



Celebrating Greyhounds

Winter 2014 Online Magazine

Growing up with Greyhounds

ALSO INSIDE:

Prison Program

Healing with Reiki

Timid, Shy, or Spook?

Celebrating Greyhounds

Winter 2014
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On the cover: *Eight-year-old Jack Cartwright and Cosmo live in Dallas, Texas, with Jack's parents, Andrew and Hila Cartwright. / Photo by Crackerdog Photography*

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A New Race, a New Life

Prison Greyhounds provides foster homes and training for Greyhounds and hope for inmates.

By Mary Louden

Many former racing Greyhounds have their lives on hold at the racetrack because adoption groups cannot find enough foster homes. In Indiana, some nonviolent inmates are ready to help bridge that gap. Prison Greyhounds addresses this frustrating shortage of foster homes by utilizing these offenders, and we are having quite an impact.

Prison Greyhounds fosters retired racing Greyhounds inside Putnamville Correctional Facility, a medium-security men's prison in Greencastle, Indiana. A team of two inmate-handlers per dog serves as fosters. The handlers have two months to teach the dogs basic house manners prior to adoption into permanent loving homes.

Former racers are selected for the program by volunteers with Greyhound Pets of America (GPA) Daytona Beach and kennel workers at Daytona Beach Kennel Club. We never

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Inmates at the medium-security Putnamville Correctional Facility spend two months fostering Greyhounds to prepare the dogs for adoption.



Weekly dog meetings allow Prison Greyhound volunteers to coach the handlers, and reduces the burden on facility staff.

select our own dogs, and we never request by color, age, or appearance. The kennel workers know the temperament of the Greyhounds entrusted to their care. They select only confident Greyhounds to go inside the prison.

A correctional facility has a lot of commotion, loud, sudden noises, hard concrete floors, strange smells, and thousands of people in close quarters under stress. In our specific facility, the Greyhounds live in a dormitory with more than

100 men.

One of the handlers must be with a Greyhound at all times. This is one way we ensure the dog is safely supervised. Our biggest ongoing threat is that other offenders can't resist offering their peanut butter sandwiches to these dogs. Everyone wants to be their friend!

The inmates are always under staff supervision and camera surveillance is everywhere. Greyhounds accompany their handlers to classes, chapel, family visitations, or for long walks in the recreation yard. The prison also provides a separate off-leash area where the dogs run together while wearing plastic kennel muzzles. At night, they are safely crated within reach of their handlers' bunks.

Retired Greyhounds are already highly socialized from their training and care at the racetrack; this is why they are great dogs for the prison program. They are gentle, affectionate, and athletic, but not high-energy. The fact that



Handlers and their Greyhounds enjoy supervised outdoor playtime.

they are already crate-trained makes them quick to learn that “outside” is where they need to relieve themselves.

Any prison program must adjust according to the specific facility. We do not have the luxury of long-term caregivers, so we simplified

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the coaching we provide. Our handlers often transition before receiving their fourth Greyhound. We always maintain two handlers-in-training to accommodate the dogs when a regular handler gets paroled, is sent to another facility, or leaves the program for any reason. The foster Greyhounds adjust well to this. A retired racer has lived in constant transition since training began, and will continue to until adoption.

Our curriculum is from several widely-recognized Greyhound adoption books. We select our prison volunteer team very carefully. This team coaches the handlers each week during dog meetings that reduce staff burden and ensure the welfare of the dogs. We require a weekly dog report from each handler and handler-in-training. Healthy relationships develop between offenders and our volunteer community role models.

At each informal dog meeting, we confirm



Two handlers are paired with each Greyhound, allowing one of them to be with the dog at all times.

that the foster dog is adjusting well emotionally and physically. If he or she were not, we would remove the Greyhound. We have four Greyhounds in Putnamville. If one were removed, we'd still have three remaining for the

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Greyhound socialization that the dogs need for their own benefit. In our facility, four is the maximum number of dogs we can accommodate in our dog dorm. When the prison is ready, we will expand into another dorm, with four more dogs. A solid part of our partnership agreement is that we will never push to foster more dogs beyond the prison's stated limit or desire.

Superintendent Stan Knight told us, "Four dogs maximizes the benefit to the dorm. Any beyond that just complicates things for our staff and the general population. Someday, we hope to open up a

second dorm with four more Greyhounds, but we cannot promise that yet."

We respect this decision, and are happy to report that we recently received permission to expand our program by an additional four Greyhounds, for a total of eight! A volunteer program that brings dogs inside a prison must always remember that we are guests. We need to make things as easy as possible for the staff.

One benefit of having our prison team volunteers visit weekly is that we handle the constant questions, training, coaching, encouraging, and delivery of the supplies. Some of the prison dog programs we studied closed because the dog group expected too much from the staff. Our facility does not hire extra staff or trainers. It partners with us because we understand the limitations and budget. We also cover every expense for this program. The days of tax money going toward dog food, staff, or program supplies are over. We assume total



Handlers take part in every aspect of Greyhound care, including bathing the dogs when they arrive from Florida.

financial responsibility for the Greyhounds before they arrive until their adoptions. Indiana taxpayers contribute nothing.

chooses its Greyhound. The Greyhounds are bathed inside the dorm, hillbilly style — we rig a hose to a faucet in the janitor’s room and

Prison Greyhounds is both a prison program and the adoption group. Adopters can only meet the prison dogs when they arrive straight off the haul. We call this “new dog day.” If pre-approved, a \$100 deposit will hold your Greyhound until adoption day, two months after his prison fostering.

