

Citizenship In 4-H Youth Development Award

“The Dog Program”

The Dog Program is a collaborative effort between Nassau County Animal Services and Nassau County 4-H, designed to foster responsible citizenship among youth while addressing critical community needs. Over a 12-week period, this program engages participants in dog handling, training, and education on key topics such as animal welfare, legal responsibilities, intake procedures, and the importance of community support in caring for shelter animals. By bridging the gap between youth and local services, the program empowers participants to become informed and active citizens who contribute meaningfully to their community.

A central focus of the program is understanding the impact of human choices on shelter animals and recognizing the vital role that individuals and the community play in their care and adoption. Through hands-on activities, youth took on responsibilities such as feeding, training, and creating enrichment activities for shelter dogs. These tasks provided practical skills while fostering empathy, accountability, and civic engagement. The program not only highlights the importance of volunteerism and community partnerships in addressing local challenges, but also inspires participants to take ownership of their civic duties. By connecting youth to real-world issues, The Dog Program cultivates a sense of responsibility and encourages long-term involvement in initiatives that strengthen the community and promote positive change.

Goals: One of the primary goals of The Dog Program is to empower youth with knowledge about the animal intake process, the care animals receive in shelters, and the various roles within Animal Services, including volunteer opportunities and careers such as private animal investigation. The program also highlights the importance of responsible citizenship by showing how involvement in community-focused initiatives fosters empathy, encourages civic engagement, and strengthens their connection to the needs of their community.

Civic Education: At the beginning of this program, many youths were unfamiliar with the laws and responsibilities associated with pet care and animal welfare. To build their understanding and promote responsible citizenship, participants completed an animal welfare class. This course emphasized the importance of recognizing and addressing animal abuse, the role of law enforcement in protecting animals, and the responsibility citizens have in ensuring humane treatment. By learning how individual actions can impact community welfare, youth developed a deeper sense of civic duty and accountability.

Civic Engagement: Over a 12-week period, youth participants served as dog caretakers and trainers, gaining hands-on experience while developing essential life skills and fostering a sense of civic responsibility. Each week, they provided critical care for their assigned dogs, including feeding, grooming, and creating enrichment activities to enhance the dogs' well-being. They also dedicated time to training the dogs in basic commands like "sit" and "stay," fostering patience, discipline, and a commitment to contributing positively to their community. The program culminated in a community dog contest, where youth showcased their training efforts, demonstrated showmanship, and presented tricks performed by their dogs. Following the event, participants reflected on their experiences, discussing how the program helped them understand

the importance of community involvement, empathy, and the role citizens play in addressing local needs. Through this program, youth developed a deeper connection to their community and a stronger sense of civic engagement and preparing them to be active and responsible citizens.

Service: Youth worked with volunteers and staff to complete basic needs of dogs while at the shelter such as cleaning kennels, feeding, baths and exercise.

Personal Development: A few youths entered this program with a clear interest in animal science and a desire to pursue careers in animal services. To support their personal development and career goals, the 4-H agent and community outreach coordinator collaborated to tailor the program to meet individual needs. The program provided hands-on opportunities to learn critical animal care skills, such as checking for worms, administering medications to newly admitted animals, performing basic blood work, and implanting tracking chips.

These experiences allowed youth to engage directly with the responsibilities of animal care, fostering personal growth and a stronger sense of civic responsibility. By asking insightful questions and gaining a deeper understanding of the demands of the field, participants developed a sense of accountability not only to the animals they cared for but also to the community they served. This hands-on approach empowered youth to take ownership of their role as active citizens and shaping their future careers while reinforcing the importance of contributing to the well-being of others.

Target Audience: The target audience for The Dog Program includes youth and the broader community. The program aims to provide youth with a deeper understanding of the critical work performed by Animal Services while equipping them with practical skills in dog care and training that they can apply in the future. For the community, the program emphasizes showcasing 4-H youth as advocates for meaningful causes, fostering an appreciation for their efforts, and helping dogs find their forever homes.

