

**RESEARCH PAPER**

## **Implementing Successful Jail-Based Programming for Women: A Case Study of Planning Parenting, Prison & Pups – Waiting to ‘Let the Dogs In’**

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**Abstract:** *With 68% of prisoners recidivating within a three year period, designing and implementing innovative programming within the corrections setting is a necessity. The transient nature of the jail population begets difficulties for its successful implementation and maintenance. Since incarcerated females represent a smaller portion of the population, women, who face different challenges than their male counterparts, often receive less opportunity for programming, especially within the jail setting. Parenting, Prison & Pups (PPP), a program which weaves together an evidence-based parenting curriculum, integrated with the use of Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT), serves as a model for how to implement innovative programming within the jail setting at both the federal and county level for female prisoners. This paper outlines strategies to employ and discusses challenges that arise during program creation, implementation, and evaluation, which all require consideration prior to starting a new jail-based program. Despite a multitude of challenges, well-developed strategies can advance program goals and outcomes.*

**Keywords:** *Women prisoners, jail programs, parenting, animal assisted therapy, jail research*

Two million people are incarcerated in the U.S and upon release, 68% of prisoners will return within a three year period (Durose, Cooper & Sydner, 2014). In an updated report (Alper & Durose, 2018), BJS (Bureau of Justice Statistics) finds that 79% of prisoners will recidivate within six years, while 83% return within a nine year period. Most prisoners (82%) will be arrested within the first three years of release, with 44% arrested within the first year; only 24% of prisoners recidivate in year nine, demonstrating recidivism occurs earlier, not later, during the post-incarceration period. Skills (i.e., communication, parenting, etc.), learned prior to release may help to delay or inhibit this process by maintaining or mending familial relationships and mitigating recidivism rates; strong family bonds, particularly for women in relationship to their children, often serve as a protective factor against recidivism (Loper & Tuerk, 2006). Women typically feel the pains of imprisonment more harshly than their male counterparts because of the separation from their children (Collica, 2006). They suffer from higher rates of depression, self-destructive behavior, and other types of mental illness (Jaspersen, 2010; Keaveny & Zauszniewski; 1999). Presently, 1.7 million children in the U.S. have a parent behind bars and these children suffer from many issues, including depression, social exclusion, family instability, anxiety, substance use, early criminality, conduct disorder, antisocial behavior, poor educational attainment, educational under performance, school failure, mental health issues, limited future income, physical ailments, and unhealthy intimate relationships (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Christain, 2009; Maruschak, Glaze, & Mumola, 2010; Mears, & Siennick, 2015; Miller & Barnes, 2015; Will, Logan, Whalen, & Loper, 2014). Seventy percent of incarcerated women are responsible for a minor child (Maruschak, Glaze, & Mumola, 2010) and these children are six times more likely to be criminal justice involved (Purvis, 2013). Therefore,



restoring mother-child bonds could impact intergenerational offending patterns. A child's adjustment to their mother's incarceration is dependent upon his/her quality of care in the mother's absence and the ability to maintain contact with his/her incarcerated parent; maintaining contact with an incarcerated parent can aid in reducing the potential for high risk behavior, mitigating the effects for intergenerational offending (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). With this in mind, it is vital to provide programming to female prisoners, not only to help them, but also their children.

Female prisoners need programs that are gender responsive and address issues that may hinder reintegrative and rehabilitative success. Jail administrators face many challenges in providing new programming and often rely on volunteers or staff from community-based organizations (CBOs). Yet, outsiders who want to develop and implement innovative programming within the corrections setting will quickly learn that despite the innovative nature of one's program, implementation will not be an easy endeavor even though the need for such programming is vital. This article discusses strategies to advance program implementation, maintenance and evaluation within the corrections setting, based on a case study of one jail-based program employed at two separate jails – *Parenting, Prison, & Pups (PPP)*. PPP is the only corrections program to integrate animal-assisted therapy (AAT) into an evidence-based parenting curriculum. The discussion that follows examines the parenting program, before AAT was incorporated, to establish the effectiveness of the parenting program, independent of AAT. We hypothesize that the effectiveness of this parenting program will be enhanced once AAT is fully integrated into the curriculum during the next set of jail classes. When introducing a new program in the corrections setting, it is often best to begin slowly and in stages. We discuss all necessary steps prior to AAT integration to assist others interested in implementing similar programs.

## Literature Review

### Corrections-Based Programming

Corrections-based education programs, whether traditional (i.e., GED, vocational, etc.) or non-traditional (i.e., HIV, parenting, etc.), provide numerous benefits, not only to prisoners, but also to corrections administrators (Collica, 2002). They reduce maladaptive behavior within the corrections setting, leading to a safer environment for staff and other prisoners (Collica-Cox, 2014; Taylor, 1993), they restrict idleness (Harer, 1995), and they serve to provide positive role models and support for conventional behavior (Collica-Cox, 2016b). In essence, such programs help to encourage law abiding behavior, especially since maladaptive behavior often leads to program loss (Duew, 2017). For female prisoners, the importance of learning/sharing in a confidential and nurturing environment should not be underestimated (Koons, Burrow, Morash & Bynum, 1997) and prosocial relationships with staff members are more likely to make the prisoner's experience a successful one (Collica, 2016b; Toch, 1987). Staff members, who can serve as a source of support and encouragement for prisoners who are transitioning to a conventional lifestyle, help them adopt and maintain a conventional identity, especially when other sources of support are weak or non-existent (Collica, 2016b).

### Gender: Different Needs and Opportunities

When implementing programs for women, corrections administrators should be careful about programs marketed as "gender-neutral", which do not target gender specific issues, such as trauma, often responsible for paving a woman's path toward incarceration (Clark, 2009). The majority of female prisoners come to jail disadvantaged and have lifelong experiences with trauma (Belknap, Lynch, & DeHart, 2016; Scott, Lurigio, Dennis & Funk, 2015). Most incarcerated women are non-white, unmarried, and have children; they present with a history of unemployment, abuse, mental health disorders (73% of female prisoners compared to 55% of male prisoners), and they are more likely than men to be arrested for non-violent crimes (Haywood, Goldman, Kravitz, & Freeman, 2000; James & Glaze, 2006).

