

Puppies Behind Bars



Photos: Peggy Vance (left and center images)
Doghouse Studios (right image)

Fall – Winter 2016

PUPPIES BEHIND BARS trains prison inmates to raise service dogs for wounded war veterans and explosive-detection canines for law enforcement. The puppies live in prison with their “puppy-raisers” from the age of 8 weeks to 24 months. As the puppies mature into well-loved, well-behaved dogs, their raisers learn what it means to contribute to society rather than take from it.

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Photo: Alan Stoga

A VERY GOOD PLACE TO START

Puppies Behind Bars has raised nearly a thousand dogs since its inception, with the belief that socialization is the key to ensuring that they reach their full potential. In addition to the professional training the puppies receive from their inmate puppy-raisers in prison, they spend hours with volunteers who take the dogs into their homes and out to public spaces, starting when the puppies are about 10 weeks old. As a result, the majority grow into well-rounded working dogs.

Just over a year ago, P.B.B. embarked on its newest venture: the Scaife Family Foundation Early Socialization Center. With the support and generosity of the Scaife Family Foundation, it purchased a house and land in upstate New York, to create a place where puppies could be socialized from the very beginning of their lives, and older dogs in the program could be given extra help to reach their fullest potential.

Research has shown that early socialization builds confidence, which is the most important trait for a working dog to have. So P.B.B. came up with a curriculum designed to expose its puppies to as many situations as possible, hoping to instill in them the sense that the world is a big, fun place waiting to be explored, rather than a scary, loud place full of things to be feared. The curriculum ranges from the general (exposure to people of all ages, and to different animals) to the very specific (hearing classical music starting at three weeks of age) and covers a range of experiences the puppies should have. It maps out when to expose them to different “under footings” — carpet, gravel, wooden floors, linoleum floors, grass, and dirt — when to introduce them to stairs and car rides; when to bring in other dogs of varying ages, sizes, and colors. It strives to have the puppies constantly surrounded by people who will pick

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Photo: P.B.B.

Although Sophie, Penny, and Toppen were amazing moms, sometimes humans had to step in when they kind of decided they wanted to take a morning or afternoon off.

The earliest socialization efforts focused mainly on body handling. The pups were massaged daily, from paws to tails to ears, and their toenails were clipped every third day. Since the puppies were whelped in the living room of the house — and stayed there with their moms for eight weeks — they heard normal domestic noises as part of their daily experience. They heard telephones ring, doors open and close, coffee grinders grind, vacuum cleaners vacuum, and deliverymen ring the front doorbell. As they got older, they were introduced to louder, more sudden sounds, because “noise sensitivity” is a prime indicator of a general lack of confidence in a dog. The idea was to make sure that the puppies heard all the sounds of a busy household, and a busy household it was. Twenty-four hours a day, P.B.B. staff and volunteers were in and out to help with everything from puppy feedings, cleanings, and handling, to making sure the moms got at least an hour of playing and running each day, to making sure

hair dryers, prosthetic legs, talking toys) without their littermates around. (They might be confident in a group, but on their own, how did they perceive the world?) Their little personalities started to develop. The staff introduced problem-solving exercises, such as having them figure out how to get from one playpen to another to get their meals; how to climb up — and down — various obstacles; or how to begin to navigate stairs. People were invited to bring their children and grandchildren over to interact with the puppies, who seemed to understand that people, of all ages and sizes, were sources of food, play, and lots of love.

The level of socialization increased each week. The pups got a playpen outside and pools for them to splash in. They figured out how to navigate small, paper tunnels that cats use to play in. They started learning basics, like “sit,” “down,” “stand,” and — the most important of all service dog commands — “watch me.” They picked up everything with lightning speed, which was a revelation for staffers who’d been used to teaching these same tasks to pups that were already 8 or 9 weeks old.

In the last two weeks, they went on car rides and met strange dogs. At the homes of local supporters, they were introduced to completely new environments such as ponds, streams, different sets of stairs, and different pots of plants on different front porches. Everyone enjoyed the puppies’ delight in exploring the world.

One of the biggest challenges was deciding which of the pups would be service dogs and which would become explosive-detection canines. After running each puppy through a battery of 12 tests designed to determine independence,

What the books didn't quite spell out is what happens when the mother doesn't think she signed up for all the tasks in her job description.

them up, kiss them, brush them, coo over them, and just tell them how beautiful and wonderful they are.

Guiding Eyes for the Blind generously agreed to provide studs for four breedings and to handle the breedings using four females P.B.B. had kept specifically for the purpose. Three litters were born this summer; the fourth is scheduled for early 2017. On May 7, Sophie whelped eleven pups. One week later, on May 14, Penny had five puppies. Toppen’s litter of eleven arrived July 18. And while staff and volunteers thought they were ready for everything, what they learned from those three litters is amazing.

For the first few weeks, puppies can neither see nor hear. They cannot feed, eliminate, or keep warm on their own. They quite literally depend on their mother for all of their basic needs. What the books didn't quite spell out is what happens when the mother doesn't think she signed up for all the tasks in her job description. Staff and volunteers discovered (semi-quickly, and through a lot of trial and error) what the pups’ different cries meant: how to tell when they were cold, when they were hungry, and when they just wanted to make noise.

there was always a large stack of clean newspapers by each of the puppy pens.

