



# RESTART DOGS CIC

## Animal Assisted Intervention in Custodial Settings

*Business Case & Programme Information | 2026*

<b>12</b> Dogs placed with veterans	<b>5+</b> Years delivering in custody	<b>3</b> CPD qualification levels	<b>2024</b> National award winner
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### What is Restart Dogs CIC?

Restart Dogs CIC is an award-winning Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) programme operating within the custodial estate. We are not a short course. We are not a qualification factory. We are a sustained, professionally delivered AAI programme that uses the relationship between people and dogs to drive genuine, measurable rehabilitation, and in doing so, trains assistance dogs for Armed Forces veterans.

We are a Community Interest Company, a social enterprise with a legally protected community purpose. Our assets and surpluses are locked for the benefit of the communities we serve: people in custody, Armed Forces veterans, and the wider public.

The programme has been running since 2019, initially with young offenders and from November 2021 in the adult estate. In 2024 we were honoured to receive the Mirror Pet Award for Inspiration, recognising the transformational impact of our work.

**Restart Dogs is Animal Assisted Intervention, a structured, professionally supervised programme in which the human-animal relationship is the primary therapeutic and educational mechanism. It is not pet therapy, not a reward activity, and not a short course.**

## Accreditation and Professional Standards

Restart Dogs CIC holds Full Membership of Animal Assisted Services International (AASI), Membership Number AAI-F-0064, valid March 2026 to March 2027, in the field of Animal Assisted Services Practice (AASP). AASI is an international coalition of practitioners and organisations working in the field of animal assisted services, and Full Membership demonstrates that our programme meets the professional and ethical standards required for recognised AAI delivery.

Our programme is delivered in accordance with AASI's standards and ethics framework, which governs the welfare of the animals, the qualifications of practitioners, and the quality of the intervention. This is not a self-assessed accreditation, it is externally recognised professional membership that provides assurance to prisons, funders and commissioning bodies.



In addition, the programme's Lead Trainer / Behaviourist is accredited by the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC), the UK's regulatory body for animal trainers and behaviourists, and all education courses are delivered to Ofqual-recognised CPD standards.



## Is Restart Dogs Right for Your Establishment?

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We will be honest with you: Restart Dogs is not the right fit for every prison, and we would rather say so clearly at the outset than waste your time or ours.

### Restart Dogs is ideally suited to establishments where:

- Prisoners are serving longer sentences and will remain in the same establishment for the duration of the programme
- The governor and senior leadership team are genuinely committed to rehabilitation as a long-term investment, not just a KPI
- There is appetite for a programme that produces deep, lasting change in a smaller cohort, rather than high throughput of short, low-level qualifications
- The establishment can provide dedicated physical space and operational support for a sustained programme

We operate in Cat B, Cat C and women's prison establishments and work with a wide range of sentence lengths. However, we are particularly well-suited to working with long-sentence and life-sentence prisoners. People with many years ahead of them often experience a profound loss of hope and purpose that short interventions cannot address. The evidence is clear: the longer a participant spends with us, and with their dog, the deeper and more lasting the change. For those who may not see release for many years, Restart Dogs offers something rare, a sustained, meaningful role, a professional identity, and a reason to invest in themselves today.

### Restart Dogs is not the right fit where:

- The prison primarily needs to demonstrate volume throughput or high qualification completion numbers across a large population
- The population moves frequently between establishments, making sustained handler-dog relationships impossible
- There is no capacity to provide dedicated space, radios, or operational cover
- Governor-level commitment cannot be given or sustained

We say this not to be difficult, but because a poorly suited placement damages the dogs, wastes public money and undermines the evidence base for AAI in prisons. We are protective of our programme and of the animals in our care.

**Quality over quantity. Depth over throughput. Long-term investment over short-term metrics.**

## Our Animal Assisted Intervention Model

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Animal Assisted Intervention is a goal-directed, structured intervention in which the human-animal relationship is central to the therapeutic or educational process. In Restart Dogs, the dog is not a reward or a prop, the dog is the mechanism through which participants learn to regulate their emotions, build relationships, develop responsibility, and understand cause and effect.