Just as women's pathways to incarceration differ from men (Simpson, Yahner & Dugan, 2008), factors related to recidivism also differ. The literature often links lack of housing, unemployment, drug use and few accessible community services to prisoner recidivism; for women, unlike men, having children can serve as a "protective" factor (Scott, Grella, Dennis, & Funk, 2014). In a recent study of jail prisoners, women without custody of their children had a 50% greater chance of recidivism, with the highest rate of return occurring within the first three months after release (Scott et. al., 2014). Thus, mother-child attachments are important

in the reintegration process. Incarcerated women need to be able to continue their role as mothers and therefore need “family-oriented policies and programs” (Hairston, 1991, pg. 24).

In jail, the amount of time a person is incarcerated may be uncertain, affecting the program’s stability and program completion rate. Jails house both unsentenced (i.e., detainees) and sentenced (i.e., to one year or less) prisoners. In contrast, prisons house those who are convicted of a felony and serving more than a year of incarceration. Both populations can benefit from similar interventions. The major difference is that a program in the jail setting has to be shorter than one offered in the prison setting. Prisoners can also be housed in either a federal or county jail. A federal jail houses those who are arrested for a federal crime, typically in the same region as the jail, although federal prisoners can be transferred to any facility within the United States. A county jail houses those arrested for crime in that specific county; these prisoners are charged with violations of state law. However, a county jail can also house federal prisoners if contracted to do so.

Regardless of location, women prisoners report wanting programming; even though the majority are mothers, few are able to participate in a parenting program while incarcerated (Gray, Mays, & Stohr, 1995). Without programs, female prisoners will face the same individualized issues (i.e., unaffordable housing, limited access to mental health treatment, substance abuse, unemployment, trauma, etc.) when released making it difficult to overcome structural issues (i.e., poverty, racism, classism, sexism, etc) over which they have little control (Belknap et al., 2016).

Given that women’s needs tend to be more diverse and more substantial than the needs of their male counterparts, and considering that female prisoners often receive fewer program opportunities than male prisoners, increasing and expanding corrections-based programming for women is crucial (Clark, 2009; Lahm, 2000). It is clear that gender-responsive programming is needed (Spjeidnes, Hyunzee, & Yamatani, 2014) and jails provide the first stop for treatment for those who are newly arrested and unlikely to have been receiving care prior to their arrest (Scott et al., 2015). Given their smaller numbers (women only comprise 15% of all jail prisoners) (Minton & Zeng, 2016), corrections officials have often been able to rationalize circumventing the programmatic needs of females (Clark, 2009; Pang, & Wallace-Capretta, 1995). Even the federal courts have supported these inequalities through decisions which require *equivalent*, but not *identical programming*, for male and female prisoners (see *Glover v. Johnson*, 1979 & *Batton v. State Government of NC*, 1980). Nonetheless, while male incarceration rates remain stable, the female population has increased (Minton & Zeng, 2016), demonstrating why their gender-specific needs cannot be ignored. Trends indicate that in some states women’s incarceration rates grew while men’s rates declined, whereas in other states, women’s rates grew at a higher percentage than men’s (Sawyer 2018). When a state experienced an overall decrease in its incarcerated population, men’s rates appeared to decrease at a higher rate when compared to women’s rates; there are only a handful of states where women “decarcerated” at a faster rate when compared to their male counterparts (Sawyer, 2018).

### **Program Challenges & Issues for Jails**

Despite a call for more evidence-based programming in order to substantiate continued funding, research on corrections programs often suffer from methodological flaws such as selection bias, small sample sizes, lack of control groups, etc. (Lawrence, Meors, Dubin & Travis, 2002; NIJ, 2012). Also, gaining approval to conduct research with corrections populations is highly challenging (NIJ, 2012; Wakai, Shelton, Trestman, & Kesten, 2009). Methodological issues are not the only concern. Programs can face many challenges, such as high staff turnover, limited funding and limited space, which can impact effectiveness (Lawrence et al., 2002).

Although prison time is more harmful to the bond between women and their children because of the longer period of separation (at least a year), implementing programs is easier than in jail. Jails have 12 million admissions yearly, consisting of society’s most disadvantaged, who are often plagued with serious problems like mental health issues, drug use, and homelessness (Lurigio, 2016). Jails may often be the first provider of health care services for prisoners who have not seen a doctor in years. Jails are dealing with newly arrested prisoners who may have untreated mental illnesses, untreated physical illnesses or are in the process of detoxing from drugs and/or alcohol. In addition, jails are “consistently underfunded” because they are often the lowest level of priority for local government (Martin, 2007).

## Parenting, Prison & Pups

To address the issue of limited programming for females in the jail setting, a gender responsive program was created by the PI and staff from The Good Dog Foundation (a leading community organization in AAT) for women housed in one federal jail and one local/county jail; this program was built upon an already established parenting curriculum (see PIO, 2018). This program is ongoing and after one year of operating without therapy dogs, we plan to integrate them into the parenting program within the next year. Starting the program without the therapy dogs helped us establish a better understanding of the parenting curriculum, as well as establish trust with corrections administrators. Starting slowly seemed to be the best way to progress toward full implementation.

