

# **PENDLETON Downward dog barks inside prison walls**

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Yogi Kamini Desai talks about the practice of yoga with prison inmates at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution on Friday in Pendleton.

Posted: Saturday, October 1, 2011 3:25 am

By KATHY ANEY  
East Oregonian East Oregonian

The five men in pretzel-like poses bobbed only slightly as they fought gravity.

Their yoga instructor urged them to “find your edge,” “relax in the midst of the intensity” and “focus on breathing.” Downward dog, warrior, sun salutation, grasshopper, cat and camel — the poses melded one to another.

The scene was one from any yoga studio in America, except with one key difference. These yoga students, wearing identical navy blue T-shirts with the words Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, would return to their prison cells after class. Instead of the aroma of patchouli and relaxing Eastern music, the discordant sounds of sliding metal doors slamming shut pierced the calm every few minutes. Voices echoed along tiled outer hallways. Razorwire glinted in the sun outside the barred windows.

Yoga teacher Kamini Desai didn't appear to notice the chaos and neither did the five men on yoga mats.

“Stay connected to the sound of your own breath,” she instructed them. “Increase your capacity to stay relaxed.”

Desai, who lives in Phoenix, took time out from leading more traditional students at this weekend's Yoga Round-Up. This is her first trek inside prison walls.

She dialed up the intensity, directing the men to shift their hips downward until they appeared to be sitting in invisible chairs. The men struggle to relax around the discomfort, coaxing long, full breaths.

Desai demonstrated, the full sleeves of her gauzy maroon shirt floating out as she moved her arms, soft material camouflaging core muscles toned from years of yoga.

The five inmates are part of the prison's Enrichment Project. The idea, said project director Brigitte Amesbury, is helping inmates learn healthy ways to use their leisure time when they are released from prison. It's one of the risk factors for recidivism, Amesbury said.

“Some of these guys have never been taught what to do with their free time. They may have grown up sitting around watching TV, drinking and partying, causing mischief with their friend,” she said. “It leads them down the wrong path.”

Once they comprehend there is a smorgasbord of fascinating avenues available, lives can change.

“They realize there's a whole world out there,” Amesbury said.

Enrichment events have included a symphony concert, cowboy poetry, speakers (recently an Alaska fishing guide spoke), travelogues and even an American Idol-esque talent competition.

Yoga has the added bonus of helping the men deal with the daily stress of living in a prison. An instructor guides them every two weeks. One of the inmates who gave his name only as Daniel said he does yoga poses in his cell each morning to cut stress and stretch his back.

“If I don’t do it,” he said, “I’m miserable.”

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## Free on the Inside: TRCI inmates turn to Alcoholics Anonymous

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**Jennifer Colton The Hermiston Herald |**

Moments after the announcement faded from the speaker, a door opened.

One man shuffled in silently, head down and a shy smile; another entered with a nod, a book clutched tightly in hand. Seconds passed, the door opened again and another man entered the room; another followed quickly and greeted everyone in the room with high-fives and handshakes.

Their personalities and appearances varied, but each bore a level of anonymity through his uniform: blue jeans, tan belt, button-down denim shirt or dark blue tee, each stamped with the neon-orange logo of the Oregon Department of Corrections.

Past skin colors and tattoos, shaved heads or dreadlocks, young or old, each man is the same, an inmate — and each also has something else in common.

“My name is Tommy, and I am an alcoholic.”

Gathered in a circle, the 11 men are part of "Free on the Inside," one of two weekly Alcoholics Anonymous groups at Two Rivers Correctional Institution. Together with a team of three volunteers, they meet once a week to help each other overcome their addictions.

"If we can just save one, that's all it takes," said Michael, the inmate with the copy of his AA book in hand. "That's what the American story is really all about, changing your life and making your family proud."

AA is a worldwide fellowship of men and women who help each other to stay sober, offering help to anyone who has a drinking problem and wants to do something about it. Since they are all alcoholics themselves, they share a special understanding. They know what the illness feels like — and they have learned how to deal with it in AA.

"The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop drinking," Brian, a volunteer, said. "Unlike a lot of organizations, the most important person in the room is the newcomer — the guy coming in for his first meeting."