You cannot fake it with a dog. If you are dysregulated, anxious, or aggressive, the dog will tell you, not with words, but with behaviour. This creates a unique and powerful environment for self-reflection and genuine behavioural change that no classroom-based programme can replicate.

## Learner Progression, Depth, Not Throughput

Participants join the programme for a minimum of 6 months. Many stay considerably longer, and that is by design, not by accident.

As participants develop their skills and their relationship with the dogs deepens, the most talented and committed learners are offered the opportunity to progress to the roles of Trainer or Head Coach within the programme. This serves three purposes:

- It retains expertise on site, well-trained dogs need consistency of handler, and a constantly rotating cohort undermines both the welfare of the animals and the quality of the assistance dogs we produce
- It provides a meaningful career pathway and professional identity for participants who may never have experienced that before
- It creates a peer mentoring culture within the programme, one of the most powerful drivers of behavioural change

This is a principled and deliberate model. A dog that has changed handlers four times in a year is not a well-trained assistance dog. A participant who has been on the programme for two years and is now coaching others is a transformed person. Those two things are not unrelated.

## What the Research Tells Us About How Restart Dogs Works

In 2024, Angela Keane, an independent MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice researcher at Staffordshire University, supervised by Professor James Treadwell, completed an ethnographic dissertation specifically focused on how Restart Dogs operates as a rehabilitation programme in UK prisons. It is the only academic study of its kind focused specifically on Restart Dogs, and its findings are significant.

The research used unstructured interviews with Restart Dogs staff and drew on PSI 38/2010's four indicators of purposeful activity: social interaction, constructive use of time, interpersonal skills and family ties. The study identified six key features of the programme that underpin its approach to rehabilitation, features that the researcher found go beyond existing rehabilitation models, and may contribute to developing them:

Feature	What it means in practice
<b>Agency</b>	Using the dog as the focus takes the spotlight off the prisoner's own performance. Rehabilitation happens as a by-product, indirectly and without confrontation. Participants reflect on their own emotions through the lens of the dog.
<b>Task-orientated</b>	The programme centres on a meaningful task, training an assistance dog, which makes a real contribution to society. This instils purpose and opens a credible career pathway.

<b>Democratic Leadership</b>	Staff model equality and mutual respect rather than authority. The same non-coercive approach used with the dogs is used with the people. As one staff member put it: 'There's no use in bollocking the men, then telling them not to bollock the dog!'
<b>Autonomy</b>	Prisoners have meaningful control over how they spend their time on the programme. This ownership makes them more likely to take responsibility for their own rehabilitation.
<b>Relationship Focused</b>	The ethos of the programme prioritises the building of genuine, positive relationships, between participants and dogs, between participants and staff, and between participants and their families.
<b>Aspirational vs. Deficit Orientated</b>	The programme focuses on strengths and future possibilities rather than deficits and past failures. This facilitates a genuine shift in self-identity, from prisoner to professional.

## Dogs as Agents, The Mechanism That Makes It Work

One of the most important findings from the research is how the dogs function as agents of self-reflection. Because participants are focused on understanding and modifying the dog's behaviour, they engage in emotional literacy and self-regulation without it feeling like a direct confrontation with their own history. The insight that emerged from the research captures this perfectly:

*"Behind every behaviour is an emotion, behind every emotion, is a need. So if you understand what the need is, you can change the function of the behaviour."*

**Programme staff member, cited in Keane (2024)**

This was evidenced in practice. When a participant was struggling to train his dog one day, staff explored what was happening for him. It emerged that he was stressed about a situation on the wing, and the dog was responding to that. The dog wasn't the problem. He was. This kind of insight, reached through the dog rather than directed at the person, is what makes AAI qualitatively different from any other rehabilitative approach.

## Empathy, Already There, Not Missing

The research makes an important challenge to the standard deficit narrative around prisoners and empathy. The dissertation argues that prisoners are not deficient in empathy, the prison environment simply removes the safe spaces to express it. Restart Dogs creates those spaces.