Unlike some parenting programs, this parenting program is based on a program called Parenting Inside-Out (PIO), which incorporates cognitive behavior skills, is outcome based, and is learner-centered (Eddy & Clark, 2010). Since relationships with children can serve as a vehicle toward criminal desistance for female prisoners, it is important to maintain those relationships during a woman's incarceration (Christain, 2009). Corrections-based parenting programs can help women develop healthy bonds with their children by empowering mothers to feel more confident about their parenting skills, by increasing their knowledge of effective parenting techniques and by promoting a healthy parent-child relationship (Gonzalez, Romero, & Cerbana, 2007; Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Sandifer, 2008). These programs offer support and attempt to lessen the emotional effects surrounding separation from their children. A parenting program in a corrections setting, as part of a larger reunification focus, can enable mothers to maintain a bond with their children, benefiting mother and child alike. We hypothesize that the effectiveness of this parenting program will be enhanced by incorporating AAT, which allows learning and sharing to occur for participants with reduced levels of stress, in an extremely stressful environment. The only change to the current program will be the addition of AAT; all other factors, such as the curriculum and the instructor, remain exactly the same. This is the first program of its kind to incorporate AAT within an evidence-based parenting program to improve the lives of incarcerated women and their children. Utilizing AAT in a corrections setting is not new (Furst, 2006) but we know of no other program which incorporates AAT into a structured parenting curriculum.

### Why AAT?

As evidenced by attachment theory, the presence of an animal companion triggers feelings of safety in humans, which can encourage class participants to explore their feelings in a protected environment. Animals can fulfill attachment functions. A "therapy pet can potentially become one of the figures in a client's attachment hierarchy ...[which can] provide some sort of safe haven and secure base to the client during therapy sessions" (Zilcha-mano, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011, 545). The expectation of complete confidentiality in a group setting is difficult and unlikely (McClanahan, 2014), and is exacerbated in the corrections setting. Consequently, participants may resist sharing personal information, which limits the effectiveness of the group. Dogs can help mediate the relationship between adults and enable more open and useful communication. AAT has numerous benefits such as reducing stress, lessening anxiety, improving behavior, decreasing depression, and enhancing communication and reading skills (Dunlap, 2010; Geist, 2011). AAT benefits are witnessed with prisoners who have psychiatric or developmental disorders (Koda, Miyaji, Kuniyoshi, Adachi, Watababe, Miyaji, & Yamada, 2015). Even in a highly stressful situation, such as conducting a forensic interview with a child victim, AAT lowers the heart rate (Krause-Parello & Gulick, 2015). Human-animal interactions (HAI) can improve physical health and emotional wellbeing by lowering blood pressure, heart rate, depression, anxieties, perceived feelings of loneliness, and by raising the perceived quality of health (Esposito, McCune, Griffin & Maholmes, 2011; Morrison, 2007). In studies of at-risk youth, AAT helped with overcoming trauma and substance abuse (Kelly & Cozolino, 2015). Dogs increased engagement in counseling sessions with normally withdrawn and non-communicative participants (Chandler, 2001). It helps prisoners develop a deeper sense of responsibility and trust with others (Mercer, Gibson, & Clayton, 2015).

Corrections departments have been using some form of animal-based programming with varying degrees of success for years (Furst, 2006). In a national survey of prison animal programs (PAPS), Furst (2006) found that most states have some form of a PAP but are most commonly used with males and do not have a psychological counseling component. Preliminary results on PAPs are encouraging; they are correlated with increased self-worth and confidence (Enders & Slegers, 2000), increased social skills, decreased infractions

(Fournier, Geller & Firthey, 2007), and increased engagement. The programs can help female prisoners become more open to therapeutic participation (Jaspersen, 2010). Dogs can facilitate a connection of trust and acceptance (Brazier, 2014) and have the ability to produce rehabilitative outcomes as they provide a sense of security (Silcox, Castillo & Reed, 2014), which is difficult to achieve in jail. Dogs also provide affection (Silcox et al., 2014), which is particularly salient for women separated from their children. Dogs are non-judgmental and loving (Cusack, 1988); you can tell them anything without fear of rejection. Dogs are favored in the corrections setting as they are disciplined, respond well to commands, and are familiar.

### Parenting Programs

Many of the emotional and behavioral problems exhibited by children of incarcerated parents began before their mother's arrest, as a result of poor parenting choices (Christain, 2009); such behaviors are exacerbated by their mother's incarceration. Research finds that children who are prevented from having visits with their mothers in jail often experience more anxiety, depression and withdrawal symptoms compared to children without restricted contact. Even when visits could not be facilitated, more letter writing and phone calls were associated with fewer behavioral problems (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010). Children can benefit from their mother completing a parenting course, particularly when they learn skills to facilitate healthy contact which can strengthen family bonds. Prison-based parenting programs for women have demonstrated increased confidence in parenting skills and increased self-esteem (Gonzalez, Romero, & Cerbana, 2007; Perry, Fowler, Heggie, & Barbara, 2011). Although the connection with reduced recidivism is not well established (Purvis, 2013), there are strong implications. Parenting programs can increase positive parenting behavior, attitudes and knowledge.; however, these programs do not appear to effect levels of parental stress immediately following the intervention (Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017). Classes may be more effective if women feel more comfortable about disclosing personal information and AAT services should help to achieve this outcome more easily (Chandler, 2001).

### Method

#### Steps Toward Implementation

**Gaining sponsorship.** *Parenting, Prison & Pups* (PPP) has a four-year implementation process. Approvals and program planning comprised two years; during the third year, the program was offered in both facilities without AAT, and in the fourth year, it will be administered with AAT. Researchers and educators interested in program implementation, especially if it contains a research component, need to have a lot of patience. Not only is the approval process long, arduous and sometimes confusing, but after this lengthy period of time, the proposal could be denied.

The process of laying the foundation for this program began long before its proposal, by establishing good working relationships with staff at both facilities. The PI in this project worked for years developing relationships with both facilities. Although not mandatory, it is much easier if the lead person has experience working within corrections, particularly at the jail level (our lead person worked at both the jail and prison levels and had ample experience). The PI needs to understand the culture, system, policies, procedures, what is possible, and what will never be allowed to happen (Apa et al., 2012). This is vital during negotiations, particularly when counteracting arguments or in deciding whether a disagreement is even appropriate. All suggestions must take security concerns into consideration; without a corrections background it is unlikely the average researcher/educator would know where to begin. Corrections employees are often distrustful due to the nature of the closed system (Brower, 2013). While previous experience and knowledge is often an asset, it can also be a liability if it prevents one from recognizing more innovative ways of achieving beneficial outcomes (i.e., we always do it this way). With this in mind, it was important to brainstorm with those who had little to no jail experience (staff from our community-based partner, The Good Dog Foundation, served in this capacity).

