

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS		
Standard Operating Procedures		
Policy Name: Animal Programs		
Policy Number: 108.13	Effective Date: 01/09/2025	Page Number: 1 of 9
Authority: Commissioner	Originating Division: Inmate Services Division (Career Technical and Higher Education)	Access Listing: Level I: All Access

I. Introduction and Summary:

The Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) has established animal programs to provide offenders with the education and training necessary to obtain employment and increase their chances of successful return to the community; improve offender behavior and increase the offenders' sense of responsibility and care towards others; and to increase animal adoptions and the number of therapy and service animals available for individuals in the community who require their services. Animal programs shall focus on socialization and basic training for the animals to increase adoptability, or therapy and/or service training for the animals to provide assistance for program clients.

II. Authority:

GDC Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): 102.01 Media Relations, 108.12 Live Works Projects, 109.01 Local Management of Volunteer Services, and 203.03 Incident Reporting.

III. Definitions:

As used in this SOP, these terms are defined as follows.

- A. **Animal Shelter Detail** - A work detail in which offenders will prepare and clean indoor and outdoor animal areas as well as provide socialization for animals at animal shelters run by a governmental entity that has entered into a legally binding contract with GDC.
- B. **Contractor** – Animal rescue organizations, animal shelters, humane societies, or therapy/service organizations that enter into a legally binding contract with GDC to provide an animal program.
- C. **Facility Animal Program Coordinator** - The GDC staff member designated by the facility to coordinate the program with the Contractor. This staff person shall be consistently assigned to the program.
- D. **Foster/Rescue Dog Program** - A program that allows offenders to assist a Contractor in providing housing, basic training, and socialization to prepare animals for adoption.

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- E. **Primary Handler** - An offender who is chosen to assume leadership as the full-time animal trainer/handler for the animal assigned to him/her.
- F. **The State Repository of Information System (SCRIBE)** – GDC’s official offender records management system.
- G. **Secondary Handler** - An offender who will assume responsibility for the assigned animal in the absence of the Primary Handler.
- H. **Service Dog Program** - A program in which offenders train dogs for the specific purpose of teaching the dogs to assist an individual who requires assistance due to a variety of physical or emotional needs.
- I. **Statewide Animal Program Coordinator** – The Career Technical and Higher Education (CTHE) staff member assigned to oversee all animal programs statewide.

IV. **Statement of Policy and Applicable Procedures:**

A. Establishment:

1. In conjunction with the Statewide Animal Program Coordinator, a Warden/Superintendent may establish an offender animal program.
2. All animal programs/Contractors will be responsible for all food, supplies, equipment and materials needed for the animals. All veterinary care will be provided by the animal program/contractor. Additionally, the animal program/contractor will be responsible for facilitating adoptions, when applicable.
3. Animal programs will function at no cost to GDC.
4. Contractors operating therapy and/or service animal training programs shall be accredited members or candidate members in good standing of Assistance Dogs International or another nationally recognized organization with expertise in training therapy and/or service dogs.

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- a. Program Coordinators shall maintain active communication with the Contractor for the duration of the program and ensure that all Offender-Trainers comply with the Contractor's general requirements for trainers.
5. All animal programs/Contractors will comply with SOP 109.01 (Local Management of Volunteer Services.)
6. Each facility will ensure there is an Animal Services Agreement in place with the animal program/Contractor prior to receiving animals. The agreement shall be coordinated through the Statewide Animal Program Coordinator and/or the Director of CTHE.

B. Responsibilities:

1. The Contractor will oversee all offender animal programs, and:
 - a. Assist with the planning and implementation of programs and act as a resource to program staff/volunteers.
 - b. Conduct regular facility visits to observe the program. While unannounced visits may be necessary, when possible, coordinate visits, including animal drop-offs with the Facility Animal Program Coordinator.
 - c. Contractors will be responsible for the acts and omissions of its staff/volunteers while they are participating in or representing the animal program.
 - d. Contractor staff will be screened per SOP 109.01 (Local Management of Volunteer Services.)
 - e. The Contractor's trainer, if applicable, will provide ongoing communication to the Program Coordinator, which will include, but not be limited to, review of Offender-Trainer progress and performance.

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2. The Warden/Superintendent will designate a Facility Animal Program Coordinator responsible for day-to-day program operations at the facility, who will:
 - a. Ensure compliance with GDC policy by facility employees, offenders and visitors involved with the program, as well as Contractor staff/volunteers.
 - b. Coordinate with the Statewide Animal Program Coordinator or the Director of CTHE, the program's contractor(s) and the offender trainer(s) on program implementation and operation, including program training schedules, curriculum, and activities.
 - c. Maintain safety and security procedures governing offender participants and program animals.
 - d. Develop and publish a schedule of all program activities.
 - e. Maintain up-to-date veterinary records for the program animals on-site.
 - f. Be active in program development, implementation, and daily activities.

B. Offender Application and Screening:

1. Offenders who wish to participate in an animal program will complete a program application and applicable screening processes for the program (for example: interviews, essays, surveys, etc.)
 - a. Therapy/Service programs require that an offender have a minimum sentence of two (2) years remaining.
 - b. Therapy/Service programs require that an offender be incarcerated for one (1) year prior to consideration.
2. Background Review:
 - a. Criminal History;

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- i. Offenders with convictions of a sexual nature, cruelty to animals and/or egregious assaultive charges/histories are generally excluded from acceptance into an animal program. Exceptions may be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Warden/designee, Program Coordinator, and Contractor.