Program Content: This program includes a project book that was filled out during the program. During each meeting the youth were trained in dog handling and worked on basic commands. Youth also created “enrichment activities” for dogs. These activities are designed to give dogs something to do. Example: Youth put a blank painting canvas in a Ziplock bag with paint. The project is to be placed on the ground with a snack such as peanut butter on the outside. The dog will lick the bag to make a fun design on the canvas.

Delivery Method: Youth complete a dog project book, 12 weeks of dog handling/ trick training and engaged in a dog contest at the end of the program.

Outcomes:

- The Dog Program successfully graduated out its first cohort of five youth in 2024.
- 4/5 dogs that were in the program have been adopted into loving homes.
- During the dog contest an average of 30 people attended to watch and support.

- 3/5 youth have continued partnership with animal services in a volunteer role outside of the program or have been seeking support in filling a career in this area within the community.
- This program was measured by observation based of three life skill areas such as critical thinking (78%), leadership (81%) and diversity competencies (62%). This observation was made on a self-survey created to answer the same series of questions for the entire program.
- The future of The Dog Program is bright as we are planning to launch it again in the fall of 2025 and possibly host a summer camp as a one-day experience.

Citizenship in 4-H Youth Development Award

“Supplemental Materials”

Pictures from the Program:



After completing the animal welfare class during the first two weeks, youth participated in a dog selection process that emphasized both responsible animal care and civic responsibility. During this process, animal services staff collaborated with participants to find the "perfect match" by evaluating the compatibility between youth and dogs, as well as considering the dogs' past experiences that might affect their suitability for the program. This thorough evaluation not only ensured the success of the training process, but also highlighted the complexities of making ethical decisions in animal care, and fostering a deeper understanding of the responsibilities involved. Once a dog was selected, it was placed on hold for the 12-week program, allowing the youth to build a meaningful bond and train with their canine partner.



Each week, youth collaborated with volunteers to practice basic dog handling and trick training, emphasizing the importance of trust-building as a foundation for successful training outcomes. Establishing trust between the youth and their dogs was not only critical to achieving progress in the training process, but also served as a powerful lesson in patience, empathy, and relationship-building.

This experience reinforced the value of mutual respect and understanding skills that extend beyond dog training and contribute to personal growth and responsible citizenship. By working diligently to form bonds with their dogs, participants learned the significance of investing time and effort into building strong, and positive connections, both within their communities and in their broader civic responsibilities.



This photo captures a proud moment on the final day of the program at the dog contest. The young man on the far end earned first place for Best Overall, recognized for his exceptional efforts and dedication. During the contest, participants were judged on showmanship and the tricks they had successfully taught their dogs throughout the program. This event showcase the hard work, patience, and skills the youth developed while fostering a deeper connection to their community and embracing their role as responsible citizens.

Program Videos:

Week 4: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1049880403312676>

Week 5: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1663725584406414>

Week 6: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/458645953846577>

Week 8: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/8527321180692230>

Week 12: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1581658429105446>

Dog Contest: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/2043489612769754>

Dog Project Stories (Youth)

Brooklyn Hansford

Before this program I never thought much about dogs. Sure, I've had family dogs and have always loved them, but I never thought of them as anything more than a basic family pet. This program has changed that for me, it has taught me a lot about the mind of a dog and why they have certain behaviors. For example, jumping, they don't just do this out of excitement, dogs know that when they do a disruptive action, they can force you to interact with them, even pushing them down or telling them "No" is giving them the attention they want. Another example of what I have learned through this program is the way dogs learn through association, when you are training a dog and give it a treat for doing a trick well the dog associates doing the trick with a reward making it want to do the trick again. I learned a lot from the professionals who volunteered, but I would argue that I learned even more from my project dog, James Patterson. From the beginning he was eager and excited, he seems to enjoy training and learning new tricks. He would do anything for some attention and a treat. He may not execute every command immediately or perfectly on his first try, but he does it with excitement and is always eager to please. James Patterson has presented some signs of having had a hard life before coming to the shelter, he gets afraid if you try to throw anything and he seems wary of men. It breaks my heart to see such a happy dog so fearful. The way the light in his eyes dissipates when we walk back into the kennel after training is one of the saddest things I have ever seen. Seeing this fear and sadness in him is hard, but it has only encouraged me to work even harder to get him adoption ready. In the meantime, I will continue to give him all the love, attention, and treats he deserves until his forever family is able to take him home. I am excited to take these new skills back to my own life and use them with the knowledge that I have learned from professionals and can be confident in what they have taught me. I am so grateful for the experiences I have gotten through this program, and I hope I am able to participate again next year.