**Levels of approval.** Obtaining permission to begin a new program was difficult but it became clear that to obtain funding, we would need permission to conduct a program evaluation. If we were implementing the program without a research component, approvals could have been obtained more easily at the facility level. Adding the research component added considerable time to the planning and implementation of this jail-based project. Obtaining IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval was required before submitting a

proposal to each of the facilities. Since prisoners are a protected population, and very few faculty conduct corrections research, the IRB process can be slowed by multiple concerns and questions. Once IRB approval was in place, formal applications could be submitted to both facilities. Achieving approval at the county level was much easier than the federal level. The county facility has an approval committee, albeit not a formal IRB, comprised of staff from education, mental health, and medical, in addition to top level administrators. The federal system required many more levels of approval at the local, regional and national levels. Our proposal was approved at all stages but the last. Researchers should persist at this point as the proposal has been reviewed and approved by many, demonstrating its safety and merit. The final denial may be a misunderstanding of the project.

Presenting a program with empirical evidence was helpful for obtaining facility support. Previous research found dramatically decreased depression, lowered substance abuse, increased parental participation (i.e., more family contact), decreased depression and parental stress, and reduced substance use (i.e., 1.6 times less likely to use drugs upon release), and recidivism (27% compared to 48%) among study participants throughout the Oregon State Prison System (Eddy, Martinez, Burraston, 2013; Parenting Inside-Out, 2015). Parent management training, a cognitive-behavioral intervention, is the foundation of this program. "Cognitive behavioral techniques (i.e., self-control and self-motivation, use of role play, modeling, rehearsal of skills) are employed to address parents' errors in thinking, teach parenting skills, and help parents begin to form a foundation for appropriate parenting and prosocial citizen behaviors after release" (PIO, 2015). The authors found that the program impacted parent-adjustment (i.e., psychological stressors such as depression), the parent-caregiver relationships (i.e., improving the relationship between the parent and the child's caregiver provides the parent more access to the child) and overall parenting (i.e., enhanced parenting skills) (Eddy et al., 2013).

Asking administrators about their needs and trying to fulfill those needs was another way to obtain facility support (White, Dunag, Cruz, Rodas, McCall, Menendez, Carmody, & Tulsy, 2003). Researchers/educators should develop programs in concert with the facility to support their mission and promote their goals (Wakai et al., 2009), as long as their goals are in line with pedagogical values. Depending on the facility, there may be contradictory goals, but in this case, both facilities were focused on rehabilitative initiatives. Corrections staff can be helpful in identifying deficits in programming. After numerous meetings with staff and community-based partners, we were able to meet the facility's and women's needs by developing a program that combined a parenting curriculum with the use of dog-assisted therapy. Our University partnered with The Good Dog Foundation, a nationally recognized nonprofit leader in therapy dog team training, to develop, implement and evaluate an AAT-integrated parenting program for female prisoners. The program will integrate AAT, delivered by specially trained therapy dogs and their handlers, into an evidence-based prisoner-parenting curriculum. Eight professional-handler/dog teams were trained and certified by Good Dog, undergoing an intensive 6-week training program; they received additional training from the PI in the parenting curriculum and in working effectively in the corrections setting. Four teams were chosen for each jail location. The PI worked diligently with the Good Dog Foundation to determine the best way to integrate the AAT component and enhance the selected parenting program, "PIO". In order to do this, we decided to first offer the parenting program at both jails without AAT and conduct pre and posttest assessments to demonstrate the benefits of the parenting curriculum independent from the future integration of the dogs, creating a comparison group.

Months were spent developing the idea and the curriculum. We wanted to enhance the original curriculum with additional curriculum components (i.e. CPR, First Aid and AED, AAT, a reunification day for mothers and their children, as well as a stress management and meditation component). The PI had to take a training course to become certified to teach the parenting curriculum, in addition to working through legal requirements which gave the University license to certify her to teach prisoner participants. Certificates of completion could be used by prisoners to demonstrate to a judge or child welfare agency that a parenting course was completed. This is a parenting course but one which also provides soft skills, such as effective speaking, listening and problem solving. This was an important aspect of the program because both facilities wanted resume building skills for their prisoners. Successful programs are not only evidence-based but provide skills that are highly marketable in today's job market (Collica, 2006). Skills learned in the parenting classes are transferable to the job market and such skills are desirable by employers. To provide additional skills, the

women are certified for two years in CPR, AED and First AID (for adult, children and infants); these skills are helpful for parenting but they are also valuable skills to add to one's resume.

Additionally, university students enrolled in the PI's civic engagement/service learning corrections course serve as teaching assistants during the jail classes to help coordinate and instruct group activities. Service learning courses prepare students to become socially responsible and encourage political and social participation within the community (Ferraiolo, 2004; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). It is highly important to expose students to experiences in the corrections setting as corrections is a neglected field in criminal justice and one of the least preferred career choices of criminal justice students (Courtright & Mackey, 2004; Kelly, 2015).

In working with both jails, it appeared programs should not exceed two months if one of the program goals was to have the majority of prisoners complete the program. Time limitations severely impacted the types of programs that could be offered. Unlike those serving time in a state or federal prison, many jail prisoners will be returning to their communities after a shorter period of incarceration where they will be able to implement the skills they recently learned in a real world setting. It is important to note that jail is not the best avenue for building those skills; community-based corrections, which allow for more intimate mother-child contact and more quality visitation can be more effective in skills building, without further damaging the relationship between a mother and her children (Booth, 2018).

