



Courtney Robbins/Index

Xavier O'Brien and his mother Andrea play with J.D., a dog that was trained by inmates in the Lansing Correctional Facility in Lansing, Kan.

Inmates train pets for families

Mandi Sagez
for the Index

Andrea O'Brien and her family drove more than three hours to pick up their dog, J.D., from prison.

O'Brien, director of Residence Life, said she and her family adopted 2-year-old Jail Dog (J.D.), a purebred cocker spaniel, through the Safe Harbor Prison Dogs Program in November 2004.

The organization rescues dogs from high-kill shelters and situations.

The program places the dogs in the custody of inmates at the Lansing Correctional Facility in Lansing, Kan.

O'Brien discovered J.D. while searching online for a dog.

"I searched for a cocker spaniel," O'Brien said. "I knew it was a good kids' dog and about the right size."

Her online search brought her to the Safe Harbor for Pets Web site, so she contacted the woman in charge to inquire about J.D.

"He was a stray that they

found on the Junction City campus, and he was just a mess," O'Brien said. "They said that he was in a high-kill shelter, which means that he had a very short period before they would euthanize him."

Safe Harbor quickly came to J.D.'s rescue and placed him in the care of one of the correctional facility's inmates.

The O'Briens chose the name J.D. so they would always be reminded of where he came from.

"People might ask us what his name stands for," O'Brien said. "It allows us to tell his story."

O'Brien and her family traveled to the correctional facility to pick up J.D.

"We hadn't even seen a picture of him," she said. "[Young] had just described [J.D.] to us over the phone."

The O'Briens waited in the visitors area to meet their potential new pet. It did not take long for them to finalize their decision to adopt J.D., O'Brien said.

"He came out of his crate and just kind of snuggled up to our two boys," she said. "We

just knew in about two minutes that he was the dog for us. Actually, it didn't even take [two minutes]."

O'Brien said she thinks the program is a positive thing for the inmates that are assigned to handle the dogs.

"It gives them not only some skills that they can learn, but it also gives them some personal emotional benefits," she said. "They have something to care for and receive some unconditional love from."

Gary Wade, an inmate at the correctional facility, said he agrees the benefits of the program are two-fold.

"It's medicine for the soul, for both of us," he said.

Wade began by describing his typical day, which starts at 4:30 to 5 a.m.

"We take [our dogs] out-

side and give them a break and let them play awhile," he said. "Then we take them inside and feed them, and then we play with them and talk to them and cuddle with them."

Wade said the amount of commands the dog learns is up to the handler.

"We give them the five basic commands, which are sit, down, stay, come and heel," he said. "After that, it's all extra."

He and his dog eat together, drink together, take breaks together and play together, Wade said.

"He lives right beside me," he said. "As a matter of fact, he sleeps beside me at night in my bed."

Wade takes care of a husky named Dodge. He is in the process of training Dodge for his family back home.

"I'm thinking about adopting him for myself, my wife and my kids," Wade said. "I'm going to

work with him and train him for my son."

Wade's 24-year-old son has cerebral palsy and is in a wheelchair.

"Anything as far as picking up, toys, forks, spoons, I'll be working with [Dodge] on that, pulling a wheelchair maybe," Wade said.

I. G. Wimbish, another inmate at the facility, said training a dog to do a variety of commands is easy.

"I don't force the dog [to do tricks], but I let it show me what it can do because it's a natural thing," Wimbish said. "If you let [the dog] be natural, it just enhances the skills."

He said a handler simply has to add the command to a task with which the dog is already familiar.

"Let's say the dog will pick up something and walk with it," Wimbish said. "Let him keep doing it. They already know what to do. You just have to tell them what it is they're doing."

He compared dog handling to foster parenting.

"[The dog] is your child to

take care and responsibility for," Wimbish said. "You're the foster parent until the right people who are supposed to have [the dogs] receive them."

Toby Young, founder of the Safe Harbor Prison Dogs Program, began the organization to save the lives of dogs.

It is the largest program of its kind in the country, and it is the only facility to have dog handlers in the maximum security unit.

Young said she did not realize upon instating the program that it would have positive effects on the inmates as well.

Young said everybody benefits from the Safe Harbor program. She said the inmates are real people who just need reconditioning.

"The dogs can do what nothing else can do," Young said. "Those dogs make the inmates believe in themselves. It's pretty powerful."

Anyone interested in adopting a dog or learning more about the program can visit www.safeharborprisondogs.com.

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Toby Young
Program Founder

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of TRUMAN students CONSUME of all the alcohol at at TRUMAN

The fact is a large majority of students do only a small portion of the drinking that takes place at Truman.

Based on 2005 CORE Survey data of 555 Truman students.
<http://mostdogs.truman.edu>

Student Public Health Association