Introduction

Paws for Progress is a Community Interest Company (CIC) which aims "to enhance the well-being of people and animals by promoting and supporting, by whatever means, positive and effective interactions between them".

Paws for Progress runs the first prison based dog training programme in the UK, in partnership with the Scottish Prison Service, Fife College, Dogs Trust and the University of Stirling. Currently operating in HMYOI Polmont, the programme teaches young men how to train and rehabilitate rescue dogs for re-homing. The programme aims to support the young men taking part to improve their own behaviour, educational engagement and employability skills as well as assisting them in their personal development. It also seeks to create positive outcomes for the dogs that they work with, to improve the dogs’ behaviour and well-being and increase their chances of being successfully rehomed.

The programme is providing the focus for a Psychology Research Project at the University of Stirling and Paws for Progress has used the evidence-based logic model approach to design the programme and to support programme evaluation.

Step 1: Review the evidence

A piece of research, undertaken by researchers at the University of Stirling, identified common needs of young men in the criminal justice system in Scotland and the contribution that animal-assisted interventions could make to the young men’s progress and development. The research included a comprehensive review of existing international evidence and a series of consultations with prison staff. The research demonstrated a need to support young men in prison with their personal development, with a particular emphasis on improving their engagement with educational programmes, developing social and problem-solving skills and overcoming low self-esteem.

The Paws for Progress programme was developed out of this piece of research in collaboration with the programme partners.

Step 2: Draw a logic model

To help inform the design and development of the programme, a logic model was drawn up, setting out the intended inputs, outputs and outcomes.
Step 3: Identify indicators & collect data

Rebecca Leonardi, the Project Leader for Paws for Progress, is evaluating the programme as the topic of her PhD and this has involved designing a range of monitoring tools. Initially, Paws for Progress considered using off-the-shelf tools and trialled a number of these with the young men using their service. They quickly found, however, that these tools were not appropriate, since many of the young men told them that they struggled to understand the language used in the tools or to interpret the meaning of items on the scale. The time taken to complete the assessments was also identified as an issue. Following this feedback, Paws for Progress worked with the young men to modify the monitoring tools so that they were better suited to the needs of the individuals and staff involved with Paws for Progress. This meant that, in addition to helping to collect monitoring data for evaluating the service, the tools were designed to be part of the programme, helping to support the staff and young men with the programme activities and to understand the individual progress being made.

The monitoring tools use a range of indicators to assess progress in relation to self-esteem, educational attainment, social competencies, employability skills and institutional behaviour. This data is collected through a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods:

- Pre and post programme assessments (including psychometric) to establish a baseline and to assess progress made
- The use of control groups to compare the progress of programme participants with those not taking part
- Interviews with the young men during their participation on the programme to gain their perspectives on strengths, needs, progress and the effectiveness of the support
- Coursework and SQA completion
- Programme records, indicating level of participation, behaviour and progress within the dog training programme.
- Feedback from prison staff
- Institutional records: infractions, disciplinary offences, participation in other programmes, educational level and general progress (using the Scottish Prison Service database Prisoner Records 2, PR2)
- Informal feedback from participants after their release from prison, which also allows Paws for Progress to continue to provide support where appropriate
- Structured longer term follow up involving interviews, monitoring of volunteering and/or employment, educational attainment and reconviction rates.
- Monitoring the outcomes of the dogs taking part in the programme. This includes monitoring behaviour, welfare and adoptability of participating dogs.

Step 4: Evaluate the logic model

As mentioned above, the programme evaluation is the focus of a doctoral project (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council) and will look at whether the service is working as expected and the extent to which it is delivering the intended outcomes. The final report is expected to be completed by January 2015.

Interim evaluation results from the eleven cycles of the programme which have taken place to-date are already available and show a high level of engagement, with over 75% of the young men continuing to engage with Paws for Progress following their release. In the past year, 30
men completed the 8 week course and participants gained almost 300 SQA qualifications covering a range of core skills including communications, ICT and numeracy.

Feedback from participants has been incredibly positive, with all of them reporting that they felt the course had helped them, and that it had a positive effect on their understanding of dogs. The young men also reported feeling more confident about their communication skills, problem solving abilities, patience and management of emotions as they have progressed through the course. Examples of the qualitative feedback received from staff at HM YOI Polmont and from programme participants are shown in the box below.

"As well as helping me work with others as a team, being part of Paws for Progress brought me closer to my family too. It gave me something good to talk to them about, for a start. Then I felt like I was doing something to make them proud of me, the first time I could talk to them about something positive in years." (Paws for Progress participant)

"I think that seeing how easy my dog changed his behaviour had a huge positive impact on helping me change mine." (Paws for Progress participant)

"Even apart from the qualifications and certificates we get at Paws for Progress, we get something more than that. It's the sense of accomplishment, when you've taught something, even just one thing. Whether you've taught your dog or you've helped another student, you feel like you achieved a real goal. And when my dog achieves something, well then I'm really happy, because I know that dog is one step closer to getting a home.” (Paws for Progress participant)

"Many of the young men in our care have had negative and frustrating experiences of education prior to their time in custody, which has impacted on their behaviour and their opportunities. Paws for Progress delivers a resourceful and creative approach to education, allowing the students to experience the many benefits of learning, improve their mental well-being and increase their prospects of employment when they return to their communities. The development of mature and positive attitudes among the young men is clearly evident as they take part in the programme.” (Governor of HM YOI Polmont)

Source: Paws for Progress participant feedback

The outcomes for the dogs have also been positive, with the dogs demonstrating improvements to behaviour across the training tasks and 55 dogs being successfully rehomed following their involvement in the training programme over the past year.

The ongoing results of the evaluation are being used to inform the continual development of the Paws for Progress programme and the forthcoming results will also help contribute to the growing evidence base around human-animal interaction programmes and what works to improve outcomes for young men serving custodial sentences.

For further information:
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About CJVSF

The Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum (CJVSF):

- Supports voluntary sector providers to continuously improve their own criminal justice services through collaboration and sharing of good practice
- Assists voluntary sector providers to understand, navigate and influence the complex and changing environment in which they operate
- Promotes broader awareness of the activities, value and impact of voluntary sector services within criminal justice.

The CJVSF is hosted by CCPS (the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland) and receives financial support from The Robertson Trust and The Monument Trust.

Further details about the Forum can be found at: www.ccpscotland.org/cjvsf