Started in 1935 by a New York stockbroker and an Ohio surgeon who had both become "hopeless drunks," Alcoholics Anonymous follows 12 steps — from admitting to being powerless over alcohol to having a spiritual awakening — and 12 traditions, including the only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Although AA does not keep a list of members, the organization estimates total membership at more than 2 million.

"There are no dues, you don't have to admit you're an alcoholic, you don't have to believe in someone else's concept of God," Brian said. "You'll eventually bump into the steps on that, but we're not going to force you to believe in God."

Instead, the group encourages members to believe in a power greater than the individual, whether that means a higher power or simply the group of sober people in AA. The true power of AA, Brian said, is the ability of the group to help each other succeed. When alcoholics leave the program and stop reaching out, they often relapse and turn to alcohol.

"I've been in and out of recovery several times," Bryan, an inmate, said during the meeting. "I let my life fall apart this time, I stopped reaching out, stopped working the steps, I stopped caring about Bryan. I thought the only person I was hurting was myself, but I wasn't. I'll never see my parents again. They're not in good health, and they can't travel to visit. By the time I get out, they'll be gone. I can be surrounded by 7,500 men and still feel lonely."

### **Bridging the gap**

In the sea of denim, the volunteers' colored shirts and khaki pants stand out, but once they leave the prison campus, they blend back into society, back into anonymity, to cope with a disease on the outside.

Brian has volunteered with the AA group at TRCI for two years this month. His fellow volunteers, Dave and Gary, have been with the program a little more than two years, and each is a member of AA.

AA members say they are alcoholics, even when they have not had a drink for many years. According to AA beliefs, people cannot become "former alcoholics" but rather become "recovered alcoholics."

Although each of the volunteers has struggled with alcoholism in the past, the program has helped them overcome it.

"We can do all sorts of things people say alcoholics can't do," Dave said. "I have a six pack of beer, wine in the fridge for when my in-laws come by. It doesn't bother me. I have no desire to drink."

Alcoholics Anonymous treats alcoholism as an illness. Because AA members know what the illness feels like, they can help other understand how to recover, even through relapses and constant temptation. Gary has 34 years of sobriety; Dave has been sober nine years; Brian had his last relapse in 2005 and joined AA in January 2006.

"That word can mean so many different things," Brian said. "I knew in my mind that an alcoholic was someone who shouldn't drink alcohol. I didn't want to call myself an alcoholic because of what it meant, but the overwhelming feature of alcoholism is the inability to stop drinking by themselves. They'll continue to do it, even after all the negatives, because that feeling is so dear to them."

Groups meet regularly at seven locations in Umatilla County alone. At the AA Fellowship Hall in Hermiston, 680 Harper Road, groups meet twice a day, 365 days a year.

"Holidays are tough for some people, so those days are even more important," Brian said. "Inside the institution or outside, AA is important because alcoholics cannot stop drinking by themselves. They have to be in a group to help them overcome the alcohol. They need the support of a social group. A lot of alcoholics don't socialize well. They tend to be isolated, and alcoholism thrives in isolation. When an alcoholic stops socializing, that's when you have to worry."

At TRCI, the inmates also face the challenge of not being able to socialize with group members outside of the meetings. The volunteers said that isolation makes the meetings even more important and stressed they do not lead the group.

"They run it, we just participate in it," Dave said. "We're not leaders, we're equals."

Although the three men give up control of the meetings, their presence plays an important role in keeping AA at TRCI because the institution requires at least one volunteer on hand to facilitate the meetings. With three dedicated participants, TRCI offers two AA groups for inmates in the main facility. With more help, they could facilitate a group in TRCI's minimum-security facility.

"It's not something that everybody in AA feels comfortable doing," Brian said. "If I didn't think it would make a difference in their lives, I wouldn't go out there for five seconds, but it does. I know it made a difference to me."

## **One day at a time**

In the classroom, each member, inmate and volunteer gives 100 percent of his attention to each speaker. In the near silence, words echo off the concrete walls, and the ticking of the lock, the turning of a page, is loud. They encourage each other, talk about faith and temptation. They share stories of their lives, families, mistakes.