Around week four, when the puppies could see and hear people, and each other, the real fun began. The puppies were pretty self-sufficient at this point and chewed on each other’s, and people’s,



Photo: P.B.B.

toes a lot. They could eliminate on their own, they were eating from bowls, and they could keep warm by finding the heating-lamp in their pen or by cuddling with each other. Then they started to get toys in their playpens. They also got one-on-one time with volunteers in different rooms of the house, to see how they interacted with unusual objects (e.g.,

prey drive, sensitivities, and overall confidence, it was decided that 22 of the 27 puppies would start training as service dogs while five would go into the program as EDCs. In general, the puppies who showed more prey-drive, were more vocal (e.g., barking or whining), and who had a natural desire to seek out new things and explore were deemed to be more likely

to be successful as EDCs. By contrast, the puppies that looked to people for reassurance and guidance were better suited for lives as service dogs.

It is really too soon to tell what impact the early socialization program will have on the puppies' confidence levels and on the program as a whole. Inmate

puppy-raisers have reported that these puppies seem much more advanced in training and responsive to handling. They're finding that the puppies pick up commands more easily, are far less likely to scavenge, and really, really enjoy human company. Veterinarians who have given the puppies their inoculations and

check-up exams say they have never seen puppies so confident and people-oriented. At the very least, it's clear that these puppies have received more love, attention, and affection from more men, women, and children by the time they are 8 weeks old than any other pup in the P.B.B. program... and that counts for a lot.

Flower Power

On Veteran's Day, Richland College in Dallas, Texas, completed a symbolic planting of 5,171 ceramic poppies, to mark the centenary of World War One and honor the sacrifice of Texans who died in that conflict. *The Blood of Heroes Never Dies* memorial is a large outdoor installation inspired by a similar 2014 work at the Tower of London, which commemorated the 888,246 British Empire soldiers killed in "The Great War." The history of the poppy as a symbol, however, has American roots, in a Canadian soldier's poem and an American woman's effort to establish the flower as emblematic of loss and sacrifice.

Richland historian Clive Siegle and artist Jen Rose decided to involve students and the community at large in the effort to reanimate the fast-fading history of America's involvement in one of modern history's most significant conflicts. The goal was to create one ceramic poppy for every fallen Texan and install them on the campus, along with panels about Texas' role in "the Great War" and the poppy's role as a symbol. It was also decided that the poppies would be sold, continuing a tradition, dating from shortly after the end of the



Photo: City of Georgetown

war, of contributing funds from the sale of memorial poppies to assist veterans of more recent conflicts. Puppies Behind Bars was the single and unanimous choice to receive the money raised.

The entire community of Richland College rallied to the cause, with 500 volunteers — students of all ages and backgrounds, as well as faculty, staff, and members of the Dallas/Fort Worth community — contributing countless hours. Later, the city of Georgetown, Texas, asked Richland to take the poppies and their message "on the road" to Georgetown's famous Red Poppy Festival, in April, which was attended by 60,000 visitors. (Appropriately,

Georgetown's interest in the flower began when local resident Henry Compton returned home from France after World War One with poppy seeds, which flourished in his hometown.) Georgetown community volunteers, like their Richland counterparts, helped to "plant" the symbolic blossoms on their courthouse lawn, and the city has tirelessly promoted the sale of the poppies to benefit Puppies Behind Bars, educate the public about America's involvement in World War One, and reaffirm that "the blood of heroes never dies."

For an extended view of the project, watch *The Blood of Heroes* on YouTube: 54NMTIUA1II.

DONATION FORM

Please accept my donation for:

- Routine veterinary care for one puppy for a year (\$850)
- One service dog vest with patches (\$100)
- A new sleeping crate (\$85)
- Food for a puppy for one month (\$70)
- Hands-free lead for a service-dog trainer (\$30)
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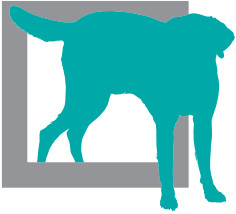
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Fall-Winter 2016



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P A W S F O R A P P L A U S E

Sweet Charity

Each year, students at the High School of Government and Public Administration in Paterson, N.J., work to raise money for a great cause. In the fall of 2015, after much research, they selected Puppies Behind Bars for their annual fundraising commitment. The kids made and posted banners throughout the school to create awareness and — with candy raffles and the sale of rubber wristbands and more than 300 t-shirts — managed to raise thousands of dollars to support P.B.B.'s work.

Summer Champs

Five Dog Tags service-dog teams graduated at a ceremony at Otisville Correctional Facility on August 22. They had successfully completed an intensive 16-day “team training,” taught by Otisville inmate puppy-raisers and P.B.B. instructors. It was the first team training conducted at the Otisville facility, and the prison staff worked tirelessly to accommodate the process. These most recent graduates, who join 87 Dog Tags teams across the country, went home to North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia. The veterans’ new companions were trained by puppy-raisers at Bedford Hills, Downstate, Fishkill, and Otisville correctional facilities.



Photo: Karen Johnson