- b. Review of Institutional/Disciplinary Record.

3. Suggested Interview Board:

- a. Warden/Superintendent or designee;
- b. Facility Animal Program Coordinator;
- c. Contractor Representative, if applicable; and
- d. Counselor.

D. Offender Participants:

1. All offender program assignments will be voluntary.
2. Offenders accepted into the program are required to comply with the terms of the facility's contract with the Contractor and facility regulations.
3. All selected offenders must sign Attachment 1, (Animal Program Waiver of Liability Form,) prior to any animal contact.
4. Prior to handling animals, offenders will participate in an orientation of appropriate care of animals.
5. In the event of observed or alleged mistreatment of an animal, security protocol and policies will be followed in accordance with GDC SOP 203.03 (Incident Reporting.)

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6. Offenders assigned to all animal programs will be scheduled for the appropriate related OJT programs in SCRIBE. Where applicable, offenders will be scheduled for the Animal Caretaker program in SCRIBE.

E. Volunteers:

1. Volunteers, including facility employees volunteering on-site with the program while off the clock, will be screened per SOP 109.01 (Local Management of Volunteer Services.)
2. All participating volunteers, including employees, must sign Attachment 1 (Animal Program Waiver of Liability Form,) prior to any animal contact.

F. Program Animals:

1. GDC will not be liable for any accidental injury or health related issues of the animal while on facility grounds.
2. All animals brought by the animal program/contractor for the purposes of participating in the animal program will be the property and responsibility of the Contractor.
 - a. All animals must be in the care of the Contractor for an approved amount of time prior to transfer to a facility.
3. Animals owned by staff must be approved in accordance with SOP 108.12 (Live Works Projects.)
4. Before entering the facility, each animal will be screened for:
 - a. Health and physical condition:
 - i. All animals must be current on all required vaccinations and have documentation to show it.

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- ii. Animals with special needs must be approved in advance by the Facility Animal Program Coordinator.
- b. Temperament, including issues that might cause injuries to employees, program staff/volunteers, or offenders;
- c. Ability to accept socialization and training; and
- d. Adoptability after program completion.
- 3. Spaying and Neutering:
 - a. All Foster/Rescue Program animals shall be spayed or neutered a minimum of one (1) week prior to placement in a facility.
 - b. Therapy/Service dogs will be at the discretion of the Contractor with approval from the facility.
- 4. Transportation of Animals:
 - a. With the exception of emergency situations, animals will be transported as needed in vehicles owned and operated by the Contractor.
 - i. Facility Animal Program Coordinator will facilitate transport.
 - ii. In the event of an emergency, the GDC facility is responsible for carrying out the facility evacuation plan or process.
- 5. The Warden/Superintendent, Facility Animal Program Coordinator, and Contractor may approve, deny, and/or remove any animal entering/participating in the program.
- 6. Adoption/Final Placement:
 - a. The Contractor will have sole responsibility for the adoption or other final placement of all animals in the program.

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G. Sanitation: Offenders assigned to animal programs are responsible for the overall cleanliness and sanitation of the animals' living quarters and outside training/relief areas.

1. Inside Facility Living Area:

- a. Solid waste and urine will be removed/mopped up immediately and the area cleaned and disinfected.
- b. Animal living quarters will be inspected and cleaned by the assigned offenders on a daily basis.
- c. Animal food and water bowls will be cleaned a minimum of one time daily by the assigned offenders.

2. Outside Training/Animal Relief Areas

- a. Solid waste will be immediately picked up following appropriate procedures and disposed of in an approved receptacle.

H. Emergency Procedures:

1. The Facility Animal Program Coordinator will ensure that a current emergency contact list for the animals in the program is maintained at all times. It will include:
 - a. Contact information for the Program Coordinator/designee, Contractor, Contractor's trainer, and program staff/volunteers.
2. Each program will develop written emergency procedures to address:
 - a. Any injury to any individual by an animal will be reported immediately to the nearest staff member/supervisor.
 - i. Any offender injured while participating in an animal program will be seen by on-site medical staff;

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- ii. An Incident Report with witness statements will be completed; and
- iii. In instances of an animal bite, the incident will be reviewed by the Warden/Superintendent, Facility Animal Program Coordinator, and Contractor to determine if the bite was an aggressive act which may warrant removal from the program.

b. Health related emergencies involving an animal:

- i. Immediately notify the Emergency Contact person for the Contractor;
- ii. Notify the Warden/Superintendent; and
- iii. Notify the Facility Animal Program Coordinator.

I. Press/Media:

- 1. The Contractor must have prior written approval from GDC Public Affairs for any social media postings, publications, advertisements, media contact, or public information that relates to an offender animal program, collectively called “material”, excepting that material which deals solely with dog adoption promotions. This approval shall be coordinated through the Statewide Animal Program Coordinator and/or the Director of CTHE (Refer to Attachment 1 of SOP 102.01, Media Relations, the Interview Request Form.)

V. **Attachments:**

Attachment 1: Animal Program Waiver of Liability Form

VI. **Record Retention of Forms Relevant to this Policy:**

Upon completion, by an offender, Attachment 1 shall be placed in the offender’s institutional file and maintained according to the official retention schedule for that file. Upon completion, by an employee or volunteer, the form will be retained at the facility for five (5) years and then shall be destroyed.