

Download this release from our Web Site at <http://www.mediarelations.k-state.edu/>  
Click on News/Events

Source: Dana Britton, 785-532-4968, [brittn@k-state.edu](mailto:brittn@k-state.edu)

News release prepared by: Erinn Barcomb-Peterson, 785-532-6415, [ebarcomb@k-state.edu](mailto:ebarcomb@k-state.edu)

Media Relations  
and Marketing  
9 Anderson Hall  
Manhattan, KS 66506 -0117  
785-532-6415  
Fax: 785-532-6418  
E-mail: [media@k-state.edu](mailto:media@k-state.edu)  
[www.mediarelations.k-state.edu](http://www.mediarelations.k-state.edu)

*Tuesday, September 5, 2006*

## **K-STATE SOCIOLOGY PROFESSOR FINDS DOG TRAINING PROGRAMS IN KANSAS PRISONS ARE BENEFICIAL TO BOTH INMATES AND STAFF**

MANHATTAN — One of the most beneficial programs in Kansas prisons costs taxpayers virtually nothing and relies on four-legged volunteers.

That's what a Kansas State University professor learned through researching three dog training programs at two Kansas correctional institutions. The Kansas Department of Corrections asked Dana Britton, associate professor of sociology at K-State, to look at a program at the Ellsworth Correctional Facility for men and two programs at the Topeka Correctional Facility for women.

Britton was assisted by Andrea Button, K-State graduate student in sociology, Manhattan.

At Ellsworth, inmates work with Canine Assistance Rehabilitation Education and Services Inc. to teach commands to assistance dogs that might become therapy dogs, hearing assistance dogs or dogs for people who have seizures. At Topeka, women in medium and maximum security participate in the Blue Ribbon dog program. Dogs that otherwise would be euthanized come from the Helping Hands Humane Society to the prison. Inmates spend six weeks to eight weeks teaching basic commands like "sit" and "stay" before dogs are adopted by people in the community. Other women in the facility work with Kansas Specialty Dog Service Inc. to train assistance dogs on a volunteer basis.

The men at Ellsworth and the Topeka women in the Blue Ribbon program are paid a maximum of \$1.05 per day, as they would be for other prison work.

Although programs like these that bring dogs into prisons are widespread — more than 150 in the United States and others in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Italy — Britton said there previously wasn't much information about what exactly the programs do. So she interviewed male and female inmates, prison administrators, program volunteers and the people who own the dogs after the animals have completed the programs.

Britton said she found plenty of evidence that the programs are beneficial. For one thing, the programs seem to decrease disciplinary infractions because inmates have to be free of disciplinary reports to participate, and they lose their dogs if they violate prison policies.

(more)

"To lose a dog, that's a pretty serious disincentive for a prison inmate," Britton said.

Having interaction with the dogs also seems to improve inmates' mental health, especially among the women. Some women reported becoming less reliant on antidepressants because of their work with the dogs. Britton said this aspect of the dog programs seems particularly promising, considering women in prison are three times more likely than men in prison to be prescribed psychotropic medications. Men in prison benefited emotionally, too, reporting that working with the dogs helped them to control their anger and learn more patience, Britton said.

Britton also said she found evidence of improved relationships between inmates and staff because of the dog training programs.

"Prison has an 'us and them' subculture," said Britton, who has done extensive research on prisons. "But it's hard for anyone to walk past a puppy and not pet it."

The programs also have the ability to connect inmates and the outside community. Britton said she attended a graduation ceremony at the Ellsworth facility where male inmates were able to meet the people receiving the assistance dogs they trained. As a result, many of the recipients' attitudes about prison changed, Britton said.

"The graduation is a powerful experience," Britton said. "The guys were able to tell their stories, and the people were able to talk about what the dogs will do for them."

According to Britton, dog training programs in prisons don't rely on taxpayer money except for the programs that pay wages — but inmates would earn wages for other types of work around the prison anyway. The dog food usually is donated, and inmates sometimes organize fundraisers for the programs. The trainers who instruct inmates on training the dogs are volunteers, whereas dog training in the private sector can be very expensive.

"These dogs do amazing things," Britton said. "People in the community are able to get them free or at a reduced cost. I think the programs have an amazing effect. They're all run on a shoestring budget. The bottom line is these programs are enormously beneficial. They are a win-win situation for the prison and for the community."

#