



# Today's Speaker

Host: Kevin Doucet

Amy Johnson-Binder, CEO

Teacher's Pet

*What Dogs Teach Us When We're  
Willing to Listen: Lessons from  
Teacher's Pet--Dogs and Kids  
Learning Together*





*Dr. Amy Johnson, EdD, MAT, LPC, CPDT-KA, UW-AAB*

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What Dogs  
Teach Us When  
We're Willing to  
Listen: Lessons  
from Teacher's  
Pet: Dogs and  
Kids Learning  
Together

# Teacher's Pet

## Mission:

Empowering at-risk youth through animal-assisted services using Social Emotional Learning, and trauma-informed practices, fostering personal growth, empathy, and community involvement while improving shelter dog welfare.





# OUR HISTORY

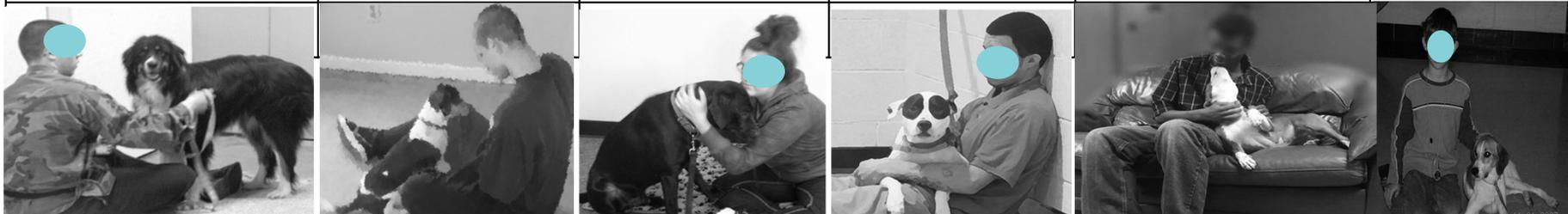
Kingsley Montgomery  
Crossroads for Youth  
Macomb County Juvenile Justice  
Children's Village  
Lamphere School  
Covenant House  
OCJ Trusties  
Macomb County Community Mental Health

