



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Loudoun County, Virginia

Program Title: ADC Service Puppy Program-Pawsitive Change: A Correctional Service Puppy Program Advancing Rehabilitation and Community Impact

Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Calvin Moore

Title: Major

Department: Corrections Division

Telephone: 571-627-6710

Website: https://sheriff.loudoun.gov

Email: Calvin.Moore@loudoun.gov

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Tim Hemstreet

Title: County Administrator

Signature: Tim Hemstreet



**Sheriff Michael L. Chapman**

## **LOUDOUN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

P.O. Box 7200 | Leesburg, VA 20177  
803 Sycolin Rd SE | Leesburg, VA 20175  
Telephone 703-777-0407

Loudoun County Sheriff's Office

Adult Detention Center Service Puppy Program

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office Adult Detention Center (ADC) Service Puppy Program is an innovative initiative that combines offender rehabilitation with meaningful community impact. In partnership with Heeling House, Inc., incarcerated individuals train service dogs for individuals with special needs.

Since 2023, 13 participants have helped train more than 20 service dogs, with five fully participating and four successfully placed as mobility, psychiatric, autism support, and facility service dogs. One participant secured post-release employment within the field, demonstrating a direct link to workforce outcomes.

Heeling House provides the dogs, training, and care, while the Sheriff's Office integrates the program into daily operations, delivering a high-impact program at minimal cost.

This program promotes responsibility, improves facility culture, and produces service dogs that enhance quality of life in the community. It is a scalable, cost-effective model that aligns rehabilitation with public service.



# LOUDOUN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

VACo 2026 Achievement Award Nomination

Criminal Justice and Public Safety

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## Loudoun County Adult Detention Center Service Puppy Program

*Pawsitive Change: A Correctional Service Puppy Program Advancing Rehabilitation and Community Impact*

### **Problem / Challenge**

Local correctional facilities are continually challenged to provide offender programming that goes beyond compliance-based rehabilitation and instead produces meaningful, measurable change in behavior, mindset, and long-term outcomes. While traditional programs such as educational classes and counseling services remain essential, they often lack sustained engagement, real-world application, and the level of personal responsibility necessary to fully prepare incarcerated individuals for successful reintegration into the community.

This challenge is compounded by the need to manage offender behavior, promote a positive facility culture, and provide opportunities that reduce idleness while supporting rehabilitation. Programs that fail to actively engage participants can limit their effectiveness, resulting in missed opportunities to develop critical life skills such as accountability, empathy, and teamwork.

At the same time, communities across Northern Virginia face an increasing demand for highly trained service dogs, particularly for children with autism, psychiatric conditions, and mobility-related needs. The process of raising and training service dogs is both time-intensive and resource-dependent, requiring consistent structure, socialization, and early-stage development to ensure successful placement.

Recognizing these challenges, the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office identified an opportunity to develop a program that strengthens offender rehabilitation while addressing a critical community

need, providing purpose, promoting pro-social behavior, and delivering measurable outcomes in a cost-effective and operationally feasible manner.

### **Innovative Approach**

To address these challenges, the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office developed the Adult Detention Center (ADC) Service Puppy Program - an innovative, structured initiative that integrates correctional rehabilitation, workforce development, and community service into a single operational model.

The program is built on a strategic partnership with Heeling House, Inc., a local nonprofit organization specializing in the training and placement of service dogs for individuals with special needs. Through this collaboration,



the ADC is able to incorporate professional training standards, veterinary care, and program oversight while maintaining internal control of operations and participant management.

Unlike traditional correctional programming, the Service Puppy Program is fully embedded within the daily operations of the facility. Carefully screened incarcerated individuals are selected to serve as primary and secondary handlers, each assigned direct responsibility for the care, training, and development of a service puppy. These responsibilities include feeding, grooming, exercising, and conducting structured obedience and service role training, as well as reinforcing appropriate behavior through consistent daily interaction.

The program begins with a formal orientation and instructional phase, followed by an extended period of hands-on training lasting several months. During this time, participants work closely with the puppies to develop foundational obedience skills, socialization behaviors, and environmental adaptability, critical components for future service dog success.

