



PLYMOUTH COUNTY COMFORT DOGS

The mission of The Comfort Dogs 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.



Hanson Police: Comfort Dog Ziva

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.



Hull Police: Comfort Dog Peddock

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 communities** they serve and regular engagement with a wide range of community members.

IMPACT

Evaluation results show multi-disciplinary benefits of the Comfort Dogs 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



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RESEARCH

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



District Attorney Tim Cruz with Hingham Police: Ofc. Tom Ford, Chief David Jones and Comfort Dog Opry

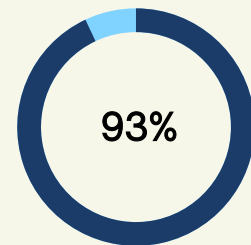


KEY FINDINGS

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, and increase a sense of community pride.
- **Builds positive relationships** between youth and law enforcement.

This evaluation suggests AAI builds these important **protective factors that reduce the risk of & prevent substance misuse** by giving young people the tools needed to manage stress in their lives.



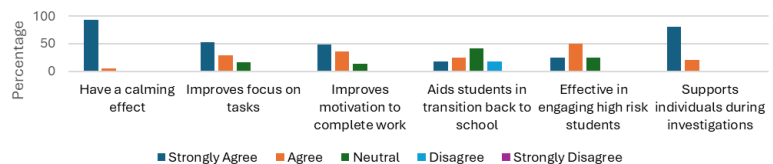
of study participants agree that the program contributes to a positive climate

RECOMMENDATIONS

Program Development

- **Identifying scope of services**
 - consistent delivery of best practice interventions
- **Multi-pronged messaging campaign**
 - enhance buy-in
- **Standardizing training**
 - align with AAI industry experts
- **Increasing administrative buy-in**
 - engagement with local school & agency administrators
- **Acquiring necessary funding**
 - extend dog-related expenses, streamline handler role, provide long-term program stability

Resiliency & Well-being As Assessed by Participants



Whitman Police: Sgt. Kevin Harrington and Comfort Dog Nola

COMFORT DOGS IN ACTION

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