More than 3,500 youth  
and 6,500 dogs

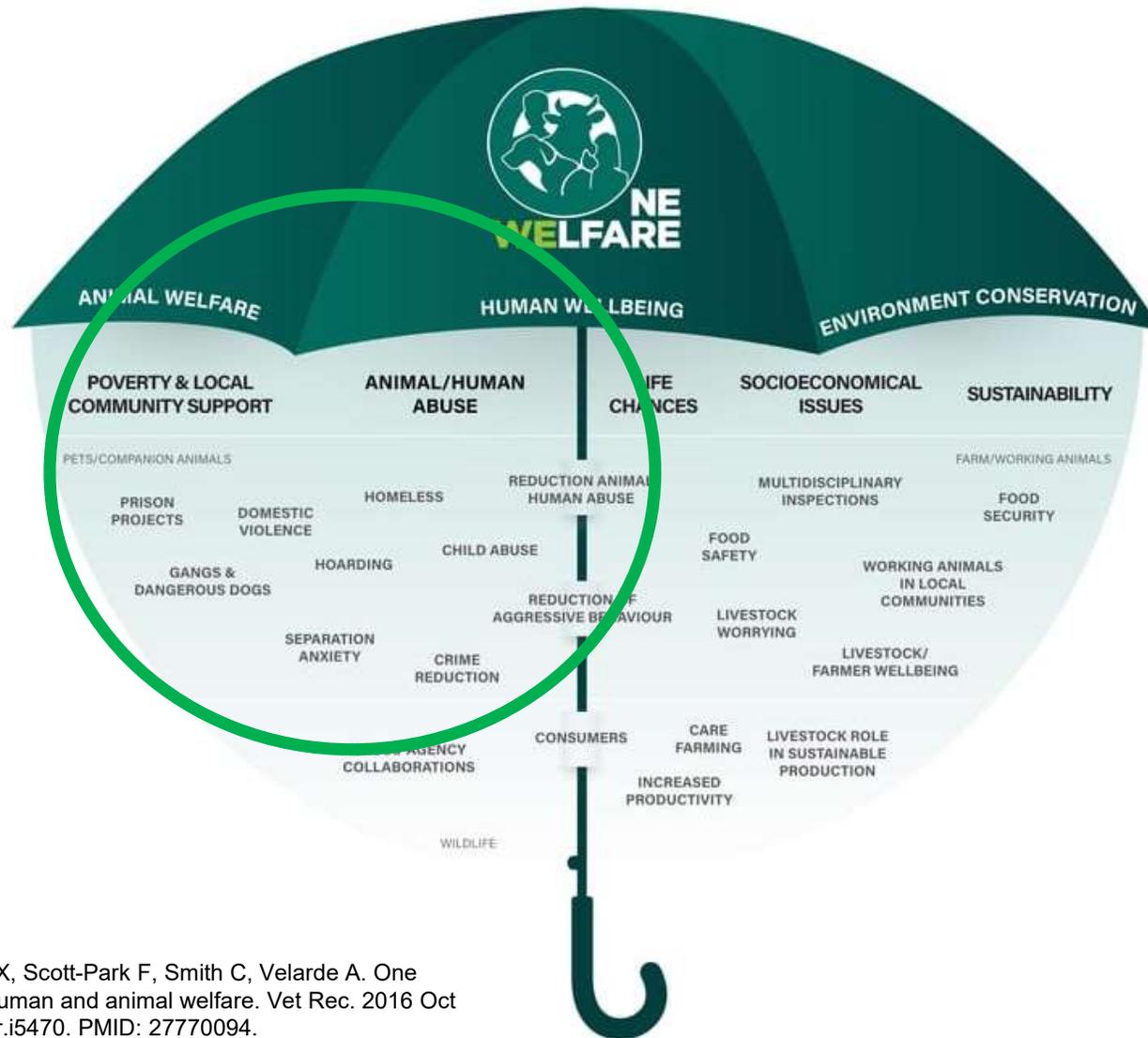


# Benefits for Clients

Physical Changes	Psychological /Psychosocial Changes	Cognitive Changes	Emotional Changes	Physiological Changes	Behavioral Changes
Muscle strengthening	Resilience in times of adversity	Thoughts about oneself (beliefs)	Learn to put words to feelings	Decrease in blood pressure	See own behaviors objectively
Gain greater mobility	Emotional support	Impact learning (reading)	Process through feelings	Decrease in heart rate	Confidence building
Cardiac rehabilitation	Sense of well-being	Overcoming fears	Normalizing feelings	Decreased risk of heart attacks	Behavior modification
Exercise	Improved relationship skills	Reduced symptoms of depression / reframing (hope)	Share coping strategies	Lower levels of anxiety	Similar bx and how to modify them
Body language	Improved communication		Safe place to practice emoting	Reduce stress	
Increased physical activity	Improved SEL		Anthrop = empathy dev.		



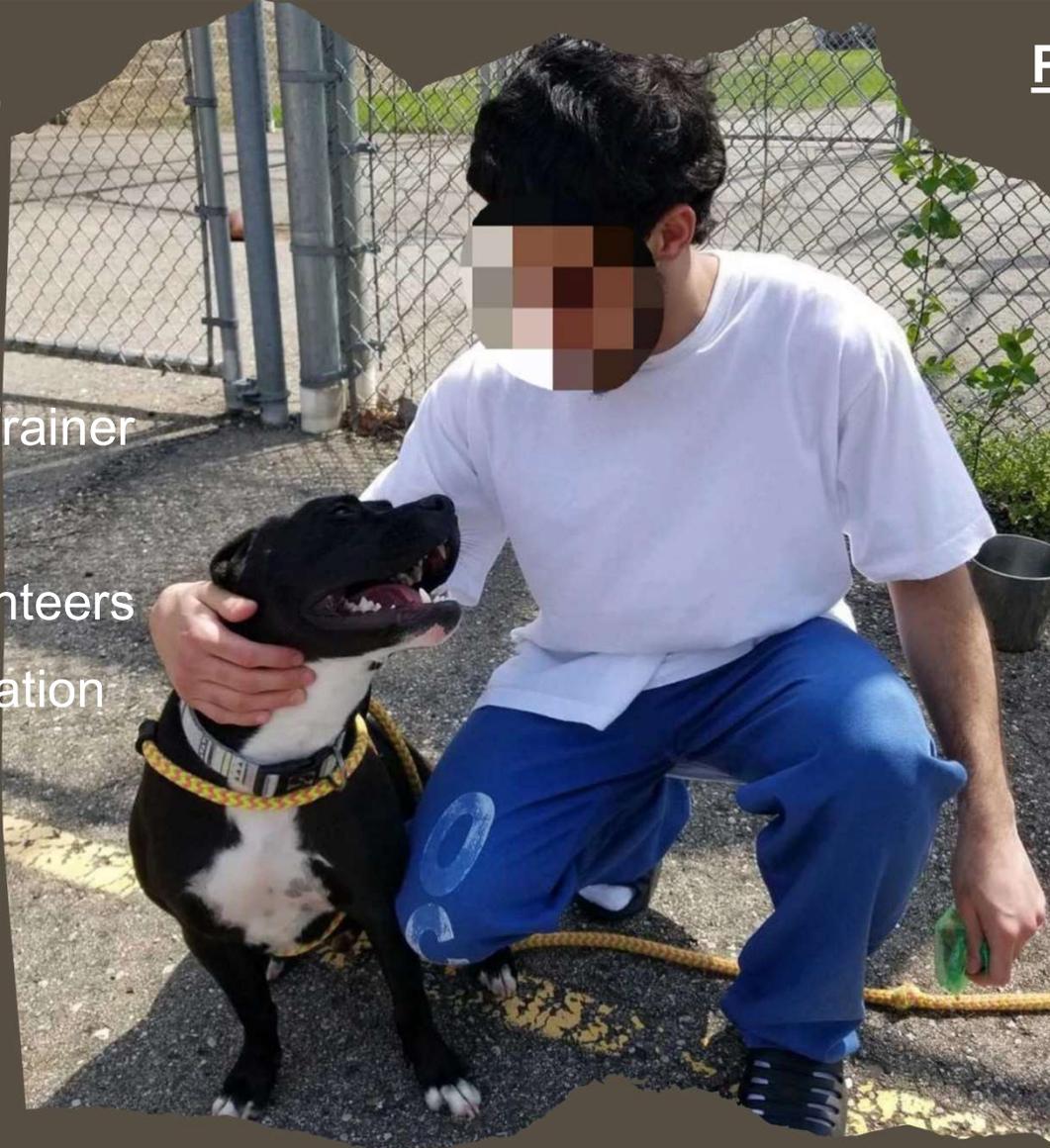
Wood, L., Martin, K., Christian, H., Nathan, A., Lauritsen, C., Houghton, S., Kawachi, I., & McCune, S. (2015). The pet factor: Companion Animals as a Conduit for Getting to Know People, Friendship Formation and Social Support. PLOS ONE. 2-17. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0122085



