

Project Overview: Paws for Change

Background

In conjunction with local youth care and support agencies, the Paws for Change programme pairs disadvantaged young people, aged 14-19, with rescue dogs from RSPCA animal centres. The dogs selected for the courses have behaviour & training needs, and often are struggling with the stress of kennel life ('long-stay' dogs); they benefit greatly from the course's training and enrichment. This also gives them an opportunity to bond with new people, as well as teaching the young people about animal care and welfare, and how to better understand dogs. The course builds on valuable life skills for the young people, such as empathy, self-control, taking responsibility and communicating. These, together with boosting the young people's self-esteem and confidence, are key goals in preparing them for the future.

Under the careful guidance of the RSPCA Behaviour & Welfare Adviser, the young people teach the dog useful behaviours that will help them succeed in their new homes, while also building up their trust in new people. Over the course of 4-5 days, the young people work with their dog in order to prepare for a training demonstration at the end of the course. For dogs which have come from situations of cruelty and neglect, simply engaging with a new person and walking nicely beside them are huge achievements. For young people who may have previously struggled in education, this is equally rewarding.

Delivery

The courses are delivered at RSPCA Animal Centres, led by an RSPCA Behaviour and Welfare Adviser and supported by regional Prevention and Education staff. Although the courses themselves are five ½ day sessions, a great deal of work goes into organising the scheme, taking referrals and co-ordinating attendees before the course takes place.

Goals & Evaluation

The scheme has 4 main goals that support the Society's objectives

- Improve the skills and behaviours of dogs participating in the course, and thereby their chances of successful rehoming
- Reduce stress of rescue dogs in kennels, the additional outside training time and enrichment provides respite from the intense noise, smells, boredom and loneliness of kennels
- Improve the understanding of the 5 welfare needs of animals amongst at risk or in-need youth (including young offenders)
- Improve the young person's ability to understand dog body language and kind/positive reward based training methods

It has additional benefits in raising the young people's social skills e.g. self esteem, impulse control, communication skills etc., it particularly provides young people with a sense of achievement that they may not have experienced before or in a very long time.

Evaluation is in three parts

- 1) The Behaviour & Welfare Advisor scores each dog in 7 categories both before and after the course, and has the opportunity to add additional bespoke behaviour needs, this is particularly relevant for dogs who are being monitored for kennel stress
- 2) The young people are asked to complete before and after questionnaires, part of which assesses their ability to identify the 5 welfare needs, and identify dog body language/behaviour
- 3) The referring agency representatives are asked to complete before and after questionnaires, part of which assesses their views on the young person's social interactions

Links to the 3 sets of before/after evaluation forms:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/16BpXOO3hhdTLW4t-CTJYmwVKwY9kAJhStu8gb7_qufk/edit?usp=sharing

Qualitative evaluation, including transformative change, is also captured via post course comments and interviews. AQA accreditation is also offered to the individual participants.

We've seen great results against the goals

- Dog behaviour average score was up from 6.4 before the course to 15.6 after (out of a possible 21)
- 80% of attendees identified the 5 welfare needs (something many adults struggle to do) and 100% identified 4 of them

Plans for 2020 and beyond

At the start of 2019 3 RSPCA Society centres (Millbrook, Felledge and Leybourne) were regularly running Paws For Change courses, during 2019 that expanded to 6 with the addition of Newbrook, Southridge and West Hatch. 13 courses were run in 2019 with 45 young people attending

5 of the existing 6 centres will continue to operate the course, based on demand from local youth care and support agencies (including youth offending teams), at an average rate of 3 per centre, per year. Felledge will be re-launched as the external behaviourist who used to occasionally run courses will be replaced by an RSPCA BWA

A further 7 animal centres; **Great Ayton, Bryn-y-maen, Gonsal Farm, Blackberry Farm, Block Fen, South Godstone, Ashley Heath** are each recruiting a Behaviour and Welfare Adviser during February/March 2020.

After recruitment, the behaviour and Welfare Advisors will have a six month training period under the guidance of the Regional Clinical Animal Behaviourists, with support from regional Prevention & Education team members for youth work. We expect these new Centres/Staff to be equipped and trained to deliver the course by the Autumn and together we expect them to run an additional course each in the latter part of 2020 and three in 2021, depending on local demand, capacity, weather etc.

From 2021 onwards, we will have 13 fully resourced centres, running an average of three courses each, per year.

Results/Targets	2019	2020	2021
	Actuals	Target*	Target*
Courses ran/to be run	13	23	39
Children attended	45	92	156
Dogs participated	45	92	156

- **Target for existing centres** is to run 3 courses at each of the centres already set up (5 centres - Newbrook, West Hatch, Southridge, Millbrook and Leybourne).
- **Target for new/relaunched centres in 2020** is to set up the programme at 8 additional centres (including the re-launch at Felledge) and run 1 at each (Great Ayton, Bryn y Maen, Gonsal Farm, Block Fen, Blackberry Farm, Ashley Heath, South Godstone and the relaunch at Felledge) depending on weather, capacity, demand etc.
- **Overall in 2020** - run 23 courses with an average of four children per course, will benefit 92 children and 92 dogs

Cost Breakdown

The expenses involved in the Paws for Change programme can be split into two categories

- 1) Expansion costs - equipping a new centre and training the staff
- 2) Existing project running costs - the costs associated with running a course

