



HM Prison &
Probation Service



Therapy Dog Pilot

Eligibility criteria: Prisoners with limited/no social ties and who receive no social visits for a period of 12 months, or more.

HMP
WYMOTT
Rehabilitation in the 21st Century

The power of a Therapy Dog when dealing with complex cases and individuals with a variety of complex needs.

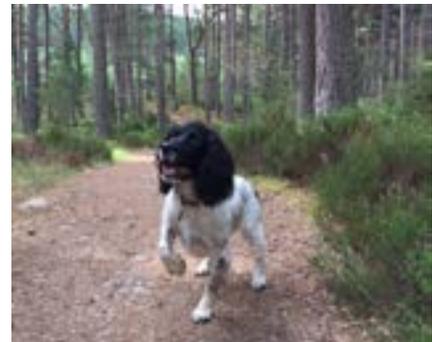
Therapy Dogs have been well documented in recent years as to their effectiveness, with children and adults, in a variety of settings. All prospective dogs are assessed, and pass a rigorous test, to make sure they have the right temperament, and that the dog is suitable to be used as a Therapy Dog.

Our dog Eddie and his handler Grainne!

The dog we've been matched with is a four-year-old springer spaniel, called Eddie, and his handler, Grainne (pronounced Gronnya). They are registered through a nationally recognised charity called, Therapy Dogs Nationwide. They provide support and training for the handlers and the dogs.

Eddie's Story

Eddie had a rough start in life and was initially used as a gun dog. Sadly, his original owner ill-treated him. Grainne, told us about his traumatic start to life before he was, luckily, rescued. He was taken in by a charity solely for springer spaniels, and then paired up with Grainne and her family.



Grainne explained that in his first few weeks he used to wail; she had never heard a dog make these noises before. Luckily as he settled in, this settled down and he adapted to his new life very quickly. He had never been house trained or even been on a lead, so they really had to start from scratch. Eddie is classed as a mute dog, as he has never barked. He is a very sociable, trusting dog with a fantastic temperament. He's a credit to Grainne and shows great resilience.

Grainne's Story

Grainne is a retired school teacher and became interested to volunteer and have Eddie trained to be a therapy dog, having experienced first-hand the effect a dog can have on the elderly. Grainne is a softly spoken, caring and empathic person, and sees the holistic impact on a person's social, emotional wellbeing when they are, or have been, in contact with the dog.



They both currently volunteer at a school in a low socio-economic area where they support the children with their reading. They also visit a local care home for people with dementia. People with dementia can be unpredictable and Eddie's temperament means he copes well with sudden noises, movements and at times he has even been struck by some residents.

Wymott: Men with no social visits and/or no external social ties

Here at Wymott we have approximately 1100 prisoners on roll. Approximately 31% of all our prisoners haven't received a social visit for the last 12 months, or more. This can be for a variety of reasons; there is a preconception that this is largely due to their offence, but could be due to a large number of complex factors at play. The fact they don't receive social visits doesn't automatically mean that the prisoners are cut off completely from their family, but there are a large percentage that have no social ties. Some of these men will have complex social and emotional needs, and many have issues with attachment and trust, which may be due to childhood trauma or abuse. The dog will only see the man in front of it and lives in the moment. It cannot prejudge. We are focussing on this group of men who don't receive social visits for over 12 months for the pilot, as many have been in prison serving long sentences. Through the work we have done so far there is a common theme emerging which indicates a large number have become institutionalised and fear leaving prison. For men with limited or no family ties, or significant other support, prison is seen as a home of sorts, where men are in a routine and don't need to focus on the outside world.

Release is anxiety provoking, and so many of our men have been in prison for such long stretches of time they see that the world has moved on, and this fact can often cause them to feel isolated and fearful.

Quite often they have limited financial resources, to set themselves up, and often have no fixed abode, so they rely on the probation service or other services and charities to set them up with housing. Often our older men have been the 'bread winners', so have little or no experience of running a home.

