

# Therapeutic Wildlife Education for High-Risk Juvenile Raccoons



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# Therapeutic Wildlife Education for High-Risk Juveniles

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- Public wildlife education is very important to assist individuals to appreciate and respect their environment. In the juvenile justice system utilization of animal interaction is used with livestock and domestic animals with positive results. Offenders may develop desensitization to animals they would normally interact with. Presenting animals they have seen in the wild but have no knowledge of can stimulate a unique interest in children that come from drug addicted and dysfunctional families and are now having to navigate the justice system. Unique wildlife education and interactions can assist the high risk juvenile cope.

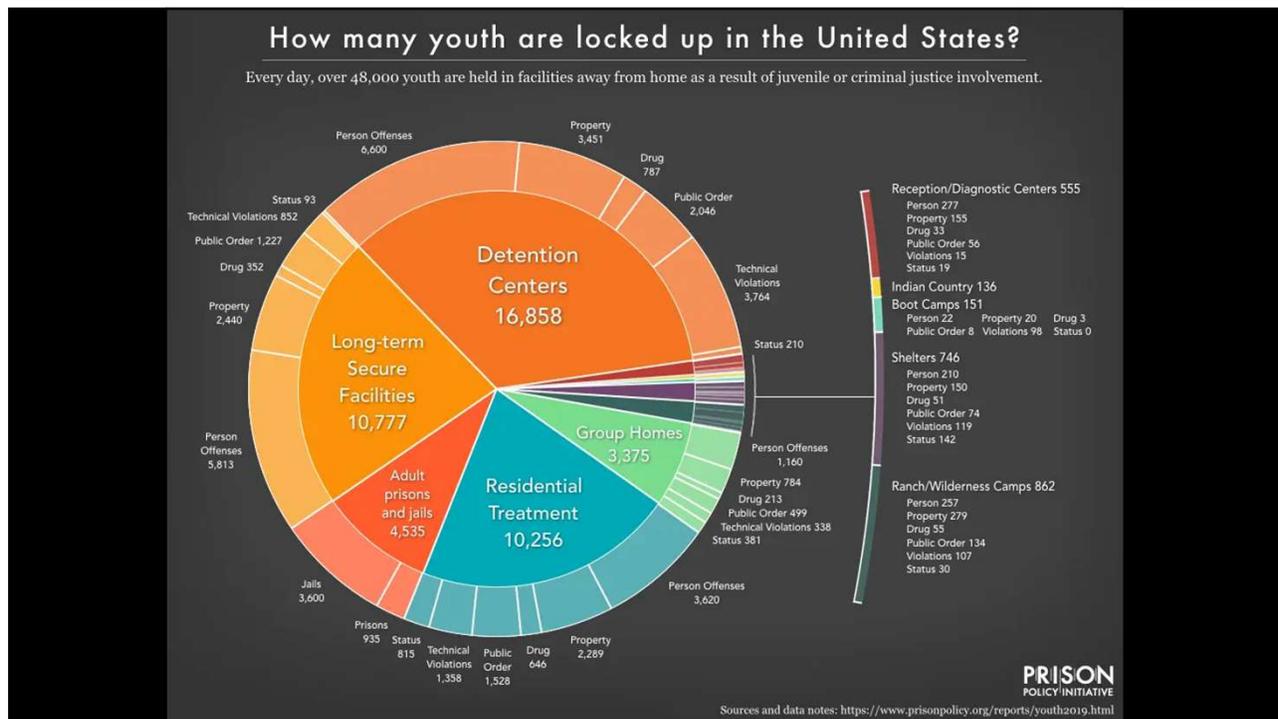
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## What is a High-Risk Juvenile?



People under the age of 21yrs that are low-income, abused or neglected, suffering from emotional, behavioral or mental illnesses, and may reside in places other than their homes or involved in the juvenile justice system.

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## Other High-Risk Juveniles

- **Low Income**
- **Special Needs – Autistic, blind, deaf**
- **Mentally Ill – PTSD**
- **Abused and Neglected**
- **Behavior Disturbances**
- **Suffer from severe Emotional Disturbances**