Paws for Change costs	2019	2020	2021	Total costs for 3 years
Cost to expand programme to a new centre	£5,370	£5,370	£0	£10,740
Cost to run a course	£3,500	£3,500	£3,500	£10,500
Number of new centres (inc one relaunch with a permanent behaviourist in 2020)	3	8	0	11
Number of courses run at new centres (as part of annual expansion)	3	8	0	11
Set up & Expansion costs	£16,110	£70,960	£0	£87,070
Number of established centres running courses	3	5	13	21
Average number of courses per centre per year	3	3	3	9
Average number of courses	10	15	39	64
Total costs for existing programme	£35,000	£52,500	£136,500	£224,000
Total courses run	13	23	39	75
Total dogs	45	92	156	300
Total young people included	45	92	156	300
Total costs	£51,110	£123,460	£136,500	£311,070

Financial Sustainability - Funding Plan

Funding Plan	2019	2020	2021	Total Cost
RSPCA general funds	£24,500	£20,000	£20,000	£64,500
Funding applications to Trusts	£13,000	£10,000	£30,000	£53,000
Funding applications to Individual Donors	£13,500	£55,000	£50,000	£118,500
Remaining to fund	£0	£38,460	£36,500	£75,070
Requested funding from Purina Better with Pets Award	n/a	£38,460	£36,500	£74,960

Detailed Cost Breakdown

1. Set Up Cost Breakdown

Category	Cost	Links
Toys/treats	£200	
Harnesses/Leads etc	£150	
Classroom training kit	£300	Whiteboards, pens, stationery etc
BWA training course	£450	https://www.imdt.uk.com/england/4-day-practical-instructor-course/
BWA Travel (to training)	£100	To attend formal offsite training and shadow a course at another centre
BWA accommodation (for training)	£300	As above
Dog Training (Room dividers)	£200	
Dog Training (Contact table)	£320	http://www.adamsagility.co.uk/product/contact-trainer-table-dog-walk/
Dog Training (Tunnels)	£250	https://www.longfieldagilitysolutions.co.uk/collections/tunnels-and-weaves/products/3-metre-non-slip-open-tunnel-no-stripes
Dog Training (Jumps)	£350	https://www.jayceejumps.co.uk/catalogue.html
Dog Training (weaves)	£250	https://www.firstcontactagility.co.uk/pages/fillers-jumps
Paws for Change mock course	£2,500	Running of a mock course for four participants with 4 dogs (reduced cost in comparison to a real course as there is not the same effort needed for preparation and follow up)
Total Costs	£5,370	

NB the equipment in the links are representative of what we'd purchase, rather than exact models, these would vary centre by centre and depend on what was best value for money we could source at time of purchase

2. Running A Course

The majority of expenses in running a course relate to staffing costs (the Behaviour and Welfare Adviser and the Prevention and Education Adviser).

2 People are required to run the course equating to 10 days effort, plus a further 5 days is spent on pre-course administrative work. 15 days overall effort costs the Society approximately £2500.

In addition to this, it's occasionally necessary to bring in temporary staff to "backfill" the Behaviour and Welfare Adviser (BWA) with a temporary person, while the BWA is running the course, if the Centre is particularly full with troubled dogs, to look after the animals, at an average cost of roughly £750

Finally, catering and incidentals mean the overall total for one course is on average £3,500

Reporting Updates - Next Due June 2020

The report update due in June will focus on

- Centre set up progress
- Number of young people taking part
- Dogs Attended
- Evaluation results (young people and dogs)
- Transformative Evaluation Stories, see below for current examples

Support Worker quote

“It was an absolute pleasure to be a part of the Paws 4 change project with the two young people I support. I think it is a fantastic idea to bring young people and animals together and not only teaches them to prevent animal cruelty, empathy and care for animals but also helps them develop in their own self-confidence, self-esteem and interpersonal skills. It has had a positive impact on the two young people I support and one of them is even interested in attending placement and apprenticeship with RSPCA. I will definitely be aiming to continue a working relationship with Paws 4 change project to give other young people this positive opportunity.’

Jennifer Bourne CGL Mentoring Support Officer.

Press release including quotes from a young person.

[EDU GK RPR Birmingham Paws for Change June 19 \(SH/CC/DA/CT\)](#)

Letter from participant following one of the courses.

Please note that I do not have permission to share this, although I have anonymised it. Just something to bear in mind, so internal/donors only please. Never to make its way public.

“Dear Charlie.

The Animal care course (PAWS for Change) that I attended in the summer has changed my life and has helped me to get out of the house and into a structured routine. It has also helped me to build my confidence around people; this had previously been really hard because I had hardly left the house or been to school in over a year. The RSPCA and the prospect of working with animals in the future has been the only thing that has kept me going and has made me think that life is worth living.

[My support worker] has spoken to me about the possibility of some kind of volunteering with animals and apprenticeship programs and this is something that I would very much like to do in the future because I feel it will help my mental health and personal development and growth. In the meantime would it be possible for me to spend some time at the centre? Because at this moment in time due to my anxiety levels I have not been able to attend school and I am currently waiting for my school to make an application for me to attend a specialist school and the last thing I want is for my mental health to deteriorate because I am not leaving the house.

Hopefully look forward to hearing from you in the near future”

The outcome of this was that we did offer him a six week one to one course with our youth officer