

# PRISON HORSE TRAINING PROGRAMS

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## The Incomplete Success Story

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Modern prison or inmate horse training programs have achieved a number of positive results for horses, adopters, inmates and the BLM wild horse and burro program. Most programs employ contemporary low resistance gentling and training approaches and most programs require trainers to develop real empathy with their animals in order for the inmate trainers to remain in the program.

The benefits to the horses are easy to define. These animals are helped through the adjustment from wild behavior to being comfortable in the human environment. Being gentled and desensitized in a professionally supervised environment typically reduces adjustment stress and risk to the horses.

The benefits to BLM are easy to define. Horses that might otherwise be kept in holding facilities for years are made available to adopters who might not possess the skill set necessary to successfully gentle and train horses on their own.

The benefits to adopters are easy to define. They will be acquiring animals that have demonstrated the ability to safely make the transition into private care and the animals will have a sound basic foundation from which the adopters can develop their horses further.

The benefits to the inmate trainers are easy to define. They learn specific skills, responsibility, empathy, teamwork, and other traits that should help keep them from returning to behaviors that resulted in their incarceration.

The missing link in this scenario occurs when inmates get paroled from the prison program.

Most parole criteria require inmates to be employed in full time jobs. Part time and cash jobs are discouraged and in some instances are not allowed since these kinds of activities are often associated with patterns that contribute to repeat offenses. Many of these inmate trainers get paroled with a specialized and beneficial skill set - the ability to gentle, train, "doctor" and trim horses. However since those activities typically involve part time and "cash" jobs, parolees typically end up working in unrelated jobs such as in warehouses or as laborers. Due to these restrictions many inmates lose the skills they have developed, and in many instances have come to love.

BLM, the horses and adopters lose valuable resources that the taxpayers have paid to develop.

Inmate trainers trimming a wild horse's hooves on a "tilt table"



Any initiative to improve adoption rates for wild horses needs to include consideration for establishing a school of horse training where experienced inmate trainers can refine their horse gentling and training skills while at the same time developing successful life skills and attitudes. They could earn salaries by performing activities that reduce the burden on BLM and prepare additional horses for placement with adopters. At the same time they can develop money management and trainer - client skills.



As envisioned, inmate participants should be recommended by their respective inmate training program directors and possess specific minimum skills and knowledge. In most states enrollment in a horse trainer certification program would also require approval by an inmate's parole officer.

The certification program should be based on a syllabus of specific skills and inmate participants should demonstrate proficiency in all required skills at the end of the program in order to receive certification.

While income derived the placement of horses and contract training and services to private adopters would not likely cover the program's expenses, it is possible that this type of program could function under a public - private partnership with a portion of the operating costs being covered by grant funds.



The inmate trainers represented in these photos are from the Nevada Department of Corrections Inmate Horse Training Program conducted at the Stewart Conservation Camp in Carson City under the direction of Hank Curry.