Pinillos RG, Appleby MC, Manteca X, Scott-Park F, Smith C, Velarde A. One Welfare - a platform for improving human and animal welfare. *Vet Rec.* 2016 Oct 22;179(16):412-413. doi: 10.1136/vr.i5470. PMID: 27770094.

## Program Output:

- Two hours day
- Twice a week
- 2 facilitators
- Certified Dog Trainer
- Transporter
- Additional volunteers
- Shelter dog rotation



## Program Output:

- Juvenile detention settings (2-3x / year)
- Community mental health (2-3x / year)
- 6-10 youth and dogs per session
- Past: prison inmate workers and youth in a homeless shelter

# Similarities Help Them Bond

Many youth struggle with trauma, trust, and emotional regulation

Many dogs in shelter face behavioral challenges that reduce adoption chances

Together, they heal and grow:

- Youth gain empathy, self-confidence and purpose
- Dogs gain training, socialization and homes



## Similarities include

- Behaviorally challenged dogs work with behaviorally challenged youth
- The dogs are “locked up” as are the youth

- The dogs have a hard time acclimating to the home culture, so do the youth
- Dogs are ‘unwanted,’ youth often feel unwanted
- Homelessness / adoption
- Work together for the benefit of both





## Defining At-Risk

**Youth who are less likely to transition into adulthood successfully**

*References:*

*Gartland et al, 2019; Flouri, Tzavidis & Kallis, 2010; McFarlane et al, 2003)*

# Impact on Youth



Growth in Empathy, Emotional Regulation and Confidence



Students describe being “less stressed, less angry, more patient”



They see themselves differently: “We are not our mistakes”