Bryan had his first experience with AA five days after he bailed himself out of jail. For six weeks, he attended every meeting, the first person to arrive and the last to leave, and AA helped him stay sober until he returned to court.

"I told them I'd see them next Wednesday, but I never made it back," he said. "There's not a lot to do in the place, and every Thursday at 7:30 I get excited to come down here because everyone is so real, and they understand they can't do it on their own. I'll stay with you guys every week until I get out. Then I'll go back to that group at the Foursquare Church. I'll never leave AA."

For one member, Yatta, the evening marked a special occasion.

"Today, I turn a half a century, my boy turns 24, and I celebrate my 13th (sober) birthday," he said. "With a clear mind, you can see things differently. I've done a lot of reflection today."

The group members celebrate both physical birthdays and the anniversary of their sobriety. Yatta, who began attending AA meetings in the early 1990s, received a 13-year coin during that meeting, a memento he can carry with him, in prison and out, to remember his years of sobriety and his commitment to AA.

"I take it one day at a time," he said. "It's a cliché, but once you really understand it, it works."

Conversation continued, and on his turn to speak, another inmate, Steven, told the group he also has a physical birthday coming soon.

"At first I was excited. I made it to 22, and I used to think I wouldn't make it to 16," he said. "I only have a year until I get out, but I feel safer in here. I think about getting out, and I don't know what I'm going to do. I could get right back into what I was before. I could get shot again. I know I'm not who I was, and it's because of you guys, because of this group."

Yatta offered Steven words of encouragement.

"You'll make it. You just keep faith and go one day at a time," he said. "No matter what, don't give up. I got a good chance next year I'm going home after 24 years. I'm proof that it works. Take it one day at a time."

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# Forest Grove fire crews rescue prison inmate injured in Tillamook State Forest

*Published: Wednesday, October 12, 2011, 5:20 PM Updated: Wednesday, October 12, 2011, 6:06 PM*

By **Rebecca Woolington, The Oregonian**

A **South Fork Forest Camp** prison inmate was transported to a local hospital after suffering a back injury while working with an inmate crew in the **Tillamook State Forest, Forest Grove Fire & Rescue** reported.

Fire crews worked for more than four hours to rescue the inmate, who was working to repair hiking trails near the Gales Creek Campground when a log broke free above the crew and began to roll toward them, said Division Chief Dave Nemeyer, a **Forest Grove** fire spokesman. The inmate, who was not identified, reportedly jumped out of the log's way, fell to the ground and landed on a stump.

He suffered a back injury and could not move, Nemeyer said. He was transported via ambulance to the trauma center at **Legacy Emanuel Medical Center** in **Portland**.

Nemeyer said firefighters hiked for more than an hour to get to the inmate. Crews used a rope-rescue system to raise the inmate the last 100 yards out of the canyon to the waiting ambulance. The inmate work crew and **Oregon Department of Forestry** employees assisted firefighters during the rope rescue.



# Communication class for prisoners

## Deer Ridge inmates learn nonviolent strategies

By **Duffie Taylor** / *The Bulletin*

Published: October 17, 2011 4:00AM PST

MADRAS — It's like a devil sits on one shoulder and an angel sits on the other.

That's how inmate Benjamin Williams described his conflicting emotions one night last week to four fellow inmates and instructor Bryn Hazell in a nonviolent communications class at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution.

Williams and the others have taken the eight-week course at the Madras institution and followed it up with a four-week practice session in which they discussed situations they have faced and worked on skills they have learned.

Now that both are over, they still meet with Hazell for an hour on Monday nights for more practice and therapy.

This past week the class discussion revolved around Williams, who said he was serving time for stabbing two people.

Williams said he recently apologized to his victims, but didn't receive a positive response.

The group discussed how Williams should deal with his feelings of rejection and what his coping strategy will be in the future.

“I took responsibility in paying for what I've done,” Williams said. “I put myself out there and wanted some connection. I wanted some response and got nothing.”

Williams said his natural reaction to what had happened would be “to freak out” and explode with anger.

But now, he's trying to address the problem through the communication strategies he's learned from Hazell.

“If my needs aren't being met, it kind of brews inside of me. I still find myself wanting to resort back to the way I've always dealt with things,” Williams said.

