

Oregon Youth Authority
NEWS RELEASE

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**“Pooch” program at Woodburn youth correctional facility
gets support in national voting**

A popular program in which incarcerated youth train and care for dogs that otherwise might be euthanized is receiving national attention – and votes – on a commercial Web site asking online voters to identify a “most deserving” project committed to pet rescue, rehabilitation and adoption.

One of the 64 organizations initially selected to compete – now winnowed to 16 in weekly voting eliminations – is 15-year-old Project POOCH at the Oregon Youth Authority’s MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn. It has up to 16 dogs available for adoption at any given time.

The MacLaren program is competing for votes in the “Mutt Madness Awards Program” sponsored by author and television personality Rachel Ray, who also markets a line of dog food. More information about the competition and voting is at <http://www.pooch.org/> on the Web site of Project POOCH, a Lake Oswego-based nonprofit organization that OYA supports with its program at MacLaren.

In the Mutt Madness competition, Project POOCH (for Positive Opportunities, Obvious Change with Hounds) describes part of the program’s benefit as “the healing bond between unwanted dogs and young men who know what it’s like to be unwelcome or even feared in a community.” The program has been shown to positively affect youth in areas such as behavior, social skills, self-confidence and leadership abilities.

Youth not only train and care for the dogs, but also record their medical and other records, produce brochures and Web material about adoptable dogs, and show adoptable dogs to members of the public.

Winners in the online voting will receive \$1,000 for each week they remain in the running, with the final winner announced in early December receiving \$50,000. The MacLaren project, which involves 12-16 youth at any given time, uses financial contributions for dog food and pet-care expenses, wages to youth that go to restitution, and facility upgrades including a desired conversion of an existing greenhouse into a training facility.

Project POOCH is one of several programs that help the Oregon Youth Authority meet its charge of protecting the public and reducing crime by holding youthful offenders accountable and providing opportunities for reformation in safe environments. OYA has

custody of approximately 925 youthful offenders in correctional and transition facilities, and supervises approximately 1,100 youth on parole and probation.

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