# Impact on Youth

Problem Solving

Improve Expression of  
Feelings

Improve Communication

Empathy Building

Increased Self Control

Improved  
Attachment/Connecting

Patience

Community Minded

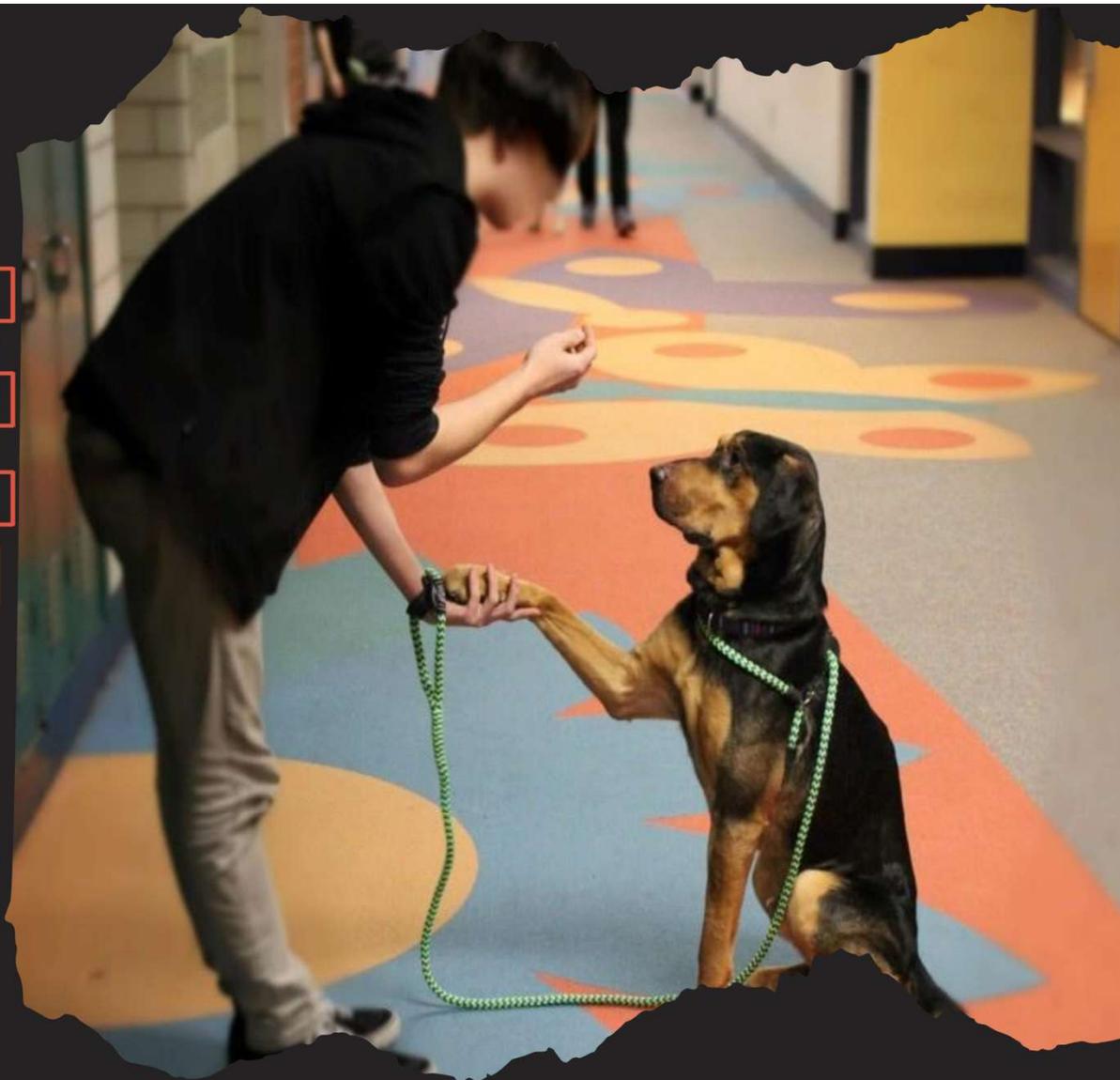
Increased impulse control

Perspective Taking

Sense of Purpose

Improved SEL

Reduce Feelings of isolation





Programming provides youth with positive, structured activities



Enhances mental health, trust building, and community connection

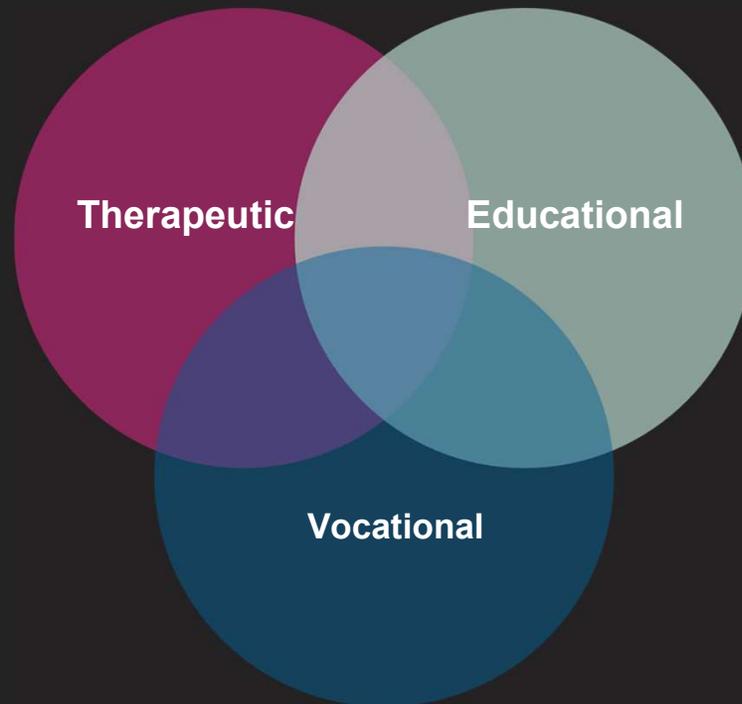


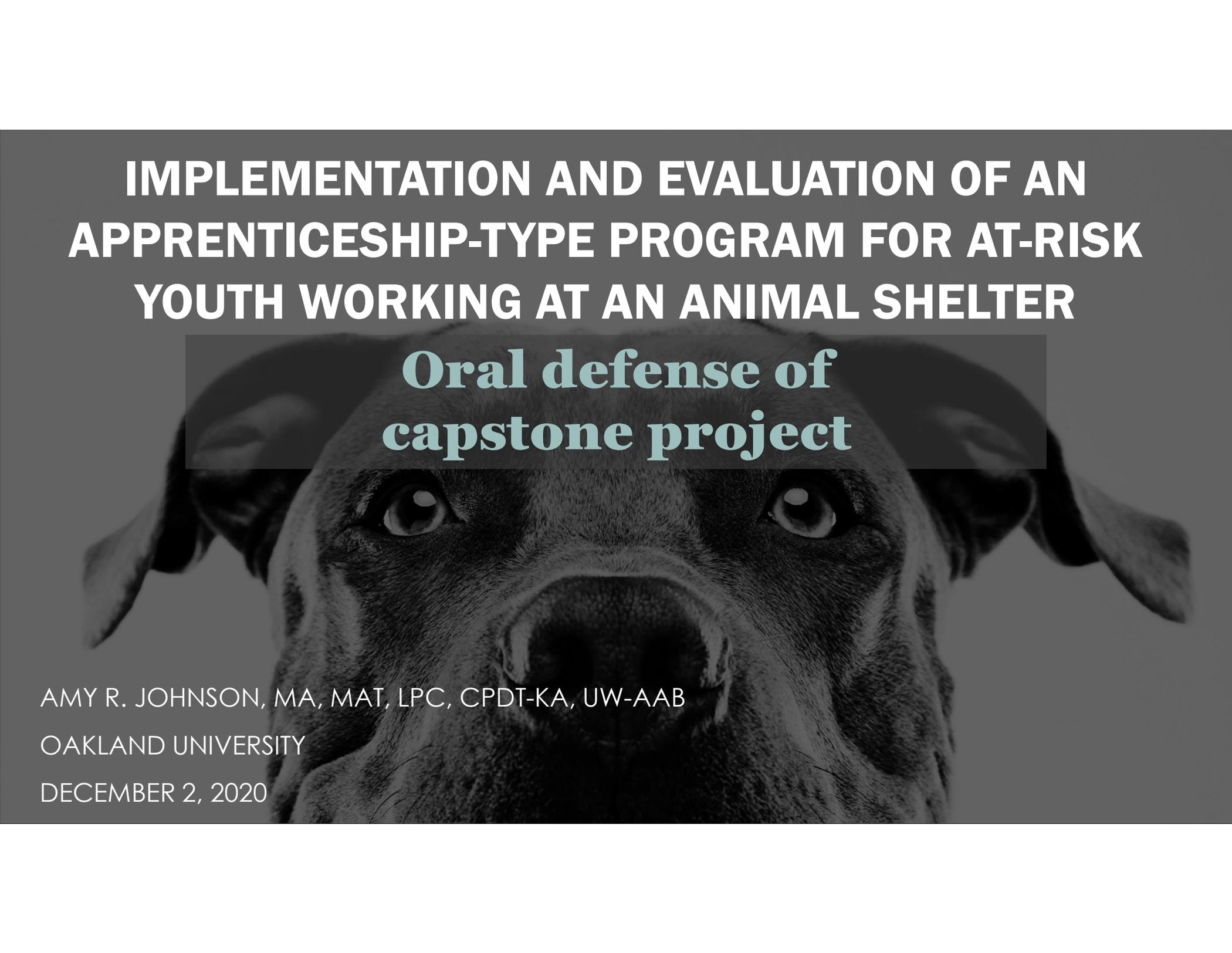
Supports stronger facility culture, reducing staff stress and improving morale

