

Dedicated to reducing the rate of recidivism among women and ensuring the personal dignity of those who experience incarceration while rescuing animals, building partnerships, and strengthening communities.

Reentry Programming Matters - Connie's Story

"My life changed forever that day – sentenced to 41 years in prison. I was so scared and confused - wasn't even sure how it had all happened.

Eventually, I came to a place of acceptance and survival. I put up high, impenetrable walls to



keep me safe. My plan was to keep my head down, work and just get through it. I vowed that someday I would have a better life. Someday, I would do something of value with my life.

I had no idea at the time that I would be offered a chance to do just that from within the prison walls.

I learned about the dog program – Prison Pet Partnership. I love dogs so enrolled and began training classes. My walls came down suddenly because dogs love unconditionally, and unconditional love doesn't allow for walls. Eventually, I started co-training and then was finally assigned my own dog to train – Atlantis.

Dan was a 19-year-old with sudden onset MS, and I was chosen to train his dog. He was getting used to life in a wheelchair and wanted a service dog so that he could gain enough independence to move out of his mom's place and return to school.

I worked with Dan to learn his specific needs and I trained Atlantis to support him. While showing Dan the command "stop", he said, "This is the most amazing thing I have ever seen. But, Connie, I can't get up and correct her like you do".



I was stunned. And then I was embarrassed because in all those months training Atlantis, not once did I think about or realize the fact that Dan wouldn't be able to handle her in the same way – that is when I realized that **Dan was the one in a real prison, not me, and his freedom would be in the dog I trained.**

That defining moment made me see life from a different perspective for the first time in my life. I had never been given the opportunity to learn that I could impact those around me in a positive way... I could change this man's life. I could make his life better. I could do something of value.

My life changed forever that day.



Over the years, I trained a total of 25 dogs – service, therapy, and rescue dogs.

One of my dogs, Rowdy, even ended up working for the police department – a drug sniffing K9 with Davenport Police Department. He worked until he passed.

I learned life lessons by training the dogs – how to listen and communicate with not

only dogs but with people. I even learned public speaking skills by teaching other incarcerated individuals, volunteers, and service teams.

I was transferred to the South Carolina women's prison to complete my sentence so I could be near my mom and stepdad – he had become very ill. It was a complete shock when I arrived as they didn't have programming like they do at Washington Corrections Center for Women – not even close.

After being there for about a year, I asked the Superintendent - for the 100th time - if she would consider starting a dog program. She finally relented and told me that if I could find out how to run such a program, she would approve it – she would even go herself to talk with the folks who ran the local humane society about a partnership if I would just stop asking and get out of her office.

I contacted PPP and was sent information about dog programs in prisons. I submitted a dog training theory that offered basic training. We began fostering and training dogs for the local animal shelter. It was called PAWs – Paws-itive Prison Program.

After being released from prison, I began volunteering at that same humane society as a part of my reentry plan and after two months, they hired me as a kennel worker. I threw myself into caring for the shelter dogs and took on different roles throughout the years – even filled in as interim executive director. I worked hard to make great changes in the shelter – we were awarded shelter of the year that year.



After being appointed executive director of the Humane Society of Greenwood County, my life changed forever that day, and I hit the ground running.



I began a TNR (trap-neuter-return) program in our county.

And partnered with the school district to work with children on the autism spectrum. We have a library – children read to dogs to meet educational reading requirements. We also have a program that works with people in vocational rehabilitation.

My organization expanded to include Animal Control services for my county.

I created a music therapy program that I am now teaching to humane societies and shelters across the country.

After all those years at PPP, I did see myself working with dogs on the outside, but I never imagined being in an executive director role. Yet, here I am spearheading a low cost spay and neuter clinic and am making changes to county ordinances to implement a higher standard of living for pets here in the south.

I went into prison at the age of 21 and came out at 54 and today there are dogs and cats and a better life, and I have the opportunity and power to continue to make others' lives better, too.

People, so many people need the services offered by Prison Pet Partnership and you can help to ensure that their vital programming continues. **Your donation can change someone's life forever. Just like how it changed Atlantis', how it changed Dan's, and how it changed mine."**



Join PPP's mission to enrich the lives of incarcerated individuals, animals, and the community through the human animal bond. Your help enables us to continue to provide vocational education to incarcerated individuals working hard to earn certification as Pet Care Technicians, Groomers, Dog Trainers, and Veterinary Assistants to secure employment and positively impact our communities upon release – just like Connie. Your support saves the lives of animals at risk of euthanasia. Your generosity provides independence to persons with disabilities. There are two ways to support: mail your donation or visit www.prisonpetpartnership.org/donate.

Thank you for supporting the first and oldest prison pet program in the world.