

CAMPUS KILPATRICK WELCOMES "PAWSITIVE CHANGE" PROGRAM TRAINERS ARE FORMER JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS

"Dogs love you unconditionally. They don't look at what you've done. They want a rub, a hug, or some attention. They are not judgmental, and that lays the groundwork for being able to trust."
- SDPO Lockhart



In February 2023, Los Angeles County Probation Department's Campus Kilpatrick partnered with Marley's Mutts to implement their "Pawsitive Change" program. "Pawsitive Change" is a program in which detained individuals are selected and partnered with shelter dogs. Program participants complete a 14-week course with a challenging curriculum, including weekly interactive dog training sessions, homework assignments, and personal goal setting. Campus Kilpatrick's "Pawsitive Change" program began with one young man interested in bringing a dog program to the facility.

"He took the initiative and presented his idea to staff, and it's been fantastic. His peers look up to him for direction, the knowledge he provides, and they fall right in line," shared DPO II DeSoto. "There's no competition or issues amongst them, and it's been great."

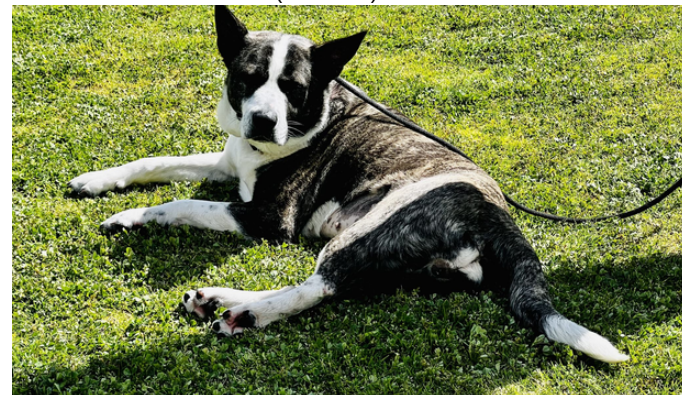
The youth wrote a proposal and submitted it to the staff. As a result, DPO II Ventura began conversing with Marley's Mutts. Eventually, the idea was presented to now former Los Angeles Board of Supervisors' 3rd District Supervisor Sheila Kuehl who provided a \$50,000 grant to fund a pilot project for one year.

With the generous donation of Supervisor Kuehl, Campus Kilpatrick began hosting the "Pawsitive Change" program. Currently, there are five young participants, including both high school students and graduates. The program started with three weeks of theory. Two K-9 friends, Blanco, and Socks were introduced to the youth in the fourth week. Blanco and Socks began residing with the young men in two separate living units at Campus Kilpatrick. The young men are responsible for the dog's daily care and training needs.

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Blanco (above) and Socks



Pawsitive Change Dog Trainers Max, David, and Didontae

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TRAINERS ARE FORMER JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS

"Pawsitive Change" dog trainers/credible messengers David Galaviz, Didontae Farmer, and Max Kerzner meet with the young men and K-9s once a week for practical training sessions. The trainers teach the youth basic training tips such as identifying the dog's workspace, loose leash walking, sit/stay commands and introducing dogs to new human and K-9 friends. Because of the trainer's lived experience, the weekly sessions often also serve as life skills and mentorship moments. As a result, the youth not only develop the skills to train dogs, but the program also allows them to forge meaningful relationships with the trainers who have most times lived the same lives as them. The dog trainers are former justice-involved individuals who overcame life's challenges and are now giving back to the next generation and affecting positive change in the world through the program.

"One young man was reluctant and didn't want to participate initially. He was very standoffish and didn't want to be involved," shared SDPO Lockhart. "But with the dogs being here, it breaks them down. It sparks conversation, and now he engages more with staff and his peers."

The lessons taught during the K-9 training often parallel valuable life lessons and foster positive decision-making and critical thinking skills in the youth. It's those teachable moments that the trainers take advantage of to meet the youth where they are and impart wisdom upon them with the hopes that it will influence good behavior change, and hope for a brighter future.

"It's been a very good program so far, and I'm happy with the results, expressed DPO II DeSoto. "The youth check each other and remind one another of their responsibilities and duties. "Pawsitive Change" has taught them compassion and how to care for an animal dependent upon them. The lessons will benefit them when they return to the community."

"At first, I wasn't into animals. I didn't like it and didn't want to do it at all, but once the two dogs came, I decided to try it," a young participant said. "I want to be a rapper, but if that doesn't work out, this is my backup. When I go home, I'll know how to train others that have dogs."

The program also broadens the young men's perspective on career possibilities. Working with "Pawsitive Change" and the dog trainers has exposed them to a new legitimate avenue of earning income in an industry where top trainers make more than one hundred thousand dollars annually.

"These kids haven't had anything depend on them in the past and having an animal that depends on them is good. It teaches them compassion and other skills they haven't had while in the community, and that's important," shared DPO II DeSoto. "Some of them may even take dog training on as a career. The probation staff has also been very supportive. Some staff has even considered adopting the dogs after their training. So, the program has been good all-around for everyone involved."

To learn more about Marleys Mutts and Pawsitive Change, visit marleymutts.org



DPOs Desoto and Ventura and Trainer Max with K-9 Socks



Pawsitive Change Dog Trainers Didontae and Max