“How's that working out for you?” Hazell asked Williams.

Williams smiled.

“I thought that it was working fine until I took this class. Now I feel the need to talk through things instead of just react.”

Originally developed by American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg in the 1960s, the communication process helps people meet their needs through self-examination, cooperation and

empathy rather than violence, Hazell said. Marshall is the founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communication, an international nonprofit that teaches the communication style he developed.

Hazell is president of the board for the Center for Compassionate Living, a nonprofit in Bend that espouses the Rosenberg model, which she has taught and studied for 11 years. Currently, she teaches four classes a week at the center and volunteers to teach the course at the prison two or three times a year.

Hazell has been teaching nonviolent communication courses to inmates since January of this year, when Cody Yeager, the director of education at Deer Ridge, asked her if she would be interested in teaching a course.

Yeager is a Central Oregon Community College employee who oversees a variety of educational courses at the prison through a contract the school has with the Oregon Department of Corrections.

In addition to the nonviolent communications course, COCC also offers GED courses, creative writing workshops and welding classes to inmates.

Those who take Hazell's class do so voluntarily. All inmates serving time at Deer Ridge, which currently operates only a minimum-security facility, are released within four years, said Hazell, so many taking the course are trying to ensure a healthy transition back into society.

Hazell said her work with inmates over many months has allowed her to detect positive change.

“Being together for a long time, I get a sense that they understand, that they're changing their way of thinking and working through things,” Hazell said. “When people come up to you afterwards and say thank you, the course changed their lives — it's a pretty powerful thing.”

Thelonius Bartlett, of Beaverton, plans to leave prison in six months. Bartlett pleaded guilty earlier this year to one count of second-degree sex abuse and one count of delivering marijuana to a minor. He said the course has taught him to reconnect with feelings he had brushed aside for years and will help him as he transitions back into society.

“The course taught me to be open and made it easier to connect with people. This has helped remind me of feelings and things I had lost.”

Hazell said Bartlett is just one example, but she has many more.

“One guy came up to me and showed a picture of his daughter, who'd been placed in foster care. He said that because of this class he had taken the courageous step to reach out and had restarted his relationship with her. There are quite a few stories like that, actually.”

[dtaylor@bendbulletin.com](mailto:dtaylor@bendbulletin.com)

# Programs helps inmates learn to train pooches

Written by Terri Harber December 21, 2011 10:07 am

By **TERRI HARBER**



A program at Baker City's Powder River Correctional Facility helps inmates learn to train homeless dogs.

The Powder Pals Program officially began in February 2011. Since then, nearly a dozen rescued dogs have been trained by inmates at the minimum-security prison. Several of the dogs now live in permanent homes.

"We've really taken some steps forward," said Dick Haines, president of New Hope for Eastern Oregon Animals, the group that helped create the program.

Powder Pals will expand its training activities to a nearby commercial building purchased recently by New Hope. This location also will serve as an education center for the public. Overall, it will be a place with a focus on animal care and training, Haines said.

The animal rescue group also is seeking to negotiate a lease for 3½ acres next to the future education center to further expand Powder Pals. That property is owned by the Oregon Department of Corrections.

New Hope recently purchased 2.4 acres across the street from the prison as well. The existing structures will be torn down and an animal shelter will be built there.

All three sites are west across 13th Street from the prison, near the intersection of K and 13th streets. Haines said donations from the Leo Brookshier Trust and Best Friends of Baker Inc. made the two real estate acquisitions possible.

An area veterinarian is under contract with the city to treat and board stray dogs. The facility can hold a dog for just five days, after which time the animal could be put down. Clinic employees and others work hard to find places for the dogs so the procedure is avoided and no dogs are euthanized, Haines said.

Officials from the city and county look forward to New Hope's shelter opening because the city's contractor doesn't have unlimited space.

"It's something that will benefit pets and pet owners," said Fred Warner Jr., Baker County Commission chairman. "I'm very excited about it."

He also characterized it as a "win-win" situation.

City Manager Mike Kee talked about the shelter plan during a recent City Council meeting. Elected officials and city employees know that "a good, humane way of dealing with abandoned animals is needed," he said.

What isn't known is what the city's level of involvement with the shelter might be, Kee also said.

