



PLYMOUTH COUNTY COMFORT DOGS

The mission of The Comfort Dog Program developed by the Plymouth County District Attorney’s Office (PCDAO) is “to provide comfort and emotional support for the well-being of Drug Endangered Children, students with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and others that require this service within the Plymouth County community.”



HOW IT STARTED

2021: 1 Dog, 1 Town

HOW IT’S GOING

2025: 20 Dogs, 16 Towns

The primary goal of this program is **promoting human resiliency and well-being** by utilizing **animal-assisted interventions (AAI)** to support the well-being of children & community members affected by the damaging effects of the opioid crisis & substance misuse.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The program is implemented by the local School Resource Officer or Community Outreach Officer who serves as the dog's handler & caretaker. For the handler & the comfort dog to join the Plymouth County Comfort Dogs Program, both must complete the required training & certification to qualify as a comfort/community resource dog team. Each handler & dog will be available to assist in their community & across Plymouth County as part of a regional response team.

RESEARCH

AAI benefits fueled expansion efforts funded by DOJ/COSSUP grant funding & culminated in the **PCDAO partnership with Bridgewater State University School of Social Work** to evaluate program effectiveness.

WHY DOGS & LAW ENFORCEMENT?

Comfort dogs **provide emotional support and comfort**, reducing anxiety levels, improving focus, and helping people cope with difficult & traumatic experiences. The dogs' unique ability to **sense one's needs and provide unconditional, nonjudgmental acceptance** lay at the heart of how participants see this program working. Law enforcement officers serve as comfort dog handlers due to their unique access to the communities they serve and their regular engagement with a wide range of community members.



IMPACT

- Evaluation results show multi-disciplinary benefits of the Comfort Dog Program**
- Teachers report...**
- Benefits from comfort dogs in classrooms
 - Improved classroom climate
 - Increased student motivation & focus
- Counselors & Social Workers report...**
- Collaboration with handler-dog teams translates to delivery of individual & group AAI/therapies targeting the effects of trauma & ACEs
 - Reduced anxiety & stress levels
- First Responders report...**
- Assistance in crisis management
 - Encouragement of interdepartmental collaboration
 - Promotion of positive image of law enforcement

KEY FINDINGS

- Interaction with comfort dogs...**
- **Improves resiliency and well-being** by building emotion regulation and coping skills, managing stress, maintaining focus and motivation, and processing grief.
 - **Brings together a diverse group of community members** to build relationships, foster community well-being, increase a sense of community pride, and build positive relationships between youth and law enforcement.
- Our evaluation suggests AAI builds these important **protective factors** that reduce the risk of & prevent substance misuse and other risky behavior by giving young people the tools needed to manage stress in their lives.



SERVICES WE PROVIDE

- School-Based Services**
- Visiting Classrooms
 - Comforting dysregulated Individuals
 - Participating in assemblies
 - Being present at drop-off/pick-ups
 - Responding to crises
- Community-Based Services**
- Drop in visits at agencies
 - Comforting dysregulated individuals
 - Attending events/meetings/camps
 - Responding to crises

COMFORT DOGS IN ACTION

In an average month, comfort dogs & handlers work in over **30** schools, several councils on aging, and at numerous community events, where over **10,000** youth and others interact with these teams.



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