# Outcomes

Topic	Benefits	Sources
Reduction of stress and anxiety / Enhanced focus & attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide comfort</li> <li>• Reduce sx of anxiety/depression</li> <li>• Foster emotional connections</li> <li>• Reducing stress allows victims to be more present and engaged in therapy, education programs and court proceedings</li> <li>• Prison settings: reduction of stress through physical touch and companionship</li> <li>• Calming influence mitigates impulsive and aggressive bx</li> </ul>	Beetz et al, 2012; Hoagwood et al, 2017; Jaspersen, 2010; Kazdin, 2017; Katcher, 2000; Lacey and Haberstock, 2019; Odendaal, 2000; Odendaal & Menten, 2003
Neurochemical Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides reduction in cortisol levels which decreases sx of anxiety</li> <li>• Enhances mood with release of oxytocin, serotonin, dopamine</li> <li>• These neurochemicals counteract the effects of hyperarousal and emotional dysregulation often associated with PTSD</li> </ul>	Beetz et al, 2012; Chandler, 2018, 2024; Odendaal, 2000; Odendaal & Menten, 2003; Lacey and Haberstock, 2019; Kazdin, 2017; Katcher, 2000; Hoagwood et al, 2017
Increased motivation & self control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased interest in activities</li> <li>• Motivation to participate results from wanting to interact with animals</li> <li>• Refraining from engaging in negative bx in order to continue working with animals</li> </ul>	Chandler, 2024; Chandler, 2005; Cooke & Farrington, 2016; Laskowski, et al, 2019
Facilitation of social connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved social functioning in individuals with autism and PTSD</li> <li>• Decrease in isolation</li> <li>• Increasing interpersonal connection</li> <li>• "Non judgmental" companionship</li> <li>• Positive, low pressure social engagements</li> <li>• Helps victims build confidence and reestablish connections in a supportive environment</li> </ul>	Beck & Katcher, 2003; Beetz et al, 2012; Fine et al, 2010, 2019; O'Haire
Minimizing retraumatization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional support in legal proceedings</li> <li>• Victims can process and articulate experiences in a safer, less intimidating environment</li> <li>• In youth detention settings, youth experience growth in empathy and creating connection without fear of judgment</li> </ul>	Franco et al, 2021; Furst, 2006; Phillips, 2019; Stimple, 2019
Improvement in emotional regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactions with dogs allow victims to model the dog's calmness and foster self-soothing techniques</li> <li>• Increases in patience and impulse control</li> </ul>	Hunjan & Reddy, 2023; Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017; Turner, et al 2009; Geist, 2011; Siegel, et al, 2016
Structured and Purposeful activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rehabilitative programming options for inmates</li> <li>• Reduced recidivism</li> <li>• Improved psychosocial skills</li> </ul>	Britton & Button, 2021; Cooke et al, 2021; Furst, 2006; Mulcahy & McLaughlin, 2013

# THE POWER TO GUIDE HEALING AND EMPOWERMENT





# IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF AN APPRENTICESHIP-TYPE PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK YOUTH WORKING AT AN ANIMAL SHELTER

## Oral defense of capstone project

AMY R. JOHNSON, MA, MAT, LPC, CPDT-KA, UW-AAB

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

DECEMBER 2, 2020

# The Research

frontiers  
in Veterinary Science

## Dog Training Intervention Shows Social-Cognitive Change in the Journals of Incarcerated Youth

Tiffany Szymanski<sup>1</sup>, Rita J. Casey<sup>2</sup>, Amy Johnson<sup>3</sup>, Annmarie Cano<sup>1</sup>, Dana Albright<sup>4</sup> and Nicholas P. Seivert<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, United States, <sup>2</sup>College of Nursing, Oakland University, Rochester, MI, United States

There is limited research assessing the effectiveness of Animal-Assisted Therapy in at-risk adolescent populations. In a recent study, 138 incarcerated adolescents participated in a randomized controlled trial of an animal-assisted intervention, in which participants either trained another dog (teacher's first grade) or walked the dogs (control group).

