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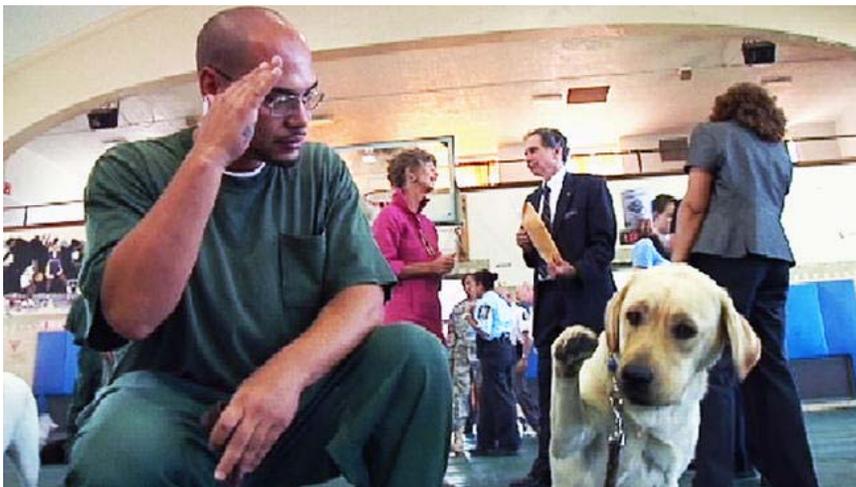
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# Raised in Prison, Service Dogs to Help Wounded Veterans

Puppies Behind Bars matches eight-week-old puppies with pre-screened prison inmates

By Marc Santia | Friday, Aug 31, 2012 | Updated 6:54 AM EDT

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NBC 4 New York

After spending their puppy years behind bars being raised by prisoners, a special group of canines have received their doggie diplomas, moving on to help veterans who risked their lives overseas. As News 4's Marc Santia reports, these dogs are destined for greatness.

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Five service dogs trained by inmates at the Fishkill Correctional Facility to help wounded veterans were honored Thursday in a tearful graduation ceremony.

"Our puppies don't know anything about prison. Our puppies don't know anything about war. All they know is that they spent their puppyhoods with people who loved them," said Gloria Gilbert Stoga, the founder of Puppies Behind Bars.

Stoga first had the idea for the organization in 2006. Today, Puppies Behind Bars matches eight-week-old puppies with pre-screened

prison inmates. The inmates spend two years training and caring for the dogs.

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"This is my way of giving something back without getting any recognition because we're not looking for recognition," said John Zgalijic, who has spent 28 years in prison.

The dogs learn more than 90 commands, including how to dial 911, reassuring a veteran struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder that someone is looking out for them.

"I was instantly engulfed in flames," said Army Sgt. Rick Yarosh from Windsor, New York. Yarosh was badly injured when his Bradley Fighting Vehicle hit an I.E.D. in Iraq. Now, the veteran is ready for a new beginning.

"Having my new puppy Amos is gonna be awesome. He's gonna be my companion, he's gonna be my pal for a long long time," he said.

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