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South Korean students visit Oregon

By C.J. Drake, OYA Communications
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A dog rehabilitation program managed by the Oregon Youth Authority recently provided an enlightening experience for a team of South Korean college students.

Four elite students from Yonsei University in Seoul toured MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn in August to learn how at-risk youth in the Project POOCH program prepare abandoned dogs for adoption.

The students were in the middle of a two-week tour of the Pacific Northwest and New York sponsored by LG Electronics, a global company headquartered in Seoul. They were chosen for LG's Global Challenger program, which offers academically gifted college students opportunities to visit overseas government agencies, corporations and social organizations.

The students intend to apply lessons learned from their visit to improve conditions for neglected pets back home.

"Our country could benefit from greater awareness of spaying and neutering options for pets and the need for more volunteers at animal shelters," said Yuree Ko, 22, over lunch with her three classmates in the MacLaren cafe.

Joan Dalton, the founder of Project POOCH, helped arrange the visit.

"The students gave the youth at Project POOCH an opportunity to practice their social skills as well as an opportunity to demonstrate their dog training success," said Dalton.

She added that visiting Project POOCH allowed the students to observe how at-risk youth train and treat dogs with compassion, which teaches the youth about themselves in addition to job skills. The students watched as youth guided two dogs through successful completion of their "Canine Good Citizen" test, making them eligible for adoption.

South Korean college students pose with Chelsea, a Project POOCH dog. Left to right: Woo Jeong Kim, Yuree Ko, Hyuanjae Roo and Hyung Min Kim.

The Korean students were deeply impressed by what they saw.

"It was beyond our expectations," said Woo Jeong Kim, 23. "We were amazed at how well the youth communicated with the dogs."

The students want to introduce the approaches they observed at Project POOCH to South Korea's juvenile justice agency, to benefit both at-risk youth and animals.

"We are trying to improve the conditions of shelter animals and at-risk youth in South Korea," said Hyuanjae Roo, 24. "This visit gave us a lot of good ideas."

To learn more about Project POOCH, visit www.pooch.org