

EQUINE ASSISTED INMATE REHABILITATION MAY HELP REDUCE RECIDIVISM RATES

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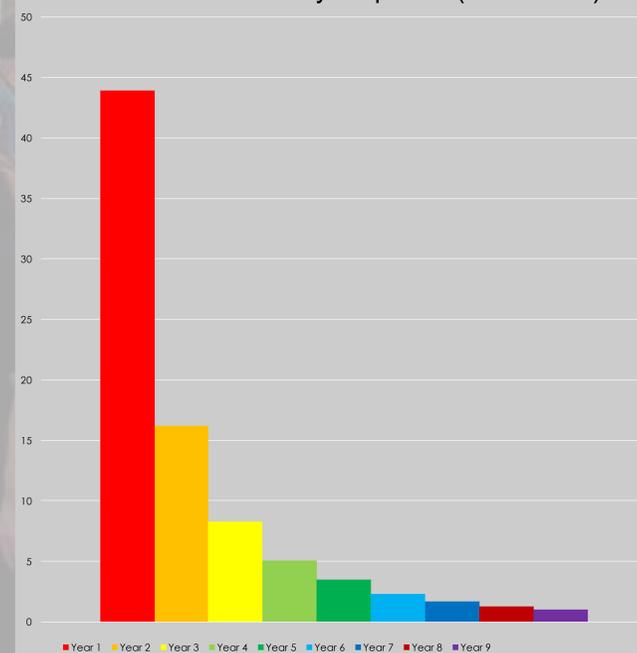
Introduction

- In the U.S., the national criminal recidivism rate is currently at a staggering 83% (Alper, Durose, & Markman, 2018).
- Prisons that employ some type of animal assisted program are thought to have lower recidivism rates (Strimple, 2003).
- The use of animals in a therapeutic setting is well researched and is found to be helpful. Newer programs have started to see benefits in using animals to boost morale, increase self-esteem and even help teach patience, empathy and anger management to inmates in prison populations (Turner, 2007).
- Equine assisted therapy has been widely studied for the purposes of developmental and emotional problems in children and adults alike (Holmes, Goodwin, Redhead, & Goymour, 2012).
- A handful of prisons have started to use equine assisted rehabilitation for prison inmates which may prove to have a positive influence on recidivism rates among inmates who have participated in these programs.
- Research on the impact of such programs on recidivism is still lacking (Bachi, 2013).

- One equine program is at the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Facility in Sacramento, California.
- This facility employs inmates who have been sentenced to more than 18 months of prison time and are successful in keeping up with good behavior requirements and other self-development programs in the prison, and trains them to become certified horse trainers.
- The program trains inmates who then help train wild mustangs to eventually be tame and trained enough to be adopted by the general population.
- The inmates are then asked to present their trained horses at an adoption event amid the general population and the horses are bid on for adoption.
- Although equine assisted prison programs are offered in 13 states in the U.S. (Bachi, 2013), the program at Rio Cosumnes is currently the only program of its type that facilitates inmate certification and equine adoption.
- Horses have long been used in therapeutic settings because they are animals that rely on body language to communicate, making them very keen on human emotion and feeling (Burgon, 2011).

- This communication ability may explain the anecdotal evidence suggesting equine based programs are exceedingly positive (Furst, 2006).
- Equine assisted programs help inmates work with large animals in a calm and compassionate manner and can help them learn and understand ways to control their anger and aggression.
- Such programs are designed to not only help inmates understand how to react to situations in a calm and collected manner but also give inmates a sense of autonomy and control when they are training these horses (Furst, 2006).
- Although equine programs such as the one at Rio Cosumnes Correctional Facility seem to offer tremendous benefits to the participating inmates, research on animal assisted programs and especially equine assisted programs in prisons are lacking due to the limited participant pools available and the lack of funding to study these programs.
- Further research into these programs is necessary to determine the effectiveness of these programs for reducing criminal recidivism. Most of the existing information on the effectiveness of these programs is anecdotal, although this evidence suggests equine assisted inmate rehabilitation programs may reduce criminal recidivism.

Recidivism over a 9 year period (2005-2014)



*Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Recidivism of State Prisoners Released in 2005 data collection, 2005-2014.

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