

Puppies Behind Bars: Mission, History and Organization Summary (Annual Report) as of January 2022

Puppies Behind Bars (PBB) trains incarcerated individuals to raise service dogs for wounded war veterans and first responders, as well as explosive-detection canines for law enforcement. 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. PBB was founded as a non-profit in 1997, training five puppies as guide dogs for the blind at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, New York State's only maximum-security prison for women. PBB now works in six men's and women's correctional facilities in New York and New Jersey, with approximately 125 incarcerated participants raising 75 puppies at any given time. Raisers in the program are entrusted with an eight week-old puppy and are charged with training the puppy as an expert service dog, performing more than 100 commands, or as an explosive-detection canine. In either case, the dogs are depended upon, quite literally, to save lives. The incarcerated puppy-raisers receive weekly instruction from PBB's professional staff, and live together in a dedicated housing unit. They work as a team, sharing information and skills, and become part of a community dedicated to a common cause. Aside from the practical, job-related skills the raisers gain, they are transformed by hard work, trust and the puppies' unconditional love to become more confident, positive, and disciplined, and to accept the possibility of becoming successful members of society.

Over the years, Puppies Behind Bars has expanded its goals. After 9/11, PBB added the training of explosive-detection canines (EDCs) to its program to help meet law enforcement agencies' need for working dogs. In 2006, PBB started raising dogs to assist disabled children and adults and phased out its guide dog program. At the same time, a new generation of severely wounded veterans was emerging as men and women returned from service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these veterans were afflicted by an invisible wound, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can cause panic attacks, nightmares, flashbacks, depression and other debilitating psychological symptoms.

In response to the needs of this growing population, Puppies Behind Bars initiated *Dog Tags: Service Dogs for Those Who've Served Us*, providing prison-trained service dogs, free of charge, to wounded veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), with a focus on those suffering from PTSD or traumatic brain injury (TBI). The first dog from the program was placed with an Army veteran with severe PTSD in February of 2008. In 2011 we trained our last dogs for general service dog work, and focused our service dog program entirely on training psychiatric service dogs for veterans. In the spring of 2018, we expanded our service dog program again, accepting a class of 9/11 first responders with severe PTSD through our new *Backup Buddy* program. We have since further expanded the Backup Buddy program by providing dogs to police departments to work as therapy dogs, providing mental health benefits for the entire department, and aiding in community outreach. As of January 2022, 154 dogs had been placed with veterans, first responders, and police and fire departments from around the country. PBB flies each recipient to the New York area to participate in "team training," where they learn to work effectively with their new companions and are certified as a "service dog team." A substantial portion of the team training process takes place in prison, where the puppy raisers take an active role in instructing the veterans. This brings the program full circle, as the raisers see first-hand the independence and freedom the dogs provide for the veterans, who have sacrificed so much. In the case of police officers, the team training experience lets incarcerated individuals and law enforcement officers see each other as human beings beyond their uniforms or the crimes they previously committed.

PBB-trained explosive-detection canines (EDCs) and accelerant-detection canines (ADCs) protect the public across the U.S., working with local, state, and federal law enforcement and fire-fighting agencies. Our EDCs and ADCs receive formal training from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and work with agencies ranging from the CIA and FBI to the National Park Police at the Statue of Liberty. We work only with agencies whose dogs live at home, as members of their handlers' families.

Puppies Behind Bars was fully accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI) in the fall of 2011 after an extensive auditing process, with our accreditation renewed in 2017. ADI establishes and promotes standards of excellence in the service dog field. Accreditation took into account not only our training methods and the effectiveness of our working dogs but also factors including our volunteer training, our client confidentiality standards, our record keeping and the safety of the vans we use for our dogs.

In December 2020, Puppies Behind Bars was awarded 4-star ranking by Charity Navigator for the fourteenth year in a row. Fewer than 1% of the organizations monitored by Charity Navigator have achieved this benchmark. This ranking is based on Charity Navigator's assessment of accountability, transparency and responsible use of funds. Puppies Behind Bars has raised more than 2,000 dogs, including more than 500 EDCs, more than 200 service dogs, and 84 guide dogs. PBB trains extraordinary dogs and allows the love and healing they provide to improve the lives of hundreds of individuals each year. Our dogs bring hope and pride to their raisers and independence and security to those with whom they serve.