We have a large number of high risk offenders and finding housing is often the hardest task that is faced by our team, as we are not a resettlement prison. We have to work with the resources we have for these complex cases. We have specialist staff that are trained to support men to move on to resettlement prisons, but often due to the high percentage of sexual offenders we house here, they refuse to move on as they are often fearful of moving into a local prison. As a result, a small number end up being released from here.

Our nearest Cat D prison for VP prisoners is approximately three hours away. This causes many of our eligible prisoners to remain here at Wymott until the end of their sentences as a Cat C. One VP prisoner using the scheme, states: "As a lifer VP prisoner facing an imminent parole decision and the prospect of progression to 'D' Cat instead of straight release, if I was given my 'D' Cat, I would prefer to remain here in closed conditions rather than progress as a Cat

'D' Prisoner to North Sea Camp or Leyhill - with the prospect of having no option but to come off the 'Rule' to enable a transfer to a mixed prison. I fully accept this as a personal view and not one shared by many fixed termers." We don't advocate release from here, but it is a reality that we do, and we must provide the support required for those men who are potentially sabotaging their parole, through fear of release, and staying in prison far longer than they need to.

The aim of the work we intend to do is to encourage the prisoners to focus forward and be rehabilitation focussed. When faced with ill-health or dementia the focus gets harder, and therefore more vulnerable due to this.

We have a fantastic team here at Wymott and our men are supported through our CAMEO centre and are linked with social care prior to release. In most cases this works effectively.

The hardest challenge is for us to have a mechanism that helps these identified men converse more easily, relieve their stress, ease their pain and tension and improve communication skills in a variety of ways.

There are a number of initiatives which are focussed for men who don't receive social visits whilst they are in prison, and they are being well received. We have had successful outcomes for those men who attend and connect with the services offered by the outside agencies, the feedback has been very positive.

Why do we need a Therapy Dog @ Wymott?

We can do more to support vulnerable men, and those who have ill health, learning difficulties or disabilities. It's not about being soft, or woolly with the use of the dog, it's about drawing them out and providing a non-human factor that has been proven in a variety of settings to reduce anxiety, stress and also to lift mood and provide a listening ear. In some studies, the effect of a Therapy Dog is evidenced to help with pain management, diffusing tension and a large number of other ways in which it can be beneficial to individuals and the staff in that environment.

The Pilot and Focus

The pilot is designed to link with our healthcare provider, Bridgewater Health & Social Care, as well as Lancashire County Council, I wing staff and keyworkers. This joined up approach means that the men are known to the staff, and the initial group that we are going to work with will be referred from the healthcare provider and the social-work team. This means that the men will be able to be supported with their healthcare needs and if they need assistance to prepare for the visits, and then their keyworkers can support them post visits and for the period of the pilot.

We are initially looking at four - eight prisoners to participate in the pilot. The men that have been referred by healthcare and Health and Social Care have a variety of complex needs and health issues, predominantly from I wing.

Once this pilot has been completed, the result and the testimonies will be circulated. The dog, in effect, will become similar to a prison visitor, but a four-legged variety! It will then be used to a wider effect, and go around the wings to visit those men who don't receive social visits, or are struggling emotionally, socially or with ill-health.

The Therapy Dog will be brought in to see the men in a group setting, and will then be free to interact with the men off the wing. There will be some activities available for the men to do if they wish, but the dog will be in the room for them to interact with if they choose. This is an optional activity and the men will be informed fully about the pilot before the first session.

The men will all have their own individual needs and we will work with them and their keyworker to help with any requirements that they have, and will explain the services that are available to them. We hope the dog will be well received and the men benefit for being involved in the pilot.

Long-term goal

Wymott is looking at a long-term connection with our Therapy Dog, and to hopefully build on the number of volunteers and dogs over time. We value, and wish to utilise, the power of dogs to support those men who are more socially isolated, because they are constantly in the prison surroundings and don't have the social break of going into visits, meeting with family, friends and significant others. We have a duty of care to ensure that they are focussed on rehabilitation, and not at risk of becoming institutionalised through lack of contact with significant others and fear of the prospect of the outside world. The dogs will also filter into other areas of the prison and interact with prisoners, who do receive visits, and their families and significant others helping to strengthen family ties and aid rehabilitation.