The most striking illustration of this came when one of the programme dogs left for his placement as an assistance dog. The men who had raised him gathered quietly, formed a silent semicircle around the handler who had worked with him for two years, and stood together as the dog walked away. The staff, standing further back, were in tears. The men held themselves together, held each other's space, and supported their colleague in the way that made sense to them. As the researcher reflected:

*"The setting provided an outlet for the expression of empathy from the men that isn't ordinarily available on the prison wings. Rather than focusing efforts on finding rehabilitative strategies to increase the levels of empathy shown by prisoners, we need to provide environments where it is safe to express it, so they can practise and maintain it."*

**Keane, 2024, MSc Criminology, Staffordshire University**

## **Identity Shift, From Prisoner to Professional**

The research found that the programme facilitated a genuine shift in self-identity. Participants stopped communicating as prisoners and started communicating as dog trainers. When prisoners were given the opportunity to run dog training classes for prison staff in the evenings, the dynamic changed entirely:

*"The dialogue became professional and client orientated rather than prisoner and officer."*

**Programme staff member, cited in Keane (2024)**

## **Family Ties**

The programme gave prisoners something positive and purposeful to share with their families, knowledge, skills and progress they were proud of. This maintained and in some cases rebuilt family relationships that had deteriorated during custody. As one staff member noted:

*"It gives them a role still. The families ask them for dog advice, and they can give it! They're so knowledgeable. It's good that they can still do things for their family."*

**Programme staff member, cited in Keane (2024)**

## **Autonomy and Purpose**

One of the most consistent themes across the research was the impact of having genuine responsibility. In a prison environment where almost every decision is made for you, caring for a living animal that depends entirely on you is profoundly different. A participant in the programme described it directly:

*"Having responsibility and care of a dog has been a big boost. Having that bit of responsibility, which is mainly taken away from you in prison, is a great motivator, not just to behave but to get up in the morning. I look forward to every day."*

**Programme Participant**

## The Wider Evidence Base

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The findings from the Keane (2024) study are supported by a substantial body of international research on prison dog training programmes and animal assisted interventions. Key findings from the literature include:

- Participants demonstrate increased self-control, anger management and patience (Cooke & Farrington, 2016)
- Significant reductions in symptoms of depression and anxiety among participants (Jasperson, 2010)
- Improved self-esteem, self-concept, empathy and self-discipline (Minton et al., 2015)
- Positive changes in attitudes and emotions including increased patience and decreased anger (Britton & Button, 2005)
- A 'healing effect', helping participants manage psychological and emotional problems including depression and PTSD (Cooke & Farrington, 2015)
- The College of Policing's guidance on prison dog training programmes concludes that overall, the evidence suggests this type of intervention has reduced crime

Restart Dogs is one of only two dog training programmes currently operating in UK prisons. It is the only one specifically focused on training assistance dogs for Armed Forces veterans. The evidence base that applies to the model internationally applies directly to what we do, and the Keane (2024) study adds UK-specific, programme-specific evidence for the first time.

*"At a recent visit to HMP Dovegate I witnessed a truly wonderful and innovative programme where prisoners are trained to become fully qualified dog trainers. Would HMG agree to take a look at this scheme as a best practice initiative combining rehabilitative potential and socially valuable outcomes for those in need in society?"*

**Baroness Fox, submitted to the House of Lords following a site visit**

## How We Deliver

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The programme runs Monday to Friday throughout the working week. Content is delivered through visual learning, direct observation and handling of dogs, demonstration, coaching and structured workbooks. Participants keep a daily journal recording training exercises and outcomes, building self-reflection and problem-solving skills alongside their practical competence.

## Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours

Participants gain a comprehensive understanding of animal welfare legislation, the five welfare needs, canine behaviour, and body language, learning theory including classical and operant conditioning, training plan design, anatomy and physiology, enrichment and socialisation. Skills developed include risk assessment, training plan creation, professional communication, independent problem-solving and autonomous decision-making about animal welfare, skills that transfer directly into employment and into life.

The programme actively builds the behaviours that underpin successful rehabilitation and employment: safe working, strong work ethic, responsibility, teamwork, communication, and

professionalism. Participants are expected to conduct themselves as professionals from day one, because they are.

## Eating Together, A Structured AAI Activity with an Evidence Base

A distinctive and intentional element of the programme is that participants and staff eat breakfast together each day. This is not incidental, it is a structured component of the AAI model, grounded in research on the rehabilitative value of shared food experiences in custodial settings.

