

Amy V. Howell., Commissioner

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DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OCTOBER 20, 2011

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**JUVENILE OFFENDERS LEARN NEW LIFE SKILLS IN DOG TRAINING PROGRAM
– Abandoned dogs benefit from program teaching youth responsibility, commitment
and decision-making –**

(Midland, GA) --- Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Commissioner Amy Howell announced that 10 juvenile offenders graduated today from a unique program that teaches personal skills that will help them live more constructively when they return to their communities. The youth received certificates of appreciation for completing a 12-week program caring for abandoned and abused dogs rescued by a local animal shelter and training them in basic obedience skills so that they may be adopted by new owners.

The young men, age 14 to 20, are residents of DJJ's Muscogee Youth Development Campus (YDC) in Midland, Georgia and were instructed by veteran dog trainers from Helping Hounds across Georgia, a not-for-profit that provides DJJ youth with restorative justice programming. During the course, the youth taught the dogs to sit, stay, walk on a leash, lie down, and, in some cases, a few tricks. The youth visited the dogs three times a day to feed, exercise, brush, train and play with them.

Six dogs from the Humane Society of Harris County – mostly mixed breeds ranging in age from five months to three-years-old and weighing 35 to 70 pounds – also graduated. Many of the dogs had a limited life expectancy without intervention and will now be offered for adoption through the Humane Society. In November, a new group of dogs will receive training from Muscogee YDC youth. One of those dogs was rescued recently from the street in front of the facility.

"This program provides youth an opportunity to perform a service to the community and teaches them skills such as discipline, compassion, patience, perseverance, commitment, respect, and responsibility, which will help them not only in their own development and rehabilitation but also throughout their lives after they return home," said DJJ Commissioner Amy Howell.

Muscogee YDC has been involved with this type of program since 2006 and has prepared 85 dogs for adoption. DJJ has a dog training program at one other facility, with plans for developing more. At least six other states nationwide also offer dog training programs to juvenile offenders.

DJJ's mission is to protect and serve the citizens of Georgia by holding young offenders accountable for their actions through the delivery of services and sanctions in appropriate settings and by supporting youth in their communities to become productive and law-abiding citizens. Each day, at 26 facilities and 92 court services offices throughout the state, more than 4,000 DJJ employees work diligently to effect justice as well as redirect and shape the young lives in the agency's care so they can take responsibility for their delinquent conduct as well as become contributing members of society. At the same time, DJJ seeks to protect the victims of crimes so that they can rebuild their lives.

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