

For Immediate Release

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'Life with Dogs' helps men in conflict with the law

If you been in trouble with the law and want to get your life back together, it's great to have a friend who won't judge you for past mistakes. Sometimes this friendship can be found in time spent with dogs.

"Life with Dogs" is a new program from the John Howard Society of Manitoba specifically made for formerly incarcerated men or those in conflict with the law.

"We have discovered that when guys spend time with dogs, they calm down and feel a sense of comfort," said Katherine Johnston, Canine Healing Services Coordinator at the society.

The new "Life with Dogs" program is an eight-session introduction to the world of dogs and how to care for them. The program started in September and is underway at the John Howard Society building located at on Ellice Avenue just east of Sherbrook. The a new round of the same (or similar) eight sessions begins in January.

George Leonard is a master dog trainer with Mehgan Search and Rescue (MSAR) and the facilitator of the sessions. For each session, Leonard brings a different service dog to the classroom.

Topics for discussion revolve around basic dog ownership and handling skills. These include dog selection, caring for your dog, grooming the animal, how to choose food for a dog, and travelling with your dog. They'll also discuss the differences between dogs when they serve as pets, therapy dogs, service dogs and working dogs.

This program operates as an "open group" format, which means individuals can come and go to different sessions and attend sessions they might have missed in the second running of the program.

"Our clients have a real interest in learning about dogs. I have seen men want to become more responsible individuals as they learn how to care for dogs," said Johnston.

Participants in the program can call the John Howard Society office to learn more (204-775-1514, johnhoward.mb.ca), or they can be referred by parole officers, social workers and other professionals. The next round of classes begins early in the new year.

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Kiefer is a therapy dog who works with clients at the John Howard Society of Manitoba.

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