Commensality, the act of eating and drinking together in a social setting, promotes social integration and engagement in behaviours that contribute to the wellbeing of others (Food Matters, 2024). A meta-ethnographic synthesis of 27 papers found that sharing food in prison settings can reduce anxiety and depression and increase feelings of self-efficacy and resilience, and that prison policy which provides opportunities for sharing food has the potential to improve relationships, increase self-esteem and build the life skills needed for reintegration (Shimshock et al., 2019). In the context of desistance research, shared eating also supports identity change, a critical factor in stopping reoffending.

From a dog training perspective, the shared breakfast simultaneously functions as a structured public access training exercise, replicating a cafe or restaurant environment in which dogs must practise appropriate behaviour with social distractions, movement and noise.

This activity must be accommodated in the physical and regime requirements for the programme. It is evidenced practice, not an optional extra.

## Programme Cohort Structure

The programme accommodates up to 10 prisoners in total at any one time, structured across two distinct roles:

Role	Number	Description
<b>Active Dog Handlers</b>	Up to 8	Prisoners actively training a dog. Numbers vary depending on programme stage, graduation of previous dogs and availability of new puppies. Each handler works with one dog from puppyhood.
<b>Programme Mentors / Orderlies</b>	2	Experienced prisoners who have progressed through the programme. They support the environment (programme orderly duties, cleaning, preparation), provide peer mentoring to newer learners, and cover dog handling when a primary handler is absent. This role is a deliberate part of the progression pathway, not a support role.
<b>Total cohort</b>	Up to 10	The full programme group at any one time.

The number of active dog handlers at any given time will vary depending on the programme stage, the graduation of dogs to their veteran placements, and the availability of new puppies entering the programme. This natural ebb and flow is part of the programme cycle, it is not a gap in provision, it is the programme working as intended.

The Programme Mentor / Orderly role is not a lesser role. It is a progression, and for many participants it represents the most significant phase of their development. Mentors have completed substantial training, hold real responsibility, and provide the continuity that protects both the dogs and the newer learners. They are a critical part of what makes the programme function.

**The programme is particularly well-suited to long-sentence and life-sentence prisoners, people who often struggle most to find purpose, maintain hope and see a future. Restart Dogs gives them one.**

## Participant Criteria

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Participants are carefully selected to ensure the welfare of the dogs and the integrity of the programme. The following criteria apply:

- A minimum of 6 months left to serve at point of joining, preference is strongly given to those with longer sentences, and particularly to long-sentence and life-sentence prisoners
- A genuine desire to work with dogs, not simply seeking a change of routine
- No offences involving cruelty towards animals
- No health conditions or allergies that could be exacerbated by working with animals
- Willingness to sign the Restart Dogs Behavioural Contract
- Ability to attend the programme daily and take on responsibility for a puppy
- Clear mandatory drug testing (other than controlled medications)
- Ability to engage, take instruction and commit to the learning process

Participants complete an application form and attend an interview before selection. The total cohort is up to 10 prisoners, up to 8 active dog handlers and 2 programme mentors/orderlies.



## The Restart Dogs Team

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<b>Programme Delivery Lead</b>	An ABTC-accredited Animal Behaviourist with overall responsibility for programme design, quality assurance, professional oversight and strategic development across all sites. Provides regular site visits, staff training and support, and funder reporting.
<b>Local Lead Trainer</b>	A qualified dog trainer recruited locally to the prison site. Delivers day-to-day training, supervises participants, maintains welfare records and liaises with the Programme Delivery Lead. Recruited with Programme Delivery Lead involvement and works to Restart Dogs CIC standards and protocols.
<b>Assistant Trainer (part-time)</b>	Supports daily delivery, working towards APDT or IMDT qualification. Provides backup coverage and supports participant welfare. Engaged in ongoing CPD. This is a part-time role, structured around programme delivery days and scaled to the needs of the site.
<b>Programme Mentors / Orderlies (prisoner role)</b>	Senior learners who have progressed through the programme. Provide peer mentoring, cover dog handling when primary handlers are absent, and support the programme environment. A progression role, not a support role.