## Effects of Dog-Based Animal-Assisted Interventions in Prison Population: A Systematic Review

Beatriz Villalón-Dominguez<sup>1</sup>, Daniel Collado-Mateo<sup>2-10</sup>, Eugenio Merillano-Santos Villalón<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Instituto de Medicina y Condución (IMECO), 60100 Valencio, Spain, <sup>2</sup> Instituto de Medicina y Condución (IMECO), 60100 Valencio, Spain, <sup>3</sup> Centro de Sport Studies, Rey Juan Carlos University, 28002 Fuenlabrada, Spain, <sup>4</sup> Grupo de Investigación IBERA, Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Talca, 3600000, Chile, <sup>5</sup> [emericollado@gmail.com](mailto:emericollado@gmail.com), <sup>6</sup> Physical Activity and Quality of Life Research Group (APVCA), Faculty of Sport Science, University of Extremadura, 10008 Cáceres, Spain, <sup>7</sup> [mlafuente@uex.es](mailto:mlafuente@uex.es), <sup>8</sup> [Compendio@uex.es](mailto:Compendio@uex.es), <sup>9</sup> [Compendio@uex.es](mailto:Compendio@uex.es), <sup>10</sup> [Compendio@uex.es](mailto:Compendio@uex.es)

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**Simple Summary:** Inmates usually suffer from depression, anxiety, or loneliness. Animal-assisted therapy, and in concrete dog-based therapy, in prisons in order to ameliorate the consequences of being in prison. This study was to provide an up-to-date analysis of the research on the effects of dog-based therapy in the prison population. Results showed that mental health, emotional, or academic skills could be improved after dog-based assisted therapy. Most of the activities related to dog training, dog caring, or activities. The duration of dog ranged between 60 and 120 min, with the frequency being between 1 and 3 days/week. These potential enhancements might lead to a reduction in recidivism and violence.

**Abstract:** Background: Animal-assisted interventions, in concrete dog-based, have been introduced in prisons to reduce recidivism as well as to improve prisoners. Therefore, the aim of the present systematic review is to provide an up-to-date analysis of the effects of dog-based animal-assisted therapy in prison population. Methods: A search of the literature was performed, and 20 articles were included in the final review. Results: Included studies included a total of 1,388 inmates. The vast majority of protocols included activities related with dog training, dog care which included vocational or educational components. Duration of dog-based ranged between 60 and 120 min, with the frequency being between 1 and 3 days/week. Statistic improvements in prisoners were observed in 13 studies. Conclusions: Dog-based therapy may improve anxiety, stress, recidivism, and other social variables in male of

**Keywords:** inmates; prison; animal-assisted therapy; dog therapy; anxiety; stress

**1. Introduction**

The proportion of both female and male inmates has been increasing since 2000. The worldwide rate of female inmates has increased 50.2%, while the worldwide rate for males increased 18.1%. Moreover, in the United States (FBI), it is estimated that 221,600 were incarcerated in 2019 because of antisocial behaviors such as, the, vandalism, bullying, or violence. People involved with criminal justice frequently are exposed to violence, trauma, or critical life events. Thus, the prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder among



