

OSPCA's new centre 'is leading edge'

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It's a been a win-win situation, stressed Pollard. "The program increases the adaptability of the dog and provide the young offender with an experience that facilitates learning and personal growth," he said.

Through YAPP, the youths take direct responsibility for the proper training of the dogs under their care, deal with the frustrations that come from the challenges of training, learn skills that enable working with the animals in a productive and respectful manner and at the end of the program, find the courage to say good-bye.

Ultimately, the dynamics of the dog training sessions, coupled with ongoing discussion and direction from the young offenders' counsellors, raises many issues such as respect for living beings, anger management, the demands of responsibility and the nurturing of respect and trust, Pollard said. With the help of counsellors, YAPP focuses on anti-violence education, accountability and responsibility.

The pilot project just completed its fourth cycle of classes. Of the dogs in the first three cycles, all but one has been adopted into new homes.

Parents and counsellors are recognizing marked attitude improvements in the young offenders.

The youths' counsellors and parents are reporting positive results in the behaviour and attitudes of the young people who participate in the program, said Pollard.

Each youth is paired with a dog companion selected from the OSPCA shelters throughout Ontario. While the majority of young offenders are from York Region, some come from other parts of the Greater Toronto Area. There's a strong link between the inclination and capacity for violence done to animals and that done to human beings, studies show.

"YAPP acknowledges this and recognizes the potential good that can come from using interactions with animals to inculcate values of respect and compassion applicable to human relationships," said Pollard. "The youthful handler learns to manage non-productive emotions and harness new coping skills."

Construction of the new OSPCA centre will soon be complete. The animal village is taking shape, said Pollard.

The OSPCA headquarters moved to Whitchurch-Stouffville from Newmarket close to two years ago. Located on 40 acres, the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville has given the centre an open-arms welcome. While the new facility was being built, the Society's 40-member staff operated out of large trailers, located on the property.

The \$7.9-million project is being funded by the proceeds

from the sale of existing OSPCA property in Newmarket and fund raising activities currently underway. As well, last year the province gave a \$117,000 grant to the OSPCA.

Once the structure is complete, it will be one of North America's most prominent animal centers. "This is a leading edge. It's a benefit to both the animals and people," said Vicky Earle, OSPCA's chief executive officer. The new facility is designed to house an animal care centre, a veterinary clinic, a pet day care centre, a library resource centre, a pet adoption centre, a pet supply store, a wildlife hospital, a livestock barn and programs, including YAPP, other violence prevention initiatives, community services and fundraising are part of the plans.

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