Emma Hansford

My story is about my project dog, Chestnut. One of the first things I noticed about Chestnut was that he was very well behaved and smart. But I learned quickly he was also anxious and unfocused. Our first training session went well as far as tricks go, he learned sit almost immediately. But he winced the entire training session. I learned that Chestnut needed to be generalized to me, his surroundings, and the other dogs he was surrounded with. Which makes sense, because he was found as a stray two days before I started working with him. So, everything was new, and overwhelming. But I'm happy to say, after 2 months' worth of training sessions he is confident and focused and is always eager to listen and learn. He has learned sit, a sit stays, touch, rollover, leave it, and heel. Not to mention, he is naturally an incredible walker. Doesn't pull and isn't fazed by other dogs. Now Chestnut has learned a lot, but I think I learned even more. From how the mind of a dog works, to how to give shots, and so much more. I'm so happy I did this program and was paired with the dog I was. With me wanting to be vet tech, this program just helped confirm for me that that's what I want to do. As well as given me a amazing

foundation of knowledge to build off of. I love helping animals, stay or abused dogs, and now I feel like I can confidently approach and train them. It makes me sad to think he was a stray but will make it that much more exciting when he finds his forever home.

Cerenity Butler

When I first met Brenda in the 4-H program, she was shy and didn't really like doing anything. As I started working with her more and more, she started getting more comfortable. Brenda is a sweet girl, she is very energetic, loves specific treats, and loves to be a pet. I worked with her for the past couple of months, once a week. Every day we met we did something different and went over some of the older things she already learned. She will walk next to you on her leash, will sit, stay (for a small part of time if you have her favorite treats in your hand), will even lay down, will bop your hand if you ask, and she is currently learning how to do a figure 8 around your legs. Brenda is around 2-3 years old. This experience in the 4-H program, working with Brenda, has taught me how to be patient with dogs and how to train them. Over the past few months, myself and other 4-H participants have worked with all of our dogs, we have tried switching people with our dogs, teaching them how to behave with other people that aren't us. We also have seen what specific diseases looked like in feces and blood of different dogs, and cats. Overall, I had a wonderful time training Brenda, and spending time with the group I worked with.

Jenny Ta:

I am nearing the end of a 4-H training program with a rescue dog named The Man. He's a mixed breed puppy with tons of personality and a lot of energy. When I first met him, he had a spirit that was just as wild as it was lovable. The training started with the basics: sit, stay, come. The first few sessions were challenging; The Man was stubborn and easily distracted because he had a lot of pent-up energy. He seemed more interested in running around than in listening to me. But I knew this was all part of the process, so I stayed consistent. Each time he even tried to follow a command, I'd give him praise and a treat, showing him that he was on the right track. Over time, The Man began responding better, especially after we let him run his energy out before training sessions. He started to recognize commands and grew more focused. With each session, he became more comfortable and willing to listen. Once we had a good handle on the basics, we moved on to agility exercises. I set up cones for him to weave through and obstacles for him to jump over. At first, he wasn't sure about these new challenges, but with encouragement and treats, he started tackling the agility course easily. The Man is still full of personality, but he is now able to listen, follow instructions, and complete tasks he would've ignored at the start. Watching his transformation was a rewarding experience for me too. Training him reminded me of the importance of persistence, and how these small steps can lead to big changes. Now nearing the end of our training, The Man is ready to find a forever home. He was still the same spirited dog, but now he had the skills and confidence to thrive with a new family. Working with him

through 4-H taught me just as much as it taught him. I am so grateful to be placed with such an amazing partner and excited for him to be placed with his forever family.