The training center won't accept dogs from the public. But New Hope expects there will be more than enough activity and demand to keep everyone involved busy, Haines said.

### **Dual purpose**

"Fifty percent of why we do this is to make a better future for the animals," Haines said about the Powder Pals program. "And the other fifty percent of why we do this is to make a better future for the inmates."

It took about two years to get the program started. Haines credits many people, including Ken Neff, the operations manager at the prison.

Neff said he wanted to see Powder Pals progress slowly and steadily to ensure that it would indeed enrich the lives of inmates while saving the lives of dogs — and do that for a long time to come.

Brookshier and Best Friends of Baker Inc. also were among those instrumental in getting the program up and running.

Neff and Haines pointed out that having dogs at the prison has changed the atmosphere there in a positive way.

And it's helping the prison system "reinstall productive citizens" throughout the state, Neff said.

Powder Pals helps inmates develop patience and a variety of job skills they can offer to potential employers after they are released. Inmate-trainers spend virtually all of their waking hours with the dogs. Their days start at 6:45 a.m. and end at 9 p.m.

There is active training as well as time spent just being around the dogs. When the inmates aren't trying to teach the dogs a specific skill, they are still providing the dogs with instruction and picking up knowledge — about the dog they are handling and dogs in general.

Playing with the dogs, feeding them, cleaning up after them or simply hanging around with them benefits the dog and the handler, said Jeanette Stewart, an animal behaviorist who volunteers to work with the inmates two to three days a week.

Stewart said she relishes her role in the program and how it affects the dogs and the inmate-handlers.

“I knew it was going to be rewarding, but I didn’t know it was going to be this rewarding,” she said.

Compared with inmates, most dog owners don’t have the time to be as vigilant in watching their dogs because they have jobs and errands that take them away from their pets.

One former Powder River inmate who participated in Powder Pals became a master trainer-handler and he now works for the Humane Society in another part of the state, said Donna Lowry, inmate work program coordinator at the prison.

Inmates who do well might also find work at shelters, zoos, kennels, veterinary offices and animal day-care centers, she said.

Not every inmate is cut out to participate, but many who didn’t believe they could do it have been successful teaching the dogs. Stewart said that inmates who never had pets are encouraged to sign up.

This is because she learned that dog handling isn’t necessarily a dog business but “a people business,” she said.

### **What’s happening now**

Two dogs are currently in the training program at the prison.

Beau, a year-old pit bull mix, had been at the prison for about three weeks and appears well-acclimated. He enjoys attention and loves to play out in a small fenced area that resembles a small dog park.

Beau already sits, shake hands and can do a high-four (or a high-five if he were a person). Beau even sits patiently as his trainer reaches for a doorknob to open a door — a major accomplishment for most dogs and their trainers.

Bear, an adult border collie mix, had just arrived the day before. Bear’s previous owner left him tied up and didn’t spend a lot of time with him. He’s just beginning to learn how to react to positive reinforcement, such as receiving treats for good behavior.

Bear loves being around people.

He doesn’t, however, like the flash from a camera. Bear quickly figured out when a picture was about to be taken and would prepare himself by closing his eyes or turning his head.

Both Bear and Beau have mostly black fur. Black dogs are more difficult to place in adoptive homes, Stewart and Haines said.

It might be that after black dogs shed their fur it's more visible around the house, or because some people fear black dogs as much as black cats. Many animal experts also point out that black dogs are harder to see in poorly lighted shelters than those with lighter colored fur. Black dogs can simply end up not being noticed.

The prison has ample space now for three dogs to be trained simultaneously. Haines would like to see up to six dogs trained on the prison grounds.

Dogs that are dominant or overly aggressive aren't included in the program. Most rescue dogs are trainable even though a significant number of them have been abused or neglected, Stewart and Haines said.

Several dogs have completed training and need permanent homes. Adoption applications are available at [www.newhopeforanimals.org/adoption-application](http://www.newhopeforanimals.org/adoption-application)

Make donations to the Powder Pals program or for the shelter through New Hope for Eastern Oregon Animals, [www.newhopeforanimals.org](http://www.newhopeforanimals.org) or P.O. Box 146, Baker City, OR 97814