by FSD staff in their early beginnings. The
handlers at the PTKCP are able to continue
that and build upon each puppy's ability to
soak up knowledge at this age. Pups at the
Denver facility go on socialization outings
each week with our wonderful FSD volunteers,
which provides varying exposures to stimuli
that help them gain confidence, resilience, and
skills needed to be a service dog one day."

According to PTKCP Supervisor Michele
Wayland, the dog training program is so
popular with offenders that there is a waiting
list. “The PTKCP is an incentive program,
which means that offenders have to be on
their best behavior to even be considered,”
she says. “They need to meet certain
behavioral criteria and have a GED, since they
have to be able to read and comprehend our
training manual and pass written and hands-
on tests. Offenders who want to train FSD
puppies must become master handlers, which
takes a little over one year of progressively
more advanced training. At that point, if the
handler is selected for the program, Darlene
assigns an FSD puppy to them, based on their
skill set and the needs of the puppy. Then
FSD trainers work with our handlers to fine-
tune their training methods and teach them
specific service dog protocols. Throughout
the program, the handlers have total responsibility
for their dog's care, including feeding, potty
breaks, giving medication under supervision,
following the training curriculum, attending
group training sessions, and providing
individualized training. And of course, there’s
always puppy playtime!"

In addition to providing 16 weeks of round-
the-clock care, training, and socialization for
dozens of FSD puppies, the prison program
also prepares our pups for the next step in
their development. Thanks to the PTKCP, our
puppies are crate and house trained, and
know basic obedience cues, before going
home with an FSD volunteer puppy raiser for
the next six to eight months.

The PTKCP brings exceptional value to
both partners, says Wayland. “Training dogs
benefits the handlers above and beyond
learning new skills. The responsibility of
training and caring for a dog puts them in

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touch with their humanity and gives them a sense of normalcy, because if the offenders have been in prison for five, 10, or 20 years, they haven't seen a dog or cat in all that time. They have a feeling of giving back to the community and doing meaningful work, which gives them a sense of pride. Also, there's a very strong healing power in interacting with these dogs that brings our handlers out of their shell, and talking about the dogs can be a bridge to opening up dialogue with family they may be estranged from during their incarceration. We're so grateful to FSD for this longtime partnership that has become a huge component of our rehabilitation program."

Adds Edwards, "An organization of FSD's size could never provide the same level of attention, care, and training to so many puppies at one time as we can achieve through our partnership with the PTKCP. With nearly 60 puppies completing the prison program in 2019 and even more expected to do so this year, we have no doubt that we'll be sending puppies to prison on their way to changing lives for a long, long time."

*Many thanks to Principle Business Enterprises, Inc. for their many years of generous support of this vital program.*

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