A key distinguishing feature of the program is the continuous interaction between the handler and the service puppy. By housing the dogs with their assigned handlers, the program creates a sustained, real-time learning environment that reinforces accountability, routine, and responsibility. This level of immersion is rarely achieved in traditional correctional programming and significantly enhances both skill development and behavioral outcomes.

The program operates under comprehensive operating guidelines, ensuring consistency, safety, and scalability. Defined roles, structured schedules, and clear expectations allow the program to function effectively within a secure correctional environment while maintaining the flexibility needed to meet both operational and training demands.

By combining evidence-based rehabilitation principles with a community-focused mission, the ADC Service Puppy Program is a forward-thinking approach that redefines how correctional facilities can deliver meaningful, outcome-driven programming at the local level.

### **Impact and Outcomes**

Since its implementation in the fall of 2023, the ADC Service Puppy Program has demonstrated measurable success in both participant development and community impact. To date, thirteen incarcerated individuals have participated in the program, gaining hands-on experience in structured training, animal care, and daily responsibility.

From an operational perspective, the program maintains consistent engagement, routinely training two service puppies at a time. To date, five service puppies have been fully assigned to the ADC program, while the ADC has supported the care, socialization, and training of more than twenty service dogs at varying stages of development, ranging from several weeks to multiple months. This reflects both the program's sustainability and its broader contribution to service dog training efforts.

Of the five service puppies that have fully assigned to the program, four successfully completed advanced training and placement into service roles, including mobility service, psychiatric service, autism support, and one becoming a facility dog for a local county police department. These outcomes demonstrate a strong success rate in preparing dogs for specialized roles that directly

improve the lives of individuals and organizations within the community. The program continues to operate actively, with a service puppy Macaroni currently in training.

### **Offender Rehabilitation and Skill Development**

The program provides incarcerated participants with meaningful responsibility and purpose beyond traditional correctional programming. Handlers are entrusted with the daily care and training of a service animal, requiring discipline, accountability, and consistency.

Through this experience, participants develop critical life skills, including time management, communication, teamwork, and emotional regulation; skills that are reinforced daily and transferable to post-release environments.

The program has also demonstrated tangible reentry outcomes, with at least one participant securing employment within the field following release, directly linking program participation to workforce opportunity.

### **Therapeutic and Behavioral Benefits**

The human-animal bond plays a significant role in improving emotional well-being among participants. Interaction with service puppies has been observed to reduce stress, anxiety, and negative behavioral tendencies while fostering empathy and emotional awareness.

Participants often demonstrate increased engagement, improved attitudes, and stronger interpersonal interactions. These changes contribute to a more stable and positive correctional environment, supporting overall facility operations and reinforcing a culture of accountability and respect.

### **Community Impact**

The ADC Service Puppy Program delivers meaningful and measurable benefits to the community by contributing to the development of highly trained service dogs for individuals with special needs. Each dog trained through the program represents a life-changing resource, particularly for children and individuals requiring assistance with mobility, autism-related needs, or psychiatric conditions.

The program has already demonstrated this impact through the successful training and placement of its first service dogs, Ginger and Moxie. As the inaugural participants in the ADC



Service Puppy Program, both completed ten months of initial training at the Adult Detention Center under the guidance of incarcerated handlers. Following their transition to advanced training in the public, both dogs successfully graduated from Heeling House's Service Dog Program in early 2025.

Today, Ginger and Moxie support children with special needs such as psychiatric and mobility service dogs, providing daily assistance, stability, and independence. Their journey reflects the effectiveness of the training model and demonstrates how incarcerated individuals can play a meaningful role in improving the lives of others.



By actively contributing to the development of these service animals, incarcerated individuals can give back to the community in a tangible and lasting way. This connection between rehabilitation and service reinforces pro-social behavior and instills a sense of purpose that extends well beyond incarceration.

