



Correctional Center Celebrates One Year Tails Program Success

By Caryn Eisert

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VANDALIA, Ill. (WAND) – A program at Vandalia Correctional Center is working to change the lives of rescue dogs and offenders.

The TAILS program at Vandalia Correctional Center partnered with Second Chance Rescue to have puppies trained and ready for their forever homes. Cindy Simmons, President of Second Chance Rescue explains, “the offenders teach the dogs basic obedience commands. Sit, stay, wait and things like that.” The puppies are also kennel trained and potty trained when they leave the program.

The program is an application process, offenders must apply to be a part of the Tails program at VCC. The Warden at Vandalia Correction Center, Stephanie Waggoner says the program gets hundreds of applications. “We have a low discipline because offenders want to be in the program.” Waggoner says for every 90 days in the program, offenders earn 45 days of good time. Meaning, they could get days off their sentencing.

The program allows 20 offenders to take care of the dogs; two offenders are assigned to one puppy. The offender is in charge of taking care of their dog 24/7. “It gives of the opportunity to be held accountable. It gives us the chance to be responsible for somebody other than ourselves,” Alejandro Cardoza explains.

Second Chance rescue provides all the supplies for the dogs. Simmons explains, “the dogs are fully vetted when they come here (VCC), so when they are done with the program they are ready to be adopted.”

Not only are the dogs getting a second chance, but so are the offenders. For Bernard Smith this program is helping to change his life. “It’s real spiritual for me. I feel like it’s a God given program.” He explains being a part of the program is a way for offenders to better themselves. “The constant source of attention and affection. They are an impact no just on our lives, but everybody incarcerated as well. They are a source of joy and hope,” explains Cardoza.

Warden Waggoner wants the program to expand, she hopes it can only grow to get bigger and better because of the impact it’s making. “This program gives a sense of completion. Offenders are giving back and for me to see that they want to give back to the community, we’re doing something right.”

Since the program started, Warden Waggoner says, they’ve trained 110 dogs and out of the 110 trained at Tails VCC all 110 have been adopted.

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