

## **ABOUT CONVICTED PERSONS' WORK WITH DOGS WITHIN THE PROGRAM CONDUCTED IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION IN SREMSKA MITROVICA**

There has not been a significant number of examples illustrating the participation of animals in the treatment of convicted persons in Serbia. That is the reason why the programme that is currently being applied in Correctional Institution in Sremska Mitrovica represents a unique programme of the re-socialisation of convicted persons and their preparation for social re-integration after they have served their punishment. Nevertheless, latest practice of foreign systems for the enforcement of criminal sanctions is familiar with the examples of animals being included in the treatment, which have had a positive influence on the development of convicted persons' empathy, their capability to take care of others, their leisure activities, their preparation for the post-penal period (including the obtaining of skills that would facilitate their employment after they have served the punishment) as well as on the improvement of the interaction between the convicted persons and general population.



By applying this programme, the Correctional Institution in Sremska Mitrovica aims to contribute to an easier and more adequate inclusion of convicted persons in the community after serving the punishment, which should have a long-term impact on the decrease in the recidivism rate. Another thing that makes this programme unique is the fact that a dog shelter for abandoned dogs from the territory of the city of Sremska Mitrovica has been established within the Correctional Institution Sremska Mitrovica as the result of shared efforts of the city of Sremska Mitrovica and the Correctional Institution. At this moment, altogether fourteen convicted persons, who are placed in the semi-open part of the Correctional

Institution, work with the dogs. For seven of them, working with the dogs represents a part of their programme, whereas the other seven work with the dogs within their treatment. The programme itself has been applied for less than a year and it is planned to continue with its application in the future, as well as to cover a larger number of convicted persons, including not only those from semi-open but those from the closed part of the institution as well.

Within their work with abandoned animals, the convicted persons teach dogs basic skills, they clean them, brush their hair, feed them and take them for a walk in order to prepare them for adoption. Apart from the fact that it produces numerous positive effect on the mood of convicted persons working with the dogs, making them feel better, think in a more positive manner and handle prison deprivations with less stress, this programme also contributes to the protection of abandoned animals' welfare and helps local community to resolve the issue of abandoned dogs by keeping them in the shelter and facilitating their adoption. In that sense, it gains three types of benefits at the same time - for the convicted persons, for the abandoned animals and for the broader community.



Ana Batrićević, PhD, Research Fellow at the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research has been conducting a field research in this Correctional Institution from February, 2018, with the aim to draw the attention of experts and general public to the positive sides of this programme as well as to the benefits of its broader application in the future, through obtaining data from the interviews with convicted persons and through making documentary photographs of the most interesting moments from their daily engagement.

The research includes: interviewing the employees in the Correctional Institution in Sremska Mitrovica, who are in charge of applying this programme, interviewing the convicted persons who are involved with the programme and making photographs of the location where the animals are kept as well as of the convicted persons working with them.

The purpose of the research is to collect the information about the content of the programme and the way in which it is being applied as well as about the impressions of the employees and of the convicted persons who are involved with the programme. On the grounds of the obtained information, the research is supposed to provide the estimation of current influence of this programme on convicted persons as well as to contribute to its introduction to other correctional institutions in Serbia.



All interviewed convicted persons have said that the interaction with the dogs makes them feel accomplished, that it makes them feel more comfortable, that it helps them to cope with the isolation from the outer world and the fact that they are imprisoned. The majority of interviewed convicted persons have declared that they would like to continue working with dogs and taking care of them after leaving the Correctional Institution. They also emphasised that they would like to keep the dog they have been with or to adopt come other dog from the shelter. Positive effects of the application of this programme are best depicted through the words of the convicted persons.

*"Apart from being separated from my family, being separated from my dog has also been very hard for me. Since dogs have a positive impact on humans and feed them with positive energy, I really missed that a lot."*

*"I would like to take at least ten dogs from here. Many of them have stolen my heart. I just hope the scientific work that you are doing here will help spread the word about this so that people start adopting these dogs without owners."*

*"They come from the street in a very poor condition and after our treatments, they really become beautiful. There isn't one you could call: ugly. As soon as we clean and brush a dog, teach it to walk on a leash, and basic things like that, it becomes a really wonderful dog."*

*"Well... The purpose of the programme is to... I don't know, I don't know how to define it. You feel nice, you feel good with them. You forget things like... It helps you go through all this in an easier way. It helps a lot. We really feel better, Time flies, goes by, you work with them. There is a lot of work, but the work itself is interesting. Nice."*

*"The dogs make me feel relaxed here and I see the abandoned dogs now in a different way than before, when I was outside. I see how little it takes to start to interact with them. I used to think those dogs are wild, that one can't work with them. But, I see that one can work with them, that it takes a little time, a little patience and that you can make a great dog if you work with it."*



It is planned that the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research follows the application of this programme in the future, as well as to publish the results of the research in scientific papers in domestic and foreign journals, on national and international conferences as well as in a book that would contain the photos made throughout this process.