

## TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE PARTNERS WITH PATRIOT PAWS.

### Contact Information:

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Something good is happening between Patriot PAWS and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) who recently entered into partnership to have prisoners train service dogs for Disabled American Veterans.

Patriot PAWS, a non-profit organization has been working with TDCJ to develop a partnership that provides an opportunity for prisoners to volunteer to assist in training service dogs over the course of 12 to 18 months.

Patriot PAWS went through a series of interviews with TDCJ and in turn researched correctional facilities in Texas as well as other states to assure the right "fit" for everyone could be achieved. The end result was on January 15, 2008, the partnership was solidified with a memorandum of understanding between the two parties.

February 04, 2008 is set to kick off the program when Stevens will go to the prison with 6 puppies and partner them with an inmate trainer. "This is a win for everyone" says Lori Stevens, Founder and CEO of Patriot PAWS. "This partnership affords prisoners the opportunity to be a part of something bigger than their situation and provides Patriot PAWS a much needed volunteer base to train quality service dogs ." Prisoners who have volunteered to participate in the program have already said to Stevens they look forward to doing something good for someone.

Gatesville, TX is the location of both the Lane Murray Unit and Gatesville Women's Correctional Unit. The two units agreed to program logistics and have set the date. The partnership is intended to provide opportunities for prisoners to have a job while serving their sentence, learning a career trade and giving back to the community.

Melodye Nelson, Assistant Warden at the Gatesville Unit gave insight to the intent of the program, "When I initially heard about the program my response was, ABSOLUTELY we want to be a part of this program." Nelson said, "The multiple benefits it gives back to the disabled veterans, the inmate population and society as a whole are worth working towards making this a success".

Nelson added, there were 81 offenders from her facility who applied for the dog trainer positions. When offenders were asked why they wanted to be a part of this program, many responded "it's time I gave back to society instead of taking from it." From the pool of applicants, a total of 12 trainers for both facilities were selected.

"The program can't get started soon enough," Nelson added. "I don't know who is more excited me or the inmates. Our intention is to double the size of the program in the next 6 months and we wholeheartedly believe in the purpose of Patriot PAWS. We're so glad to be a part of doing this for our Disabled American Veterans."

After the training period, service dogs are partnered with Disabled American Veterans and help to restore many of the physical and emotional freedoms which have been compromised due their physical disabilities. The cost of the care and training for one service dog is approximately \$20,000. Patriot Paws depends on volunteers to achieve that end.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, civil rights division the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), service animals perform some of the functions and tasks that the individual with a disability cannot

perform for him or herself. Guide dogs are one type of service animal, used by some individuals who are blind. This is the type of service animal with which most people are familiar. But there are service animals that assist persons with other kinds of disabilities in their day-to-day activities. Some examples include:

Alerting persons with hearing impairments to sounds.

Pulling wheelchairs or carrying and picking up things for persons with mobility impairments.

Assisting persons with mobility impairments with balance.

Stevens went on to say, "This program affords us the privilege of being the conduit that positively impacts the lives of people through the placement service dogs, and that's what we're all about."

If you would like more information about the Patriot PAWS and the positive impact of service dogs for Disabled American Veterans, please visit [www.PatriotPAWS.org](http://www.PatriotPAWS.org) or call 972-772-3282.

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