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## **Jackson Correctional Institution Launches Program to Train Service Dogs for Persons with Disabilities**

BLACK RIVER FALLS – Today, the first litter of ten puppies arrived at Jackson Correctional Institution in Black River Falls to begin training as service dogs. Jackson Correctional Institution is working with Can Do Canines, a Minnesota-based non-profit organization that trains assistance dogs for persons with hearing loss, mobility challenges, seizure disorders, diabetes, or childhood autism. The service dogs are provided at no cost to the recipient.

In addition to the program launching at Jackson Correctional Institution, there are existing programs at Stanley Correctional Institution, Oshkosh Correctional Institution, and Flambeau Correctional Center. Correctional dog programs decrease costs for organizations training dogs and provide inmates with positive, productive activities while they are incarcerated.

The incoming litter of puppies is roughly 4 months old and will alternate between training at Jackson Correctional Institution and training with volunteers in the community for the next 10 to 14 months. During this period, the dogs will receive training in a number of areas, including obedience training, house manners, and service dog skills like opening doors or flipping light switches.

Jon Litscher, DOC Secretary said: “Welcoming this new program to Jackson Correctional Institution is one way that we can give back to the community. Inmates training service dogs for persons with disabilities decreases the cost of training and is a positive, productive activity for inmates. Our focus is on providing opportunities for inmates to better themselves through education, programming, and treatment. I firmly believe that this program will aid inmates in developing new skills that will serve them well upon their release to the community.”

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Lizzie Tegels, Warden, Jackson Correctional Institution said: “This program is an incredible opportunity for inmates at Jackson Correctional Institution to grow key skills like responsibility, empathy, and commitment, as well as giving back to the community. We are excited for this partnership with Can Do Canines and look forward to doing our part to train these dogs to serve persons with disabilities.”

Julianne Larsen, Director of Training for Can Do Canines said: “We are so excited to be starting this new partnership with Jackson Correctional Facility and we cannot wait to see the positive impact this program has on the inmates and the facility staff!”

Can Do Canines is also seeking volunteers in the Black River Falls area to provide community training during the weekend, socializing the dogs and exposing them to situations they will encounter as a service dog. Community members interested in volunteering can contact Can Do Canines Volunteer Coordinator Laurie Carlson at 763-331-3000, extension 113.

Can Do Canines (New Hope, Minn.) is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities by creating mutually beneficial partnerships with specially trained dogs. Since 1989, Can Do Canines has provided more than 570 assistance dogs to people with disabilities; all free of charge. Our fully trained dogs, often adopted from local animal shelters, are provided to our clients who live with disabilities that involve mobility challenges, hearing loss or deafness, seizure disorders, diabetes complicated by hypoglycemia unawareness or children with autism.

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