**Starting the program.** We wanted to first implement the parenting program in both jails and become familiar with the curriculum, as well as solve any operational issues, prior to utilizing the therapy dogs. Having a point person in the Education Department proved to be invaluable at both levels; they processed our clearances, met us at the gate, and helped to clear us and our supplies for each visit.<sup>1</sup> Organization was key, particularly in regard to organizing the students and other outside volunteers. Our program is based on volunteers. The PI volunteered to teach all of the classes; her students volunteered to assist with course delivery and were trained to co-facilitate group activities under her supervision.

Other professionals in the field volunteered to teach the stress management/meditation component (an instructor from the Prison Yoga Project) and the CPR component (two volunteer firefighters who also worked as jail custodial staff in the county facility— one officer and one sergeant). In addition, The Good Dog volunteered their staff to attend jail classes and train the students on AAT. Although beginning a program with volunteers is not ideal (i.e., volunteers often have other commitments and without pay, have no formal obligation), it was necessary until funding could be obtained.

Staff can be one of the most important factors in a program's ability to positively impact prisoner behavior (Collica, 2014; Koons et. al., 1997; Palmer, 1995). To be most effective, program staff must be properly trained, have prior experience working with similar populations, and understand, but more importantly, follow corrections' policies/rules (Tewksbury, 1994; White et. al., 2003). Those without experience should receive formalized supervision and additional training from someone with experience. The PI provided this additional training for Good Dog staff. It may be difficult recruiting staff, especially volunteers, because of preconceived notions about what to expect while working in a jail with prisoners. Those with serious concerns and fears will probably prove to be inappropriate for this type of work. We faced these issues when recruiting appropriate staff for our program. Potential staff must be able to relate to the population (White et al., 2003).

## Methodology

Utilizing a pre and posttest quasi-experimental design, we first evaluated the effects of the parenting program without AAT. When the dogs are integrated into the program we will evaluate how a structured set of AAT activities affects the efficacy of the parenting curriculum. It was important to understand if the program itself was effective, independent of the dogs, to determine whether AAT offered enhanced effects. We felt sharing this process, particularly the protocol, was important for other researchers/practitioners who might be interested in implementing corrections programming. When the dogs are fully incorporated in the next classes, the AAT activities will be structured to support lesson plans that comprise the parenting curriculum for females housed in both jails - the WCDOC (Westchester County Department of Corrections), the county jail, and MCC (Metropolitan Correctional Center), the federal jail. We will determine if there are measurable

differences following the AAT intervention (within subjects) and compare these results to the earlier group from both jails, who completed the same parenting course without AAT (between subjects).

Challenges exist in terms of reviewing and assessing the program. Rigorous controls, which are preferable, are often not possible in the jail setting, and preventing prisoners designated to a comparison/control group from participating in an available program raises ethical concerns. There were a limited number of eligible women incarcerated (a maximum of 25 in each facility) and participation was voluntary, making randomization and a control group impracticable. During our first year, the women completed the parenting program without AAT and we decided to use this group as our comparison group. Having this comparison group also helped us to understand how to best incorporate the therapy dogs and where in the curriculum they would be most effective. These women were interviewed within a few days of beginning PPP and they were interviewed again a few days after completing PPP. Pre and posttest data, inclusive of scales (DASS21) measuring levels of stress, anxiety, depression (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), were collected via 1:1 interviews. Open-ended questions measure the level of contact/involvement with children, confidence in parenting (Berry & Jones, 1995; Korjenevitch, Dunifon, & Kopko, 2010; Kramer & McDonnell, 2016; Parenting Inside-Out, 2015), and once the dogs are integrated into the program, overall feelings regarding the implementation of AAT within the course. Interview questions examined disciplinary rates. The HAIS (Human-Animal Interaction Scale) will be used to measure the level of human-animal interaction following each AAT session (Fournier, Letson & Berry, 2016). A comparison of both groups will determine the effect of AAT on promoting engagement and retention, key elements of the learning process.

Women were recruited by education staff in each facility. Requirements for participation included having at least two months of time remaining on one's sentence (which is difficult to guarantee in a jail setting) and a child or grandchild 24 years of age and under where the prisoner served as one of the child's primary caregivers. Other familial relationships were considered (i.e. aunts) if women served as the primary caregiver/custodial guardian of a minor child.

There were 14 class sessions that took place twice a week over a two-month period; each class was two hours. These classes included Orientation and Parenting Styles; Effective Speaking; Effective Listening; Effective Problem Solving; Bonding Through Play and Reading; The Parent's Job and The Child's Job; Directions and Encouragement; Rules, Rewards and Consequences; Time Out with Back-Up Privilege Removal (non violent discipline); Going Home To Your Children; Stress Management and Meditation; Healthy Adult Relationships; and CPR, First Aid and AED certification for adults, children and infants. Last was the Reunification Day, where prisoners' primary family and children/grandchildren were invited to the facility to spend time with our prisoner mothers. Each facility agreed to sponsor this two hour session, including refreshments, activities and the graduation ceremony. The facility agreed to suspend traditional visiting rules that limit physical contact, and children were permitted to interact normally with their mothers. AAT will be incorporated into the next set of classes, integrated within each lesson (with the exception of meditation and CPR). The women will have unstructured time with the dogs at the beginning and at the end of class. The dogs will serve as emotional support during the class when difficult topics are discussed and the dogs will be incorporated into each lesson and serve as avatars/surrogates as women practice some of their skills (i.e., dogs, like small children, cannot verbally communicate. How do we know what they need, what they are feeling, etc.?). The therapy dogs will be available for the children and family members during the reunification/graduation day. PPP is a pioneer program in the way it integrates an evidence-based inmate parenting curriculum in conjunction with AAT, which has not been done previously (see Collica-Cox & Fagin, 2018).

### Program Challenges

#### Flexibility

During the course of this project we learned that many challenges must be overcome before full implementation of a new program. Beyond the lengthy approval process, there were differences in facility culture – what worked at one facility was not necessarily allowed at another (Apa et. al., 2012). It was important that program staff be flexible during this process. Constraints of the jail setting, particularly space, are always a major challenge (Stevens, 1993). Schedules were revised several times based on available space to conduct the classes, which, along with the pre and posttest interviewing, required a confidential setting.



