

THE EPOCH TIMES



(Courtesy of Cell Dogs, Inc.)

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA OC NEWS

OC Extends Program for Inmates to Rehabilitate Through Training Dog

By [Rudy Blalock](#) | October 24, 2022 Updated: October 25, 2022

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The [Orange County](#) Board of Supervisors on Oct. 18 unanimously agreed to extend for three years a dog-training program that focuses on inmate [rehabilitation](#).

The program—operated by [Cell Dogs, Inc.](#)—has been in place for about a year at the Theo Lacy Facility, a county jail in Orange. It was first started at the James A. Musick facility in Irvine but was shut down due to the pandemic.



Inmates train dogs at the James A. Musick facility in Irvine, Calif. (Courtesy of Cell Dogs, Inc.)

Sgt. Todd Hylton, a spokesperson for the Orange County Sheriff's Department, told The Epoch Times that it's been a huge success.

"Wherever the dogs have been, there are less issues. ... It's really helped the inmates understand how to be able to love one another, because a lot of them may come from difficult situations," Hylton said.

The nonprofit, in collaboration with the Orange County Sheriff's Department and Orange County Animal Care—which provides temporary shelter for stray dogs—offers inmates the opportunity to gain hands-on dog-training experience, develop life skills and positive lifestyle changes, and prepare for success upon release.



(Courtesy of Cell Dogs, Inc.)

“We are a one-stop shop,” Cell Dogs, Inc. founder Janette Thomas told The Epoch Times. “We organize, facilitate, and graduate the dogs that come into the program.”

Dogs in the program receive crate training, potty training, basic obedience commands, and cute tricks before being offered for adoption, Thomas said.

She said she started the nonprofit 15 years ago. She hasn’t taken a salary, she said, so her trainers can be paid adequately.



Trainer Lynn works with rescue dog Buddy in 2020. (Courtesy of Cell Dogs, Inc.)

“It’s an expensive program to run because we supply everything—all the supplies, all the food, and all the medical bills,” Thomas said.

No government funding goes to the program, so it is completely self-sustained through donations and fundraising, she said.

One way people can support the company, she said, is to shop through AmazonSmile, the philanthropic version of Amazon. The company donates 0.5 percent of eligible purchases to the charity of the buyer’s choice.



Duff, a rescue-turned-service dog, is placed with his working partner. (Courtesy of Cell Dogs, Inc.)

At the Theo Lacy Facility, the nonprofit works with female inmates but hopes males can join soon. Before working directly with the dogs, participants learn the basics of handling, caring for, and training the dogs.

After four weeks of classroom learning, participants have between 8 to 10 weeks to care for and train a carefully selected dog they will be working with every day.

Earlier this month, Cell Dogs, Inc. also started working with the Orange County Probation Department, where both male and female juveniles will go through the same classes. Thomas said they will begin their training soon, and the nonprofit will be searching for a home for the dogs once they graduate.



(Courtesy of Cell Dogs, Inc.)

Thanks to the experience, several inmates have become dog trainers once they returned to civilian life, she said.

“They’ve been trainers for PetSmart and Petco. We also employ and offer job opportunities to trainers we think are amazing,” Thomas said.

She said her company is responsible for finding dogs for the program, which can be difficult.

“Temperament is the most important criteria,” she said.

Qualifying dogs will have gone through dozens of hours of evaluation before being selected, she added.



Dog evaluation at a local shelter. (Courtesy of Cell Dogs, Inc.)

Important qualities dogs must have, she said, are the ability to work well with people and other dogs, a great temperament, and tolerance for a noisy environment.

“One bite and we’re done, so we have to find dogs that are amiable to each other,” she said.

Careful selection doesn’t mean discrimination, though.

“We’ve had small dogs, and the biggest dog we had was 115 pounds. We’ve had [dogs with] medical issues. We’ve had amputees. We’ve had deaf dogs. We’ve had dogs with one eye. You name it,” Thomas said.