



NEWS RELEASE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

Commissioner Monroe B. Hudson, Jr.

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Brandywine Valley SPCA Launches Animal Assisted Therapy Program at Baylor Women's Correctional Institution

NEW CASTLE, DE – The Brandywine Valley SPCA (BVSPCA) has launched its new Paws for Change animal assisted therapy program at Baylor Women's Correctional Institution (BWCI). Paws for Change trains owners and their dogs for therapeutic visits to venues such as correctional facilities, youth centers, assisted living facilities, and schools.

Paws for Change dogs and their handlers go through an initial evaluation followed by an eight-week therapy dog training course conducted by Brandywine's canine behavior experts. This training is an American Kennel Club-endorsed curriculum for therapy pets. Members of the public who are interested in having their dog evaluated as a potential Paws for Change therapy dog candidate are encouraged to apply at: secure.qgiv.com/for/pawsforchange.

Brandywine partnered with the Delaware Department of Correction (DOC) after the non-profit was awarded one of two animal-assisted therapy contracts through a competitive bidding process to serve DOC facilities. Brandywine's Paws for Change teams have been conducting twice-weekly visits at BWCI since September, reaching more than 70 residents each week.

“The partnership with Brandywine Valley SPCA demonstrates our investment in new innovative supports as part of our comprehensive medical and behavioral health treatment programs that meet the needs of our incarcerated population,” **Delaware Department of Correction Commissioner Monroe B. Hudson Jr. said.** “The DOC initiated this program at BWCI because we know that animal therapy improves mental health, reduces anxiety and has other positive impacts. Thank you to the BVSPCA and its volunteer therapy teams for helping us to meet our dual mission of public safety and rehabilitation.”

One BWCI resident said, “I didn't think it was going to be that overwhelming for me when I held him [the animal therapy dog], but now I look forward to it every week. When I hug the dog, I feel like somebody cares, and it gives me hope. Through our treatment program we are trying

to be compassionate and show empathy towards people, but with the trauma we have experienced, it is hard for us to do. With these animals coming in to visit, it does help.”

Another BWCI resident stated, “Many of us here are dealing with issues at home and issues with substance abuse, and when you get a chance to see a dog that’s comforting, you can trust that dog, and it gives you that minute away from everything that’s going on. They’re always so happy to see you and jump up on your lap, and you forget in that moment that, ‘hey you’re incarcerated,’ ‘hey I’m in the program,’ ‘hey I’m angry.’ And in that moment, it doesn’t matter, and you just feel that joy.”

Thirteen volunteer Paws for Change certified therapy dog teams have delivered nearly 60 hours of therapy visits to date at BWCI. “One of the things that makes us unique as an animal welfare organization is the high priority we place on our work in the community to support the bond between pets and people,” **said Adam Lamb, Brandywine Valley SPCA Chief Executive Officer**. “Our work with the Department of Correction to launch Paws for Change has been such a rewarding experience, being able to bring a dog’s joy and unconditional love to inmates who otherwise wouldn’t have that light in their lives.”

Amy Mason and her husband Bill adopted Bernice from Brandywine in June 2018 and graduated from the first Paws for Change class last Fall. “I do this volunteer work because Bernice gives me and my husband so much love we want to share it with people who might need some of that love,” Amy said. “It means a lot to me to see how happy the Baylor inmates are when they see Bernice. They take turns holding her and ask a lot of questions about her background. It is a nice time for them.”

About the Brandywine Valley SPCA

Founded in 1929, the Brandywine Valley SPCA is the first open admission no-kill shelter in Pennsylvania and Delaware. In 2021, the BVSPCA cared for nearly 19,000 lost, stray, owner-surrendered, and abused and neglected animals while achieving a 95% live release rate. The BVSPCA provides animal protective services for Chester County and much of Delaware County in Pennsylvania, and it holds a five-year contract with the Delaware Office of Animal Welfare to provide state-wide animal services. Animals are placed through five adoption centers: Dover Campus, Georgetown Campus, New Castle Campus, West Chester Campus, and Plymouth Meeting PetSmart Everyday Adoption Center. In addition, the BVSPCA provides families with safety net and low-cost veterinary services at its four Animal Health Centers in Malvern, New Castle, Dover and Georgetown. The BVSPCA also operates the Animal Rescue Center (ARC), a facility dedicated to helping animals with additional needs prior to being ready for adoption, such as cruelty cases, disaster victims, and infants. bvspca.org.

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