

PETS & PEOPLE

Pets Help Troubled Teens

(NAPSA)—Taking care of a pet could give some children a new leash on life.

A recent study found that when paired with a multidisciplinary approach to treatment, caring for an animal improved the behavior and social interactions of severely troubled youth in a residential treatment setting.



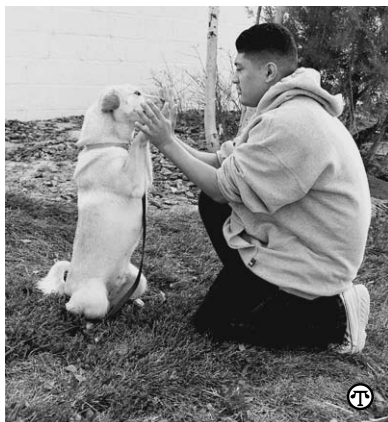
According to the study, the youth developed significant attachment with the dogs they trained. Teens also indicated they felt responsible

for their dogs, a characteristic of growing maturity, doctors say. In addition, the study found that children who cared for pets had changes in their levels of:

- Positive social interactions
- Appropriate self-disclosure
- Empathetic feelings.

"This research documents what we have witnessed firsthand—that caring for animals can help a person develop a healthier outlook on life," explains Chuck Thompson, president of CBR YouthConnect (CBRYC).

Thompson's organization is a national residential psychiatric and educational facility for moderately to severely troubled youth ages 10 to 21. The group ran the study (with a grant from The Iams Company) to evaluate its "New Leash On Life" program. The program, which pairs teens with abused dogs, has enrolled more than 220 boys and 230



A national program uses pets to help troubled teens turn their lives around.

dogs—including 16-year-old C.J. and his miniature poodle Noah.

Thompson says caring for Noah helped C.J. become more responsible and develop the anger-management and social skills needed to return to his family. After 10 weeks in the program, Noah—like all New Leash On Life dogs—was placed in an adoptive home.

While many have speculated that caring for pets is beneficial therapy for people with behavioral or psychological disorders, the study was among the first to directly link animal-assisted therapy with improved behavior in adolescent residential treatment facilities.

To learn more about the program or to see the adopted dogs that have completed the program, visit www.cbryouthconnect.org. You can also see the dogs at www.petfinder.com.