, assuage loneliness and facilitate laughter with their antics. They present challenges, but also tangible measures of pride for their handlers as obstacles are overcome. Compassion, creativity, teamwork and persistence are values promoted and visibly rewarded.

In the public arena, the significant social contributions of the inmates related to Coffeewood Canines are evident far beyond affecting each dog's personal growth. Canine graduates of the training program become ambassadors, representing the potential fulfilled that almost every dog has with the proper time and training. The plight of animals lost, abandoned or seeking sanctuary at local shelters is brought to the forefront through dialogue relating to Coffeewood Canines, resulting in increased adoptions. Successful placement of the animals is of invaluable assistance to the citizens, volunteers and personnel of animal welfare organizations striving to save their lives.

The employees, volunteers and clients of the Orange County Animal Shelter are incomparably grateful to Warden Pruett and his exceptional staff for the opportunity to collaborate on this program and also wish to extend immense gratitude to the inmates for their hard work.

To date, more than two hundred dogs have found new homes thanks to Coffeewood Canines; Profiles of available dogs may be found on Petfinder.com.

Inmate Mike Woodward proved wrong the popular adage "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." Levi, an eight year old neutered male Border Collie who had lived the bulk of his life in a back yard, was Coffeewood Canine's first success. After only three weeks of intensive training, he was fully housebroken, crate-trained and had learned a variety of advanced commands. Levi is the program's first graduate; he was immediately adopted and has become a truly beloved family pet.

Handlers currently working under the auspices of Coffeewood Canines pose with their charges:

A RESOLUTION BY THE
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF ORANGE COUNTY
IN RECOGNITION OF

The Coffeewood Correctional Center
"Coffeewood Canines" Training Program

WHEREAS, The Coffeewood Correctional Center, under the direction of Warden Samuel V. Pruett, has a history of promoting public service and boasts a total of six inmates trained as canine handlers by both the Virginia Department of Corrections and the Department of Homeland Security; and

WHEREAS, The Coffeewood Correctional Facility partnered with the Orange County Animal Shelter to create the *Coffeewood Canines* training program on June 19, 2009, with the first shelter dogs in residence at the facility by July 1, 2009; and

WHEREAS, The *Coffeewood Canines* training program has reached its third anniversary with one hundred eleven dogs having successfully been rehabilitated and subsequently placed in homes, and

WHEREAS, The participating inmates have demonstrated great skill and compassion in their work with dogs of all different breeds, needs and skill levels; and

WHEREAS, The inmates have achieved such remarkable feats as instructing a deaf Border Collie in sign language, training an unruly Labrador to become a successful therapy dog for an epileptic child, and teaching a young Retriever mix the skills necessary for her new life as a therapy dog for severely autistic adults; and

WHEREAS, The significant social contributions of the inmates related to *Coffeewood Canines* are evident far beyond affecting each dog's personal growth; and

WHEREAS, The objectives of the *Coffeewood Canines* program are multifaceted and serve to benefit both the residents of the affiliated institutions as well as the at-large communities of Orange and Culpeper Counties; and

WHEREAS, The plight of animals lost, abandoned or seeking sanctuary at local shelters is brought to the forefront through dialogue relating to *Coffeewood Canines*, resulting in increased adoptions and

WHEREAS, Successful placement of the animals is of invaluable assistance to the citizens, volunteers and staff of animal welfare organizations striving to save their lives

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Orange County Board of Supervisors publicly recognizes the inmates and staff of the Coffeewood Correctional Center for their efforts in rendering the *Coffeewood Canines* program a resounding success, and extends its appreciation to all those involved for their time and dedication.

CERTIFICATE
This is to certify that the foregoing is a true copy of a Resolution duly adopted by the Board of Supervisors of Orange County, Virginia, at a meeting thereof, held on the 14th day of August, 2012.

S. Teel Goodwin, Chairman
Orange County Board of Supervisors

Attest:

Julie G. Summs
Clerk of the Board