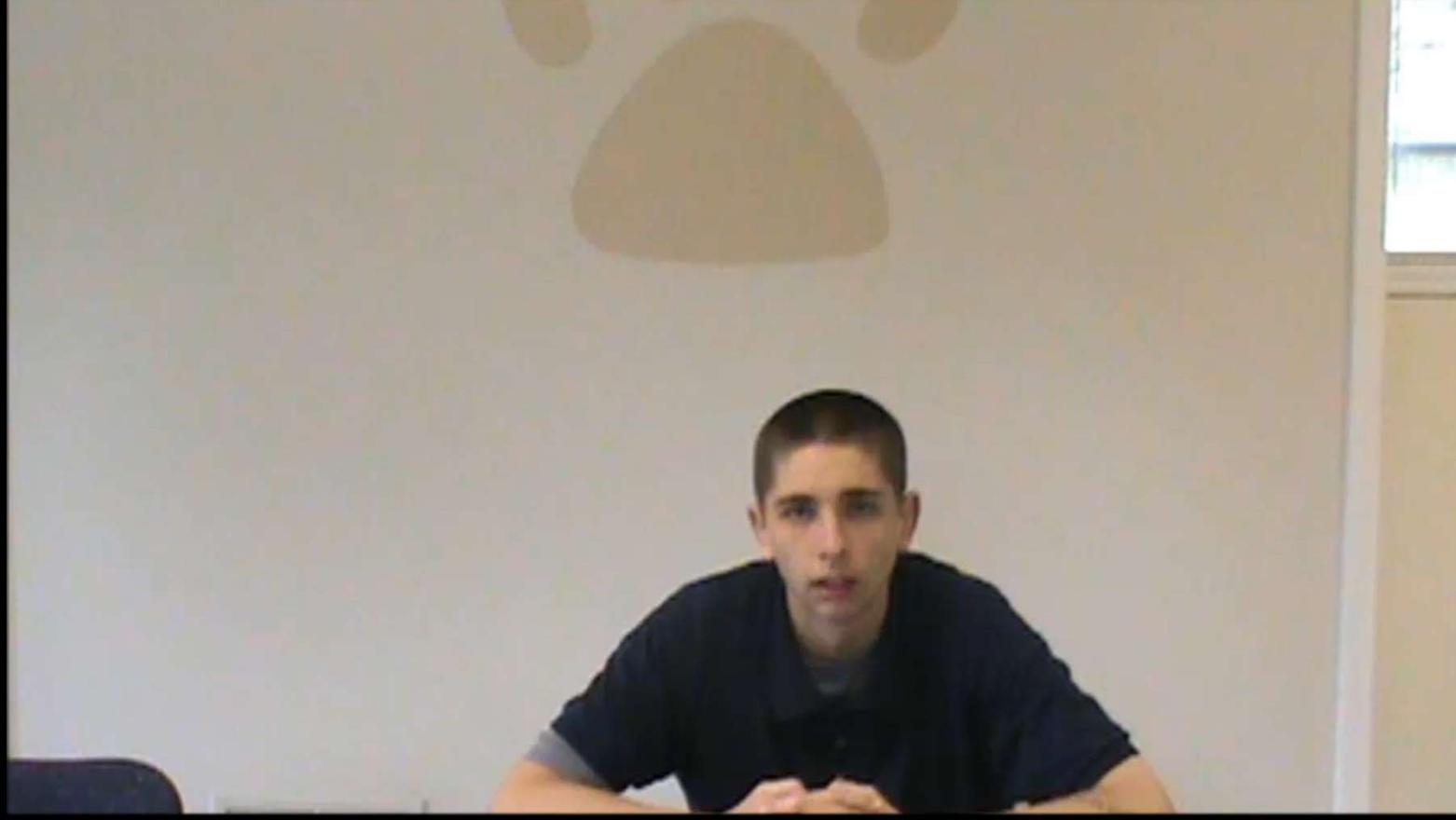


## The Research

### Current study:

- 8 focus groups (Lifetime Bonds & Teacher's Pet)
- Male and female groups
- Analysis stage
- Book proposal
- Themes of 'belonging,' altruism, patience, moving beyond themselves (Otherness!)

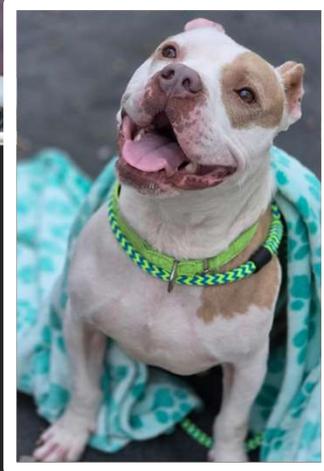
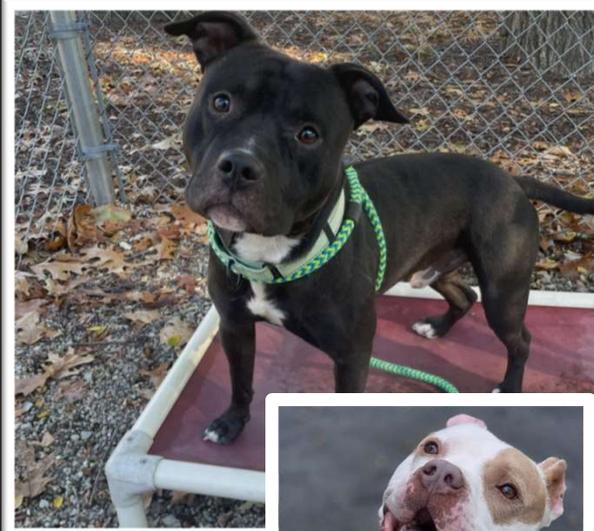
# Frustration tolerance; Authority mindset



**LESSONS LEARNED....  
OR GROWTH?**



# Impact on Dogs



- Dogs learn “preferred” in home behaviors
- Learn to travel (in crates)
- Over-looked dogs become adoptable
- Enrichment (mental and physical)
- Time out of the shelter
- Information gathered about behavior for adopters

# Goals for Dogs

Socialization/  
Confidence building  
Sit / Stay  
Focus  
Down / Stay  
Leash walking  
No jumping  
Recall  
Leave it  
Sit for food bowl  
Etc.