Within one hour after jumping down off the haul, we whisk the prison fosters off to Putnamville. Each team of two handlers

suds the dog. It is great fun and a true bonding lesson for the handlers. Our volunteers stay with the new arrivals until they are introduced to their handlers, bathed, exercised, fed, treated for parasites, given a new toy and fresh bed, and then settled in for a long nap after a very long journey from Florida.

We have little problem after adoption with the feared separation anxiety. This is one question asked a lot by Greyhound connoisseurs, who are concerned that these dogs are always with handlers for the entire two months they are in training. A lot of this has to do with the fact that these are confident dogs going inside the prison, and almost every dog is adopted before he leaves the prison. Greyhounds transition directly into their forever homes. They are ready. They have learned basic house manners, to climb stairs, walk on slick floors, and to maintain good leash manners.

We reserve our volunteer foster homes in the community for Greyhounds that have retired with racing injuries and cannot be on concrete prison floors 24/7. The injured dogs often wait the longest in the kennels before an adoption group says "We want that dog!" We actively encourage the adoption of these injured Greyhounds. We find them loving, responsible homes by telling their stories.

The prison program has intrinsic benefits to the handlers. These are some of our favorite quotes, taken from the inmate-handlers' weekly dog reports:

"This program motivates me to get better not bitter."

"I really needed a friend and this Greyhound came along."

Another offender, who is not in the dog program, closed his eyes and hugged one of our



See more photos from Prison Greyhounds' program inside Putnamville Correctional Facility.

Greyhounds during chapel. He told the handler, "Please bring him every week and sit by me. This is the closest to home that I have felt since I have been in here." He had tears in his eyes.

The staff tells us that from the day the dogs arrive, the noise level in the dorm is noticeably softer. Things are calmer. Offenders laugh and smile more. Teamwork is developed. Inmate-handlers are often featured on our Facebook page. We had underestimated the positive impact that our Facebook site would have on helping to maintain healthy family relations for the offenders. Families, both local and long distance, feel an instant connection and pride upon seeing their incarcerated loved one being a role model to the prison.

We never select our inmate-handlers.

We let the professional staff counselors at the prison select the participants. We give the staff some very basic outlines. Our relationship with the offenders ends at the moment they leave our program. Once they leave, they are in our hearts, but not in our lives. We are not trying to be a post-prison assimilation group. We do not allow identification or communication between offenders and any of our adopters or volunteers, other than during the dog meetings. This provides an extra measure of distance for our peace of mind. Our mission with the handlers is accomplished when they leave our program. This human-Greyhound connection impacts inmates who will someday be released into our community as better citizens and more responsible pet owners.

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We see ourselves as small and local by design, with a team that is volunteer-intensive. We practice community collaboration to build our own support network. Teamwork and partnership will always accomplish more. We knew that by ourselves we would always have limitations, and realized a strong desire to help more Greyhounds find their forever homes.

As a successful prison program, we attract a lot of national, and sometimes international, attention. Many of our supporters are too far away to volunteer or adopt. We decided to harness this enthusiasm to help with the expense of the long-distance transportation of retired Greyhounds to various adoption groups in non-racing states. In 2013, with great support from our fans and volunteers, Prison Greyhounds created



Prison Greyhounds volunteers unveiled their new A Ticket Home program at the Daytona Beach Kennel Club.

a fundraising campaign we call “A Ticket Home.”

A Ticket Home is one way we can contribute to a larger mission beyond Prison Greyhounds. GPA Daytona Beach constantly houses about 110 former racers waiting for adoption, and has a waiting list of 150 more retired Greyhounds ready to get into their adoption kennel. We became aware that GPA Daytona Beach completely funds its own hauls, out of long-standing tradition. Rising expenses can put long-distance hauls at risk. Yet without reliable delivery of Greyhounds to distant states, adoption groups are rendered useless. We are only one group on the haul route that benefits, but our volunteers are very proud of this accomplishment.

A letter from inside the prison:



The Greyhounds have had a positive impact on their inmate-handlers.

Today I woke up feeling a little down, missing my children and the possibilities of the outside world. As I laid on my bunk visiting my regretful past memories, I began to say a silent prayer. As my eyes became moist with tears I felt something

(or someone) breathing on me.

When I opened up my eyes there was a beautiful blue-brindle Greyhound actually smiling at me — just inches from my face. It startled me at first, to see him smile, because his canines were showing! However it was not an act of aggression, it was an act of compassion, which in turn made me do something that I rarely do in here, which is to have a good laugh from my soul.

I then said to him, “Power Up, does this mean that we are friends?” He actually smiled at me again which set the pace for me to have a tolerable day. In closing, for me, I took Power Up’s smile as a sign that God can use animals, as well as humans, to convey a message of hope. All I had to do is be receptive. Thanks Power Up – Good friends like you are hard to find. ■

– Handler Tom

About the author: Mary Louden, president and founder of Prison Greyhounds, resides in Indianapolis and owns a professional dog walking business. She and her husband, Jeff, adopted their first retired racer in 1993. To date, they have adopted 11 Greyhounds, usually having four in the house at one time. Mary’s favorite volunteer role is serving on the Prison Team that coaches inmate-handlers. In 2012, she was awarded the title of Pet Adoption Advocate of the Year by Pet Sitters International for the efforts of Prison Greyhounds’ volunteer teams.