### **Sustainable Program Growth**

The program's structured design, consistent capacity, and demonstrated outcomes position it as a sustainable, long-term initiative. The ability to continuously train and transition service puppies through the program, while maintaining operational stability, reflects strong program management and effective partnership coordination.

As the program continues to evolve, it remains well-positioned to expand its impact, further strengthen reentry outcomes, and continue delivering measurable benefits to both participants and the community.

### **Partnerships**

The success of the ADC Service Puppy Program is built on a strong partnership between the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office and Heeling House, Inc., a nonprofit organization specializing in the training and placement of service dogs for individuals with special needs.

Heeling House provides the dogs, training expertise, veterinary care, and all necessary supplies, while the Sheriff's Office, through the Adult Detention Center's Inmate Programs Section, manages program administration, participant selection, supervision, and integration into daily operations.

This partnership is formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding that defines roles, responsibilities, and expectations, ensuring accountability and long-term sustainability.

By combining public sector oversight with nonprofit expertise, the program delivers meaningful rehabilitation opportunities while expanding access to service dogs, creating a mutually beneficial partnership that enhances outcomes for participants and the community.

### **Cost Effectiveness**

The ADC Service Puppy Program is a highly cost-effective initiative that delivers significant rehabilitative and community benefits with minimal financial impact to the County. Through its partnership with Heeling House, most program expenses, including service puppies, food, veterinary care, training supplies, and instruction, are covered by the nonprofit partner.

This model allows the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office to sustain a hands-on rehabilitation program without additional funding, utilizing existing staff within the Adult Detention Center's Inmate Programs Section to oversee operations.

Beyond minimizing direct costs, the program provides operational benefits by promoting positive behavior, increasing engagement, and contributing to a more stable facility environment. It also supports long-term reentry outcomes by equipping participants with practical skills and, in at least one case, leading to post-release employment.

Overall, the program represents an efficient and sustainable use of public resources, demonstrating how strategic partnerships can deliver high-impact results at low cost.

## **Replicability**

The ADC Service Puppy Program is highly replicable and can be implemented by other correctional facilities with minimal structural changes. Its success is driven by a clearly defined framework, strong nonprofit partnerships, and the strategic use of existing resources, making it adaptable across a wide range of jurisdictions.

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office has established comprehensive policies and procedures governing operations, participant eligibility, safety protocols, and staff responsibilities, providing a clear blueprint for implementation. The program's partnership model further enhances scalability, as nonprofit organizations supply the dogs, training expertise, veterinary care, and equipment, allowing jurisdictions to implement similar programs with minimal financial investment.

Operationally, the program functions within existing facility resources, maintaining a manageable capacity of two service puppies at a time without the need for additional infrastructure or staffing. Its integration into existing rehabilitative and reentry programming ensures it complements current services rather than replaces them.

With its structured design, low-cost model, and proven outcomes, the ADC Service Puppy Program offers a practical and effective model that other jurisdictions can adopt to enhance rehabilitation and community engagement.

## **Conclusion**

The ADC Service Puppy Program exemplifies a forward-thinking approach to corrections - one that transforms rehabilitation into a meaningful, purpose-driven experience while delivering tangible benefits to the community. By aligning offender development with the training of service animals for individuals with special needs, the program creates a powerful connection between personal growth and public service.

Through strong partnerships, a structured operational model, and the effective use of existing resources, the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office has implemented a program that is both highly impactful and fiscally responsible.



The program's demonstrated outcomes, including successful service dog placements, sustained program capacity, and direct employment opportunities for participants, highlight its effectiveness as a rehabilitative and reentry-focused initiative.

Equally important, the program contributes to a more positive and engaged facility environment, reinforcing accountability, empathy, and responsibility among participants. These outcomes extend beyond the detention center, benefiting families, communities, and organizations that rely on service animals to improve quality of life.

The ADC Service Puppy Program stands as a model of innovation, collaboration, and measurable impact. It reflects the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office's commitment to advancing correctional practices that not only prepare individuals for successful reentry but also strengthen the community as a whole. As such, it embodies the principles and goals of the VACo Achievement Award and represents a program worthy of recognition.