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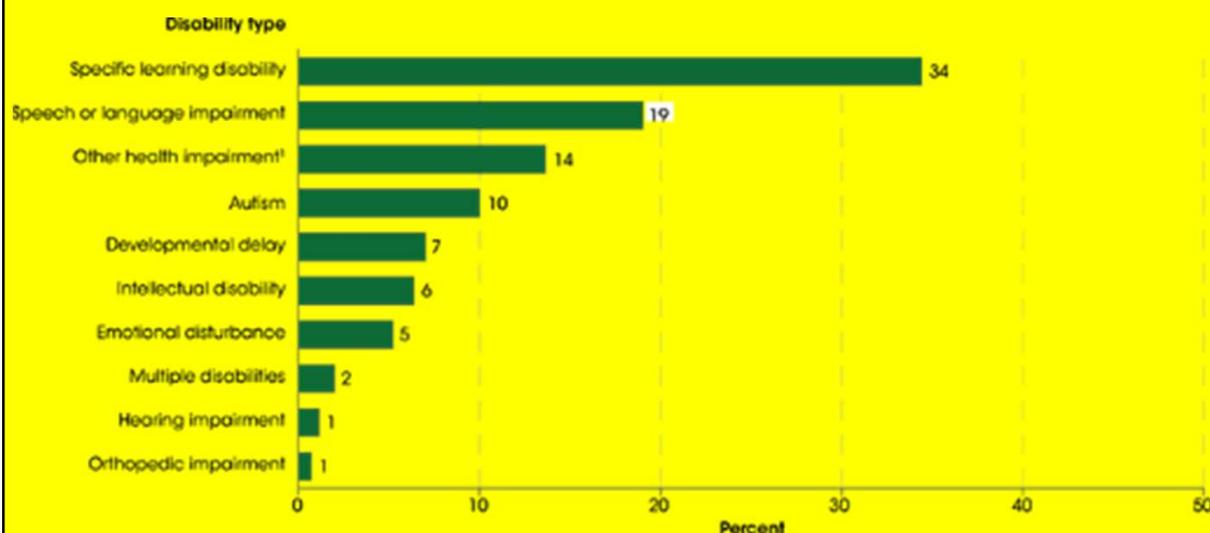
## PUBLIC SCHOOLS

***In 2017–18, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 7.0 million, or 14 percent of all public school students. Among students receiving special education services, 34 percent had specific learning disabilities.***

[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgg.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp)

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**65-70%** Between 65 percent and 70 percent of the 2 million children and adolescents arrested each year in the United States have a mental health disorder. <https://www.ncsl.org/documents/cj/jiguidebook-mental.pdf>



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## Why are these children high-risk?

These children are what is referred to as “poly-victimized”- They have been exposed over a prolonged period of time to traumatic events.

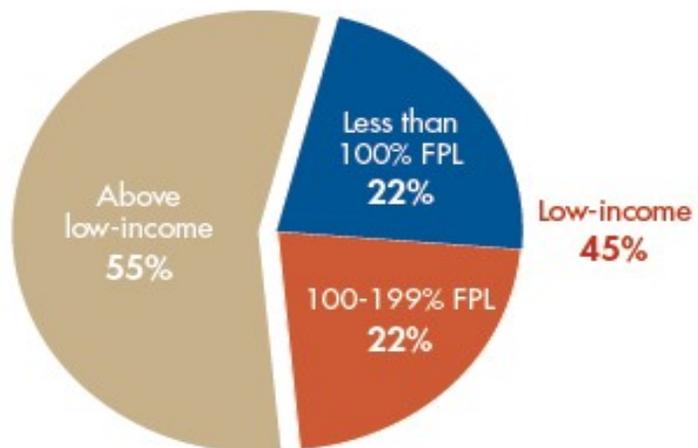
There is also situations in which the child is mentally ill and over time has comorbid issues such as abuse, poverty, and long term exposure to violence.



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### Children by family income, 2011

**National Center for Children in Poverty - There are more than 72 million children under 18 years old in the United States.**  
**45 percent – 32.4 million – live in low-income families.**  
**22 percent – 16.1 million – live in poor families.**



[http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_1074.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_1074.html)

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

© National Center for Children In Poverty (www.nccp.org)  
 Basic Facts About Low-Income Children: Children Under 18 Years, 2011

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## Children Navigating The Juvenile Justice System

**The high-risk child goes into survival mode and will go into automatic pilot to protect themselves and end up making bad decisions without thinking clearly and end up in trouble with law enforcement. This is actually post traumatic survival coping. Much like wildlife, they react and worry about consequences later. They become involved in drug usage, school delinquency, gangs and just about anything they feel will save them from their current situation.**

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## YOU MIGHT ASK, WHY IS ALL THIS INFORMATION IMPORTANT?

**You need to know who your audience is**

**Children are complicated**

**You want to make sure you gear your program to have the highest impact in the brief time you have with these children**



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## HELPING CHILDREN WITH ANIMAL THERAPY

Therapy -  
a treatment that helps someone feel better, grow stronger, etc., especially after an illness

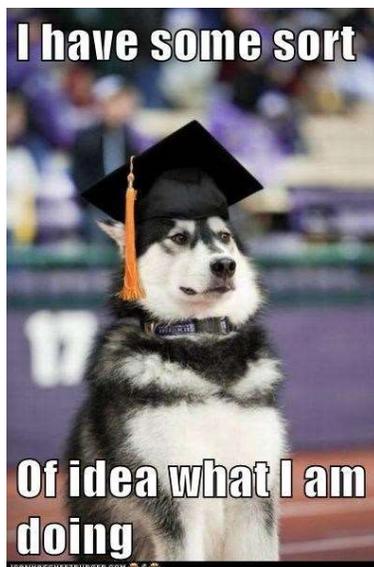
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/therapy>



Various animals are used therapeutically to help children and have been proven to help children feel better

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## What the Heck is a Therapeutic Animal?