# A FEW EXAMPLES OF LESSONS LEARNED IN THE MOMENT



# Teacher's Pet with Adjudicated Youth



# Patience



# Positive Reinforcement



4  
9



Source: Teacher's Pet

# Resilience and Empowerment



# The power of touch



Photo credit: Teacher's Pet



Photo credit: Teacher's Pet

*Keon: we have a lot in common with the dogs. They were neglected, abused and so are we.*

*I did not know how to care for a dog. I did not even think about it. But now I know how to approach a dog, how to make sure he is not afraid*

*Swoth....had a residential dog at another facility. Liked that. It was nice to live with a dog. A lot of work--responsible for everything. Feeding, walking, cleaning. It kept us calm though. We had to be calm to be around the dog and the dog helped us be calm. It was like therapy.*

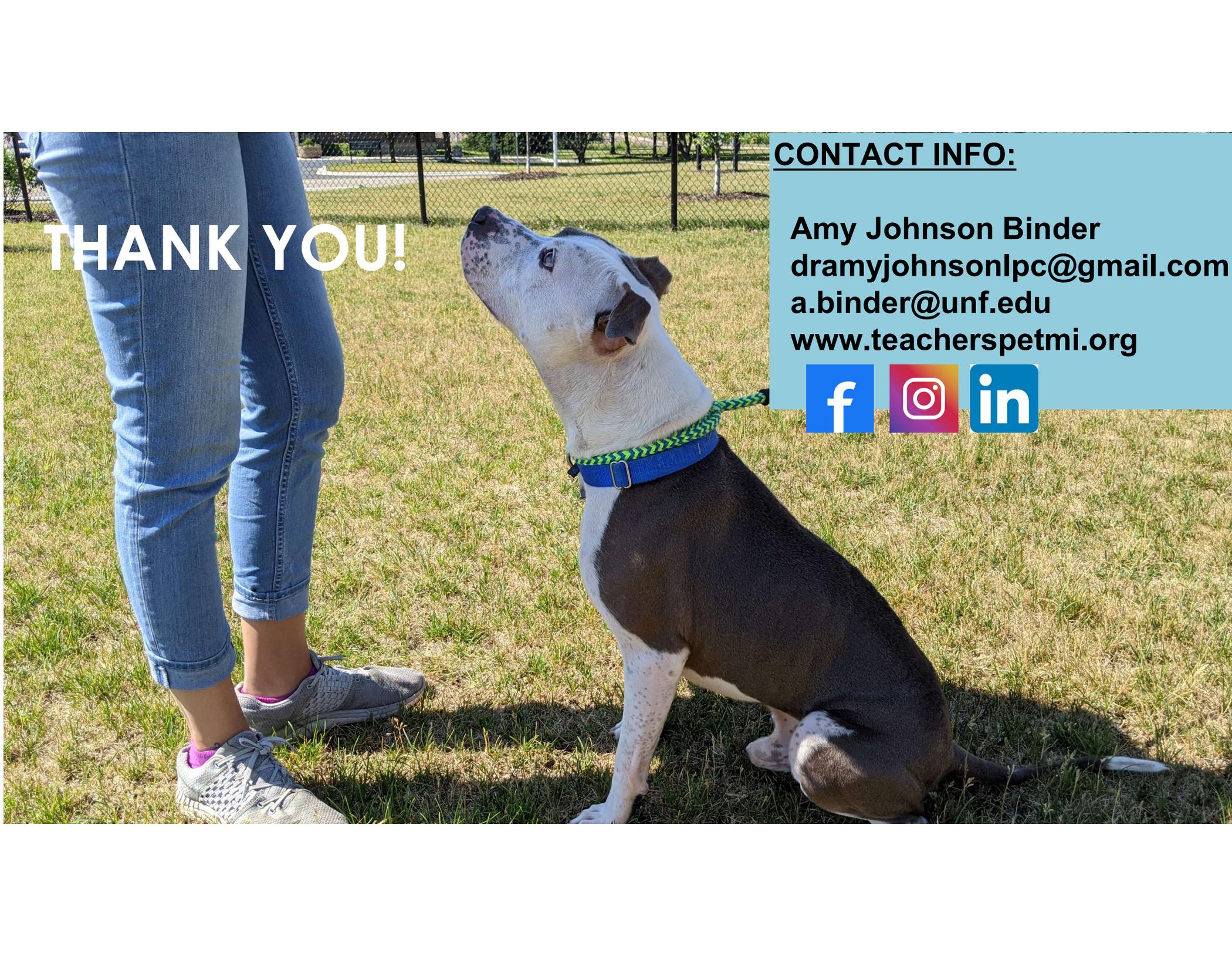
*The dogs are in jail just like us  
After we have a session, we are happy. It calms us. We behave better outside the program because we feel good.*

*Messer: it's good that you are taking this to NY but this program should really be all over the United States.  
It's fun. We get to have fun.*

*Like this program too. Maybe the same. It helps me forget I'm locked up. (More than one kid said this). I learned how to care for a dog, how to train. Things I can use on the outside. How to approach a dog so he's not scared.*

*Medina--i am a dog person. I just like dogs. I always did. I did not know how to take care of them before. When I get out I want to buy a small \_\_\_\_\_ and teach him all the things I learned here.*





**THANK YOU!**

**CONTACT INFO:**

**Amy Johnson Binder**  
**[dramyjohnsonlpc@gmail.com](mailto:dramyjohnsonlpc@gmail.com)**  
**[a.binder@unf.edu](mailto:a.binder@unf.edu)**  
**[www.teacherspetmi.org](http://www.teacherspetmi.org)**