## Patience

Remaining flexible was important as program staff should be prepared to do a lot of waiting. Arriving early was important to account for factors beyond one's control. If there was a security code, all activities were closed, including programs. Staff may not learn about this until after their arrival. Rescheduling of classes, although uncommon, did occur. Waiting for everyone to be processed at the gate can take some time, especially if clearances were missing or if there was a long line of others who also needed to be processed. In other cases, the "count" (i.e., all prisoners are accounted for several times a day) may not be cleared and no one can enter the facility during this time. There were several times we waited an hour before gaining entry, even though we always arrived a minimum of 45 minutes ahead of schedule. When class is over, you may not be able to leave, especially if you needed an escort. Prepare for an additional 30 to 60 minutes. Volunteer staff need to understand how much of their time will be required. For paid staff, this is a budgetary consideration.

## Working With Corrections Staff

Maintaining a good working relationship with all jail staff was critical to operational success. Civilian staff should never interfere with custodial duties. If there is a problem, never discuss it in front of the prisoners. CBO representatives/volunteers must respect corrections officers at all times and not interfere in prisoner/officer conflicts. Always be polite and respectful, even when you may not be treated the same in return. Having an argument with someone who works in the facility will only lead to problems for your program; work out difficulties at a later time. Volunteers or contract employees must always remember that they are visitors in a corrections institution and may be removed from their duties at any time and for any reason. These staff do not have the same employment protections as staff who work directly for the jail. Security is often the foremost concern and all other matters, particularly educational programming, will take a backseat (Hogben & Lawrence, 2000). When unsure about a situation, always ask questions. Do not give the prisoners anything (even pens or paperclips) unless it is approved; items outsiders consider harmless can be manufactured into something that could pose a threat to the safety, security and well-being of the institution (i.e., tattooing pens, handcuff picks, makeshift syringe, shiv, etc.). An error on the part of program staff can jeopardize the entire program/project. It will take awhile for prisoners and staff to trust individuals from an outside agency, but consistency and an ability to follow and understand the rules and regulations, seems to be the road to the successful maintenance of programs (AIDS Alliance, 2003).

## Prisoner Participation

To obtain participants, corrections staff was needed to recruit prisoners. Jail staff had access to the prisoners and to the prisoners' records to determine program eligibility (White et. al., 2003). Without this assistance, the process of assessing eligibility could be a lengthy endeavor. The primary goal was to have prisoners complete the program. Although not always accurate, staff was more likely to know if a prisoner would be incarcerated for the duration of the program; prisoners were often unclear about their release dates or may not have been honest about release dates.

Other barriers to obtaining full prisoner participation revolved around prisoner and facility schedules. Prepare for the expected and the unexpected. Programs had to be arranged around prisoner movement, chow (meal time), the count, medical visits, drafts (prisoners leaving one facility and transferring to another), commissary, the package room, prisoner misbehavior (i.e., a prisoner, not in our class, flooded part of the tier and we had to relocate), medication, etc, (Hammett & Daughery, 1991). We changed and revised the schedule of classes several times to account for these issues. Attendance was challenging; during classes, we had issues when medication was called or when someone had an attorney's visit or needed to appear in court for a hearing. Participation for all classes was mandatory. In special circumstance, such as these, the PI or other class participants provided 1:1 tutoring with the prisoner to cover missed material. If any prisoners are remaining when we conduct the next set of classes, we plan to add a peer mentoring component to help the PI with tutoring. Again, the importance of flexibility, creativity in handling such issues, and time management cannot be understated.

## Results

### Initial Results

In order to obtain preliminary data, as part of a feasibility study to assess the future integration of AAT, we conducted parenting classes at both jails last year without the use of AAT, with encouraging results. As stated earlier, AAT will be incorporated into the next set of classes. Even though our program was only eight weeks, attrition was an issue in the jail setting. Out of 14 women who started the program at the federal facility, 11 completed, but only ten could be interviewed. Two women were transferred the day the program began, one woman was transferred toward the end of the program, and one woman, who finished, was released the morning of the reunification day. Initial results from our first control group (the federal jail without AAT) (n=10) – the pilot – indicated decreases in stress, depression, and parental stress, in addition to increases in self-esteem. Although anxiety decreased, it was not a significant decrease. We hope to improve these changes with the integration of AAT. All prisoner mothers said the class exceeded their expectations and that the most important skill they learned was how to become a better communicator:

Yes, [this class was] beyond my expectations. I realize what type of things to expect as my daughter gets older. The class helped me to cope with being away from her.

It exceeded my expectations with all of the materials provided [to] us and with what I gained from the class. I didn't expect to gain as much as I did.

All participants felt the class helped them in their relationships with their families by helping them to communicate more effectively:

[I worked most on] effective listening skills. I am more aware when people are talking to me. My focus is not that great and since this class I am really focusing on what people are really saying. I am really listening and not just agreeing and shaking my head.

I haven't lost my temper on the phone with anyone. I hope it keeps staying that way.  
[I worked most on] my communication skills and not giving up. I cannot wait to get out and speak to my son. I am not [usually] a communicator – I'm a screamer.

I have learned to be more considerate of others' feelings. Now, I put myself in their shoes.

I can take a little piece of everything we learned and use it with my kids and husband.

Seven women said the class changed the way they thought about themselves as a mom:

The way I was raised was abusive. There were fights and alcohol and drugs. This class made me realize that it doesn't have to be that way. There's a better way.

I will be a better mom. I thought I knew it all but I learned more skills. I can redefine the definition of what I thought a mom was.

All ten women said the parenting class changed the way they thought about parenting and that the course made them feel more confident in their parenting skills:

There is more to just parenting than being a parent. There are different ways to parent. I identified parenting things I could better. I am convinced that I need to do the things I haven't done.

[I feel more confident because] I learned different ways to cope with situations.

[I feel more confident because] it helped to improve my skills and validated what I was doing.

