



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

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Commissioner Promotes Shelter Dog Rescue Program to Challenge DJJ Youth *Rescue-2-Restore* Animal Care Initiative Aids Recovery & Rehabilitation

(ATLANTA - GA) Commissioner Avery D. Niles is pleased to announce DJJ's new "*Rescue-2-Restore*" animal care and adoption program is on track for future expansion to more of Georgia's juvenile justice facilities as the department continues to build community partnerships to help local rescue partners train shelter dogs for the animal adoption process.

"This new initiative is designed to equip our troubled teens in secure facilities with many of the stabilizing social and emotional tools they will need as adults," said DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles. *Rescue-2-Restore* provides our youth with important lessons in adolescent development while our youth train these abandoned animals for a second chance at finding permanent homes."

DJJ's dog training program was recently restructured under Deputy Commissioner Sarah Draper who oversees the Division of Operations and Compliance, Volunteer Services. While holding young offenders accountable for their actions through probation supervision and secure detention, DJJ also provides youth with psychological treatment and specialized programs like *Rescue-2-Restore*. Deputy Commissioner Draper says the relationships developed with the rescue dogs often help juvenile offenders experience compassion, commitment and respect for other living creatures.

"Animal programs are proven to help alleviate stress and depression and to encourage good behavior. That kind of positive reinforcement is obviously important during juvenile incarceration," said Deputy Commissioner Draper. "DJJ counselors and therapists tell us these same important relationship skills also help encourage positive results with the youth reentry process as they prepare to return home."

The inaugural *Rescue-2-Restore* program was launched at two DJJ secure facilities where juvenile offenders train the dogs on-site with local rescue partners. The DJJ facilities provide temporary foster homes for the rescue dogs until local animal welfare partners can handle the eventual canine adoption process with the public.

Program dogs are housed in separate free-standing kennel buildings on campus. Designated youth are responsible for feeding the dogs and cleaning their kennels. Caretaker youth interact with the dogs a minimum of three times a day with at least an hour dedicated specifically to training.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

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In Dalton, Georgia, the dogs at DJJ's Elbert Shaw Regional Youth Detention Center are kept on campus until adopted. The dogs at the DJJ Muscogee Youth Development Campus go through a 12-week training program. If they are not adopted by the program end, the dogs are returned to the Harris County Humane Society shelter where they can be viewed by potential adopters. The *Rescue-2-Restore* program goal is to have the shelter dogs adopted as soon as possible after their training programs are complete.

The Department of Juvenile Justice turned to Friends of DeKalb Animal Services (FODA) founder, Chrissy Kaczynski, to coordinate the DJJ animal rescue program and help set the standards. "To ensure the safety of our participating youth and the other dogs involved, one of our main selection criteria is for dogs that are both "dog-friendly" and "people friendly", Kaczynski said. "We select midsized dogs, generally between 35-to-55 pounds that are not too 'high-energy'. This means we can ensure the youth can handle the dogs and fulfill their exercise requirements."

The caretaker youth teach their dogs basic manners and commands such as "sit", "down", and "stay". Rescue dogs are trained to walk on a loose leash and to greet and appropriately interact with people.

Kaczynski says the youth also teach the dogs tricks when there's time. "Watching the kids and dogs work together, you can just see the mutual respect, the bonding, and the joy. Our program youth love working with these dogs. As the youth begin interacting with the dogs, the walls begin to come down and they just become kids playing with dogs. You can tell how quickly they bond with them and have fun teaching them their commands and tricks," Kaczynski said.

The Department received a letter from one youth who completed the dog rescue program and thanked DJJ for his opportunity to be a handler. The youth revealed that after the death of his father he never wanted to love anyone again because of his fear that they would leave him too. But then he recounted how his program dog helped him overcome that fear. He explained that after his release, his family saw the change in him and he said he was able to form more positive relationships once again.

"Access to the therapeutic benefits of human-animal interaction like these in the *Rescue-2-Restore* program can provide youth in detention with meaningful avenues for deeper recovery and more successful transitions," said Deputy Commissioner Draper.

"*Rescue-2-Restore* entrusts youth in these juvenile detention settings with the responsibility of performing a much-needed service to their community. But at the same time this program is teaching them life-skills like discipline, patience and perseverance, they're also having so much fun they may not even notice they are learning," said Commissioner Niles.

For information about the **Rescue 2 Restore** program contact: Chrissy Kaczynski, Program Coordinator at (470) 230-9308 or Follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DJJRescue2Restore>

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