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Calendar



## Operation New Hope gives dogs and inmates a second chance

December 4, 2012 By [Danielle Austin](#)

"There's a breed and a type and a face that every adopter looks for and those are the dogs that go the quickest," said Kate Koss, an animal care staff member at The Humane Society for Greater Savannah.

So what happens to all the dogs that don't fit most adopter's standards?

They usually spend months and months in the shelter with little to no chance of ever being adopted. Even the dogs that are adopted aren't guaranteed a forever home. Some are returned after a week or two for being aggressive or having behavioral issues. The second a dog is deemed "unadoptable," its chance at a happy life with a loving family significantly decreases.

Sgt. Robert Brooks from the Chatham County Sheriff's Office wanted to do something about this stigma. So he came up with the idea for a program called "Operation New Hope," which launched April 16.

The four-week long program is a collaborative effort between The Humane Society for Greater Savannah and the CCSO. It takes dogs that have had a tough time getting adopted for one reason or another to live with low-risk inmates at the Chatham County Jail. The inmates work closely with the dogs and teach them basic commands and behavioral skills while learning a thing or two about responsibility and animal care themselves.

"We want the inmates to learn responsibility and learn how to love and take care of something other than themselves," said Sgt. Brooks.

And they do.

"Coming into it I had no experience training a dog at all so it's helped me learn discipline," said inmate Thomas Gillooly. He has grown extremely close to his dog Stu in the past few weeks and though he thinks he will feel rewarded on graduation day, the feeling will be bittersweet. "It will be hard to say goodbye, but I've got great memories and photographs, so I'll remember him."

Inmate Gary Singleton shares the same feelings as Gillooly. His dog, Stickly, was abused and rescued from a puppy mill. As a result, Singleton is one of the few humans she trusts. "I wish I could adopt her," Singleton said while petting Stickly. "She's a really nice dog and it's going to be hard to let her go."

But before the inmates say goodbye, their dogs must go through a basic graduation test.



The inmates keep journals so future adopters can get to know the dogs and their personalities a little better.

Photo by The Humane Society for Greater Savannah



"They have to learn 'sit,' 'stay,' 'down,' not to jump on strangers and then anything extra that [the inmates] want to teach them. A lot of them learn 'high five' or 'shake'; one dog even learned how to 'play dead,'" said Koss.

If the dog passes the test, both the dog and the inmate receive graduation certificates. While it might seem obvious as to how this certificate helps the dogs, you might be wondering why the inmate would want one.

Sgt. Brooks explained, "They not only learn obedience training but how to take a dog's temperature, how to trim its nails, how to clean its ears. There are numerous things they learn in the program and many avenues for employment after they go through the program."

For inmate Robert Cook this experience has definitely sparked a new interest in working with animals. "I would like to pursue something like this when I get out. I really like it and it's taught me a lot," said Cook.

Not only is the program a good learning opportunity for both the dogs and the inmates, but it has also served as a real morale booster for the staff.

"We have a very stressful job," said Sgt. Brooks. "We are overcrowded, inmates are getting younger and more dangerous every day and it does the staff good to go down on their break and pet a puppy."

But perhaps the best part of this program is that it is funded by The Humane Society for Greater Savannah and isn't costing taxpayers or the sheriff's office a dime. Even the veterinary care is completely donation-based.

"The county is not paying anything for this, we survive solely off of donations," said Sgt. Brooks.

"And we've had a lot of donations," Sheriff Al St. Lawrence added. "People want to donate to the program because people think we are doing a good thing. And we are."

With eight classes completed and a 95 percent adoption rate, the program seems to be working exceptionally well. And Sheriff St. Lawrence couldn't be more proud. "The program is without a doubt successful ... a lot of these dogs that would not find a home do find a home."

Even two deputies from the CCSO have adopted dogs from the program.

"The interest has started to really pick up. We have people calling saying, 'Hey, when's graduation? We want a jail dog,' and that's really great," said Sgt. Brooks.

Regardless of all the success the program has gained, Sgt. Brooks isn't making plans for expansion just yet. "I think we need to get one full year under our belt first and then look at the amount of adoptions and the recidivism rate — because ultimately the goal of the program is to lower the recidivism rate."

Operation New Hope might not be expanding any time soon, but it is spreading to other counties. Gwinnett County has already adopted the program and Fulton County is starting to adopt it as well. Hopefully, Operation New Hope's success will continue to grow and spread throughout the state of Georgia.

Anyone interested in adopting one of the dogs from Operation New Hope can visit [The Humane Society for Greater Savannah](#).



(From left to right) Sheriff Al St. Lawrence, Kate Koss, and Sgt. Robert Brooks.  
Photo by Joseph Jacob



Sgt. Brooks embraces Brian Clayton's dog Lola. Lola has several scars running  
Photo by Joseph Jacob



down her back and may have been used for breeding.



Robert Cook walks his dog Droopy out to the common room. During certain hours the cell doors are left open so the dogs can interact and have room to move about.

Photo by Joseph Jacob



The dogs are taken outside five times a day. To assist the dogs with becoming housebroken, they are taken outside at the same time of day every day.

Photo by Joseph Jacob



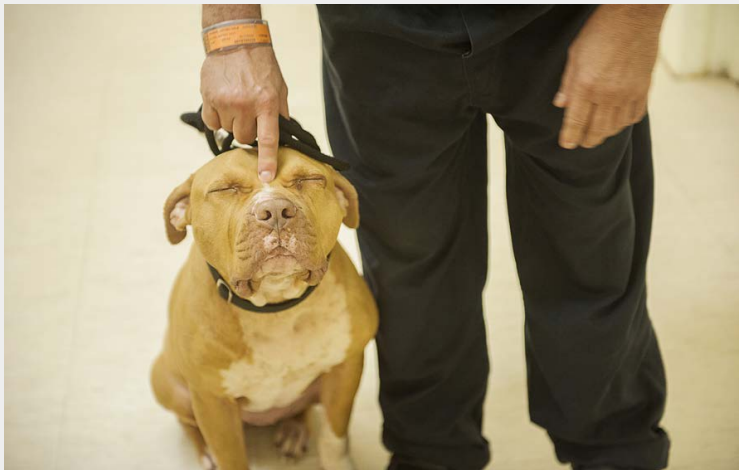
Sticky clings to her trainer Gary Singleton in his cell. "I wish I could adopt her," said Singleton, "She's a really nice dog and it's going to be hard to let her go."

Photo by Joseph Jacob



Charlie was rescued by members of Bryan Animal Caregivers on U.S. Hwy. 17. He had been severely malnourished and had been mutilated by his previous owners.

Photo by Joseph Jacob



Despite his abusive previous owners, Charlie is a good-spirited dog. Jeff Oliver, Charlie's handler bragged, "Look at him, he's supposed to be a ferocious dog, but he's nothing but a big ole baby."

Photo by Joseph Jacob



One aim of the program is to get the dogs to trust people after abusive



Loki is one of the two dogs that have yet to be adopted. The animals are placed

relationships, "[Stickly] gets nervous around people," Singleton explained, "but she is a good dog."

Photo by Joseph Jacob

at the Humane Society, with a certificate of completion of the program, where they wait for prospective adopters.

Photo by Joseph Jacob

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