## Further Results

Our second class was held at the county jail in fall of 2017. Most measures did not prove to be statistically significant, however, these women, when compared to the federal women, presented with many more issues and problems, such as lengthier criminal and drug histories. Thirteen women began the parenting class; 10 completed/interviewed. Overall, data indicated a significant decrease in depression. Decreases in pre and posttest measures for stress and anxiety were noted, but neither was significant. Self-esteem scores increased minimally but scores generally remained unchanged. Parental stress scores showed a minor increase from the pretest ( $M=40.0$ ) to the posttest ( $M=40.8$ ) but generally remained unchanged. For this second class, we decided to add a knowledge test to the research protocol, consisting of 25 multiple choice and true/false questions. These questions were developed directly from information in the parenting curriculum to see how much the women knew about parenting prior to the course and to determine how much information the women retained after the conclusion of the classes. The knowledge test scores increased considerably from the pretest to the posttest and proved to be significant, increasing an average of 16.1 points. Many of these women were not in contact with their children, with some prevented from having contact via child protective orders. As a point of comparison, only one woman at the federal facility was prevented from having contact with her son through a child protective order. In general, 64% of the women from the local jail felt the class provided them with enhanced parenting skills. Many of these women commented that since they were not responsible for raising their own children, they found this information very useful, particularly since they all planned to reconnect with one or more of their children upon release. Six women reported communication was the most effective skill they learned, with eight women who reported that these skills helped to improve their relationship with family members and nine women said it helped to improve their relationship with other prisoners. All the women said it made them feel more confident in their parenting skills, with the class exceeding or meeting their expectations.

The work of each woman in the class was individualized. As women brought issues to the group, the group would brainstorm possible solutions based on skills learned during the course. For example, one woman used her communication skills to deal with the hostility of her son. When our class began, he would not speak to her, but she persisted with the communication skills learned in the parenting class, and by the end of our class, he spoke with her and said he would see her. Another woman, who lied to her grandson about her whereabouts, disclosed her incarceration to him, which was a direct result of the parenting class. A third woman used the communication skills and problem solving skills to enhance her relationship with her daughter's caregiver. By the end of our class, she received a visit. Overall, the women in the class, including four who did not want to be there at the beginning (two at the federal jail and two at the county jail), really worked very diligently to enhance their parenting skills and to begin to deal with guilt that they felt as a result of choices which led to their separation from their children. As each woman faced challenges, she brought these challenges to the group. The group worked actively to help problem solve and the women would report on their progress. Many of the women waited to disclose toward the latter half of the class. Our hope is that AAT will help them to disclose sooner.

The university students also proved to be an asset to the course. The 15 university students who participated in the first jail classes at the federal facility and the 13 University students who participated in the second set of jail classes at the county facility developed a realistic view of corrections and, as expected, these views were completely different from what they previously imagined. All students said this was their best educational experience and the majority was now considering careers in the corrections field. Exposing students to corrections helped them to realize that transformation was possible, even with the smallest effort. The inmates reported that they felt the students were valuable in assisting with group activities and they enjoyed having outsiders join their group.

## Discussion

It is clear that jails need programming, especially for female prisoners (Clark, 2009), where gender responsive programming is critical for rehabilitative success (Belknap et al., 2016). *Parenting, Prison & Pups* was developed to help respond to this need, particularly because children can serve as a protective factor for women, decreasing rates of recidivism (Scott et al., 2014). Although overall incarceration rates are their lowest since 2004 (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016), unlike males, female incarceration has increased at a higher rate

(Minton & Zeng, 2016). Female jail prisoners already suffer from a paucity of programming, typically justified by their smaller numbers. In light of these recent statistics, now is the time to introduce more innovative programs which will help them to successfully transition to the community and maintain law abiding behavior (Clark, 2009; Collica, 2016a).

Researchers will face many challenges when attempting to establish a new program, including gaining sponsorship, successfully navigating large *bureaucracies*, obtaining all of the necessary levels of approval from multiple agencies, and negotiating facility schedules. Issues regarding recruitment and retention can also affect program stability, but well-developed strategies and continued communication and support from corrections officials will help mitigate, if not eliminate, these problems. Flexibility, patience, time management, adherence to facility rules/policies and dedication are all essential components to implementing, and more importantly, maintaining, a successful jail-based program.

First, starting the program slowly and in steps (first without the therapy dogs) appeared to be a great way to establish the legitimacy of the program, gain trust from both corrections administrators and prisoners, and manage operational issues/problems as they arose. It allowed us to address a multitude of challenges (i.e., long approval processes, operational issues, obtaining quality program staff, learning and understanding jail culture, policy and procedure, etc.) before implementing the full program. It enabled us to test the overall effectiveness of the parenting component independently from the dogs and we even used it as an opportunity to refine our methodology. Based on the information presented above, the program itself is effective independent of the dogs. Other researchers or practitioners could implement this program without AAT, as we did initially, and still have very beneficial outcomes. Since few parenting programs have been evaluated, we have initial data which demonstrates that this program is valuable. We will learn whether AAT enhances these outcomes. Lessons learned during this implementation process can be helpful to those who want to provide programming or assess program effectiveness in the corrections setting. From what we learned, we believe that we will be able to transition to full integration of the therapy dogs more easily. In order to demonstrate good faith (we felt badly that this first group of women would not have the benefit of AAT), after the conclusion of the first classes without AAT (including post testing), we surprised the women with a visit from a therapy dog. The women really enjoyed this visit. One woman at the federal facility sat on the floor with the therapy dog and wept openly. It was a very powerful experience and it gave us a sense of what was to come.