## Requirements to Host the Programme

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The following requirements are non-negotiable. They have been developed through operational experience across multiple sites and reflect what is genuinely needed for safe, ethical and effective AAI delivery.

### Physical Space

- A dedicated classroom for up to 10 participants and up to 8 dogs, space for a desk, a dog bed and safe separation between animals always
- Cleanable, non-slip flooring (we have a contractor for this if required)
- Electrical power points for laptop use
- A separate rest room for dogs during lunchtimes and between sessions, no through traffic, calm and undisturbed
- Two additional rooms for 1-2-1 training and participant reflection space
- Secure, dedicated outdoor training areas accessed directly from the building at ground floor level, routine use must not require movement permissions through Coms
- Outside storage for wheelchairs, agility obstacles and training aids

- Kitchen facilities for preparation of dog food and enrichment, and for the daily shared breakfast, this is a structured and evidenced AAI activity and is non-negotiable
- Access to laundry facilities, washing machine and dryer within or adjacent to the classroom
- Toilets for staff and students

### **Operational Requirements**

- Dedicated radios issued to Restart Dogs staff for independent use on the estate, staff must be able to manage movements and always have the ability to communicate
- Radio and key training for all Restart Dogs staff, plus local security framework induction
- A documented OSO cover arrangement for genuine emergencies, for example urgent veterinary attention requiring off-site travel.
- Access to various environments across the estate by prior arrangement, essential for socialisation and public access training
- A named governor-level lead with authority to protect and resolve operational issues for the programme
- MDT engagement, mental health, resettlement and safer custody teams should be aware of the program
- In case of prison lock down, at least two of our learners must be able to be released on the same basis as kitchen staff to ensure support of the staff in dog care.

### **Contractual Requirements**

- Minimum 2 year contract, this reflects the time required to train a dog to assistance dog standard and to deliver meaningful rehabilitation outcomes. Shorter arrangements are not appropriate for this model

### **Programme Costs**

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Restart Dogs CIC offers three routes to funding the programme, depending on how the prison contract is structured. We are flexible and pragmatic about which model is used, what matters is that the programme is properly resourced, and that the financial arrangement is sustainable for both parties.

#### **Route 1, Built Into the Prison Contract (Preferred)**

Where Restart Dogs is written directly into a prison management contract or service specification, for example as part of a procurement bid, the programme costs are met entirely from within the contract budget. This is the cleanest and most sustainable arrangement. It means no external funding bids are required, no delays waiting for grant decisions, and no annual uncertainty about whether the programme can continue. If your establishment is in this position, we can move quickly.

## Route 2, Direct Establishment Funding

Where the prison holds sufficient budget within its commissioning framework to fund the programme directly, we can proceed on that basis. The annual programme cost is £94,800 + VAT, with a one-off setup cost of £14,000 for equipment, staff training, materials, risk assessments and insurance. Monthly costs are £7,900 based on a full cohort.

## Route 3, Blended Funding

Where a prison cannot meet the full programme cost from their commissioning budget, we can explore a blended model. A prison contribution, however partial, signals institutional commitment and significantly strengthens our ability to secure grant funding for the remainder. This route requires more lead time but remains viable.

Cost Element	Amount
Initial set-up (equipment, staff training, materials, risk assessments, insurance)	£14,000 (one-off; not required where already established on site)
Monthly programme fee (full cohort of up to 10)	£7,900 per month
Annual programme cost	£94,800 + VAT
Puppy procurement and early raising costs	Currently met by Restart Dogs CIC. We are actively developing partnerships with dog welfare and assistance dog organisations to share this cost, and welcome introductions to potential partners.

Note: Where Restart Dogs is already established within a prison's infrastructure, the one-off set-up costs do not apply to additional cohorts or contract renewals.

## Additional Programme Activities

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Where the establishment's regime allows, Restart Dogs can offer the following activities that deepen the vocational and rehabilitative outcomes:

- Evening dog training classes for staff with their own dogs, giving participants the experience of teaching, coaching and running a professional training business on the estate
- Community classes for participants on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL), building real-world professional experience before release
- Links to local rescue organisations and canine business networks, building professional identity and employment prospects ahead of release

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