What qualifies as a therapeutic animal – any animal species can be considered a therapeutic animal.

They are different from a service animal and do not require any type of certification or training.

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## So how are animals used for children with special needs and mental illnesses?

**There have been programs with autism spectrum disorder, ADHD and PTSD. Horses, dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs and other farm animals.**

**“Findings are generally promising for positive effects associated with equine therapies for autism and canine therapies for childhood trauma.”**

Hoagwood, K. E., Arci, Morrissey, M., & Peth-Pierce, R. (2017) Animal assisted therapies for youth with or at risk for mental problems: A Systematic Review, *Appl Dev. Sci.*, 21(1); 1-13. doi: 10.1080/10888691.2015.113426712

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## ANIMAL THERAPIES FOR CHILDREN RESIDING IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

**A program in New Mexico in which shelter dogs were picked to be paired with incarcerated juveniles and they were to train the dog and provide a story with the dog at the end of training to help it get adopted. Results were very positive.**



Harbolt, T., & Ward, T. H. (2001) Teaming Incarcerated Youth with Shelter Dogs for a Second Chance, *The Animal Humane Association of New Mexico, Inc., and the Youth Diagnostic and Development Center of New Mexico*, (pp.177-182). *Society & Animals* 9:2

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## NATURE BASED THERAPY PROGRAMS

**Also called Wilderness Therapy –  
Juveniles are immersed in nature**



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## What is the point of all these programs?

**Possible outcomes –**

**To create awareness, appreciation and respect of people, animals, wildlife and nature.**

**To learn to be more in tune with the world and know that there is a connection.**

**To relieve stress and help the human feel better.**



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## Southern Wildlife Rehab's Program

SWR has a contract with the Bexar County Juvenile Probation office providing therapeutic wildlife education to juvenile probationers, incarcerated youth and those in transitional housing due to removal from the home for various reasons.

SWR works with the City of San Antonio providing several educational wildlife programs with live animals focusing on low income/Title I schools and high risk juveniles



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## SWR PROGRAM

We utilize possums, tortoises, turtles, skunks, bats, arachnids, iguanas and various other wildlife. No contact is allowed with the Rabies Vector Species.

We present exhibits that can be touched and examined to create an intimacy with animals in nature.

Especially for Special needs kids we try to make sure all exhibits are handable, we use the possum and the tortoises because they can be handled.



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## PROGRAMS FOR JUVENILES IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM



SWR uses arachnids such as a whip scorpion (Vinegaroon) to break the ice then we go from there. Interactions are in small groups to ensure all individuals have access to what is being presented. Go with small and important details. No need to sound like a science class.

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## TOUCHABLE EXHIBITS ARE VERY IMPORTANT



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## WHAT ABOUT RVS IN THESE TYPES OF PROGRAMS?



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Overall, the program should have a personal impact on the juveniles you are speaking to.

Create a personal connection as quickly as possible in the time you are allotted.

Tell the juvenile that the animal is attempting to communicate with them or is pleased with meeting them.

Ask the juvenile what about that animal they like.

Quiz the juvenile about what you just told them and ask them how they would tell someone else about his animal.



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**Have fun with your program.**

**Although your animal ambassadors are very important, you are the most important one in your program.**

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Resources:

Katcher, A. H., Friedmann, E. Beck, A. M., & Lynch, J. J. (1983). Looking, talking and blood pressure; The physiological consequences of interaction with the living environment. In A. H. Katcher & A. M. Beck (Eds), *New Perspectives on our lives with companion animals* (pp.351-359). Philadelphia, PA; University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kidd, A. H., & Kidd, R. M. (1996). Development factors leading to positive attitudes toward wildlife and conservation. *Applied Animal Behavior Science*, 47, 119-125.

Hoagwood, K. E., Arci, Morrissey, M., & Peth-Pierce, R. (2017). Animal assisted therapies for youth with or at risk for mental problems: A Systematic Review, *Appl Dev Sci*, 21(1); 1-13. doi: 10.1080/10888691.2015.113426712

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McNicholas, J., & Collis, G. M., (1995). The end of a relationship; Coping with pet loss. In I. Robinson (Ed), *The Waltham book of human-animal interaction; Benefits and responsibilities of pet-ownership* (pp. 127-143). Oxford; Pergamon.

Seivert, N. P., Cano, A., Casey, R. J., May, D. K., & Johnson, A. (2018), Animal assisted therapy for incarcerated youth: A Randomized Controlled Trial, HHS Public Access, *App Dev Sci*. 22(2); 139-153; 2016 Oct 10, doi: 10.108/10888691.2016.1234935 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6430139/>

Comorbid Psychiatric Disorders in Youth in Juvenile Detention, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2893728/>

Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, Bexar County Juvenile Justice Data Sheet

Trauma Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System, National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, 2016

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