Second, when developing programs, it is important to work alongside corrections administrators to achieve a balance between the types of programs needed and the ones wanted. Programs that can satisfy both will likely be most welcomed and any program that can impart marketable skills will often achieve the support of administration. Skills learned during this parenting class were soft skills which are applicable to the job market (i.e., communication and problem solving skills). Employers seek potential job candidates who possess effective communication skills and over half (59%) express difficulties in finding candidates with suitable interpersonal skills (Brooks, 2016). The CPR certification, which was helpful training for parents, was also a resume builder. The OSHA First Aid standard (29 CFR 1910.151) “requires trained first-aid providers at all workplaces of any size if there is no infirmary, clinic, or hospital in near proximity to the workplace which is used for the treatment of all injured employees” (Osha, 2006, p8). Certification in CPR, First Aid and AED helps to satisfy this requirement. Women will not only be lifesavers for others in need, especially their children, but they learned skills, which can be added to their resume, to increase their marketability upon release. Any additional skill will help in mitigating the stigma of one’s incarceration when seeking employment. Female prisoners who have job skills, coupled with family support, can increase their chances for success (Collica-Cox, 2016).

Third, assessment and evaluation is an important part of program implementation. Any program worth maintaining needs to be evaluated for effectiveness, especially in lieu of often limited resources. Rigorous controls are difficult to achieve in the corrections setting but that does not prevent evaluations from being conducted. Quasi-experimental designs can work well in this setting. Data collection for our program is ongoing, yet, our first classes without AAT demonstrated promising results, especially for helping prisoners to communicate more effectively, which not only aided mothers in enhancing their relationships with their children and their children’s caregivers, but it is also provided the soft skills discussed above, which are desired by many employers. These initial results also helped to establish a baseline for our program and to demonstrate to

corrections administrators that this program, even absent the dogs, could provide beneficial results. The county women did not achieve as many program outcomes as the federal women, but, they presented with many more issues at program onset and were subsequently at a greater disadvantage. We believe this group may benefit more from AAT. Initial results demonstrated that the parenting program by itself decreased stress, parental stress and depression for the federal prisoners, while decreasing depression for the county prisoners, who presented with much longer criminal histories. A research component added to a program will ultimately increase approval time but all programs must be assessed for effectiveness to insure that limited resources are not being misused.

Fourth, a parent's incarceration, particularly a mother's incarceration, has a negative effect on a child's sense of security and trust (Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007). Increased contact between a child and his/her incarcerated parent can lead to renewed trust and greater communication but such relationships are most beneficial for children when there is a clear connection to behavior change on the part of the parent (Hedge, 2016). The process of behavior change can begin when prisoners are regularly engaged in programming intended to encourage and support conventional behavior; the goals are often to achieve fewer institutional misconducts, greater involvement in prosocial activities (such as parenting) and decreased recidivism, which are also intrinsic to a conventional lifestyle (Gaes Flanagan, Motiuk & Stewart, 1999). Connecting women with their children in a prosocial way appears to provide a multitude of benefits for both mother and child.

Fifth, innovative methods can help to garner support from administration and prisoners. AAT is not new to the corrections setting (Furst, 2006) but it can be utilized in unique ways. Since the corrections setting restricts time with one's child, thereby hindering a prisoner's ability to practice her parenting skills, the therapy dogs, employed as a high impact learning practice, will serve as avatars (surrogates) for female inmates as they learn and practice parenting skills in preparation for reuniting with their children. AAT components were designed to enhance, illustrate, and augment class topics, as well as to assist inmates in reflecting on and articulating their feelings. We believe the use of structured AAT activities to support this parenting program will aid in reducing negative feelings for prisoner mothers, help to foster more open communication, and allow these classes to reach their maximum potential for the women, and most importantly, their children. We look forward to implementing and evaluating our next set of parenting classes, fully integrated with the therapy dogs. Although we have not yet implemented AAT, we felt it was important to outline the steps when implementing a new program in the corrections setting and to determine if the underlying program was effective in meeting its outcomes. We hope that this will aid others if they have interest in implementing similar projects.

Sixth, educators and researchers should not shy away from program implementation and from jail-based research, which may be difficult, but not impossible. Although women comprise a small percentage of the jail population and the population is transient, creating challenges for program stability and completion, it should not serve as an excuse to justify jail-based women's continued neglect for meaningful intervention. Jail populations are often incarcerated for shorter periods of time, hence, will be returning to our communities more quickly. They can benefit the most from these types of interventions. Well-developed strategies, such as some of the ones discussed in this paper, can advance programmatic goals. It is important work and work that needs to be completed by dedicated professionals.

Seventh, because of limited funding, many volunteers were needed to support the program. Although small grants were obtained, it will not be enough to sustain the program long term. Ample time must be taken to identify and apply for funding opportunities. This can be challenging while simultaneously trying to develop and implement the program, in addition to data collection. We have been lucky, thus far, with the generosity of a private donor. We are still in the process of submitting funding applications. If successful, we would like to recruit additional instructors to implement this program at other facilities and determine whether the benefits are generalizable to other areas.

### Conclusion

It is apparent that jail-based women, who are the most underserved of all corrections populations, are in need of innovative programming. Yet, the implementation and maintenance of such programming presents with many challenges. Despite these challenges, it is clear that well-developed strategies can advance program goals and outcomes. Researchers should not be intimidated by these challenges; evaluating the effectiveness

of corrections-based programming is essential in order to insure that we are utilizing the availability of limited resources most efficaciously. Results from our initial study imply that parenting programs developed for women are important jail-based interventions to improve parenting skills and relationships with their children and/or children's caregivers. When resources are limited, programming is often provided to male prisoners because the program has the opportunity to impact more prisoners, thus improving upon its cost-effectiveness. Yet, overlooking the programmatic needs of jail-based women, because of their small numbers, ignores the opportunity to provide an intervention which can aid in rehabilitative and reintegrative outcomes, especially for those who will return to our communities after brief periods of incarceration. Such interventions not only aid women being released from jail, but have the potential to impact her children. Where children are often the innocent victims in this process, and can potentially benefit from healthy contact with their mothers, we can think of no better reason as to why this type of programming is needed.

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#### Footnote

<sup>1</sup> We have concerns about losing this point person (i.e., to transfers and/or promotions). Hence, we have tried to establish relationships with other staff in case this comes to fruition. It is clear that the success of a jail program is based on connections with dedicated jail staff.

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