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Handler and Canine: Exploring the Career Path of a K-9 Officer

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Abstract

The K-9 Unit is a special unit within police departments where an officer may have a canine as their partner. They are designed to assist law enforcement in their duties making it easier to keep cities and towns safe. Within this unit, it is required that both handler and canine undergo intensive training. This paper reviews the steps a person may take to join a K-9 Unit and how to excel with their canine partner on the force. After discussing the history of using canines to serve and protect, this paper explores the difficulties of being a K-9 Handler such as the belief that it is cruel and inhumane to utilize animals within such a field. The paper dives into this controversy and concludes that canines love to perform their work alongside their handlers, and work hard to do so.

Introduction

K-9 Unit officers are handlers of the working canines in police departments. These police officers are to care for the working canines, continuously train with their canine in the job they are given, and work alongside their canine partner against the war on crime. K-9 officers work with all parts of a department and even other departments as well. They will aid in searches, seizures and finding of suspects, artillery, weapons, drugs, missing persons, and even human remains. The dogs are specially trained to listen to the handler's commands and only their handler's commands. This is important so the dog does not listen to random citizens while on the job. The bond between handler and canine is very important for both parties in order to perform the best they can on the job. The canines can be any breed that is used as a typical police working dog for detection or patrol duties. Most utilized dog breeds include the German shepherd, Labrador retriever, and Belgian Malinois. The canines are specially trained in being able to perform searches and apprehensions of persons (Handy et al., 1961). These canines are handpicked and trained by professional K-9 trainers and then matched with an officer that the dog would work well with together. This is determined by both the officer's personality and the canine's personality. The officer will work with different dogs to help the trainers determine which dog and handler are best paired. The police department may choose to have one or more handler and canine, and sometimes they utilize the State K-9 Unit and dispatch them to the area needing the K-9 if they do not have their own unit. K-9 Unit officers can work at the federal, state, and local levels. The handlers are to take care of the K-9s and be able to have control over their K-9 partner. The handlers need to keep up with training and respond to calls that require the K-9. Depending on the breed, some will be more difficult than others.

This paper discusses the history of how canines became associated with law enforcement leading to their many uses in today's day and age, as well as how to actually become a K-9 Unit police officer. This paper touches base on the different types of K-9 officer jobs a person may apply to be, and gives the information needed to the reader so that they may be able to choose the right career path for themselves. The reader may use this paper and the information within to aid in deciding whether this is a possible career path they may be interested in, or help to make the decision that this is not the career path for them. This paper discusses what would make a person the better candidate for the K-9 unit position, and the possible controversies or issues that come along with the job.

History of K-9

Dogs have been known to work along-side humankind throughout history. The earliest war known to date that dogs have been used for is as far back as the Peloponnesian War which dates 431-404 B.C. (Dorriety, 2005, p.89). Since dogs were used for protection and to assist in wars, it makes sense as to why law enforcement would want to start to use them as well. Well known leaders like Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Monarchy, King Henry VIII of England, and Napoleon were known to use dogs in wars (Sloan, 1955, p. 386). Dogs would be used to intimidate and attack their opponents (Sloan, 1955). As the years went on, dogs continued to be used in World War I and World War II. The first use of canines may have been for catching food and to warn or protect against bigger threats (Sloan, 1955, p.385) The olfactory of canines is more superior to those of humans, which makes them better at being able to track other animals down (Dorriety, 2005, p. 89). The previous research done by Dorriety (2005) states that dog's have more than two hundred million olfactory sensory cells in their nasal chambers and

the adult human only has five million. In history dogs have been used in wars, for hunting, and even for protection.

The earliest programs that started to utilize canines for law enforcement in the United States of America began in the South Orange (New Jersey) and New York City Police Departments around 1907 (Dorriety, 2005, p. 89). Police dog programs only consisted of the northeastern part of the United States in 1952 as the programs were on the rise (Chapman, 1990, p.16). According to Sander's (2006) research, there was an incline between 1950s and 1960s due to an increase of burglaries, vandalism, and assaults. As time passed, the popularity of dogs used in law enforcement grew at a rapid rate. Some people might have called it a "fad" because the increased use of K-9s grew at such a rapid rate (Dorriety, 2005, p. 89). The popularity of departments creating their own K-9 unit to assist law enforcement officers on the job grew as interest in human-animal interaction increased (Sanders, 2006).

Patrol and Detection

Today, officers can have a detection dog, a patrol dog, or one that is trained in both tasks. Detection K-9s are dogs that are able to identify and alert the specific item they are detecting. The specific item that could be needed to be detected are human remains (Alexander et. al, 2011). Detection K-9s undergo very intense and extensive training in order to get the job of being a K-9 officer. The dog starts training from when it is a puppy; although in recent years there have been rescues being trained to be detection dogs as well. These dogs must have outstanding obedience and detection abilities. Not every dog is cut out to be a detection dog. This would be because of the different drives the breeds have. The breed of dog is important to make sure they can perform the jobs that are asked of them.

The most well known dog utilized in law enforcement is the German shepherd (Harris, 2016). There are many other breeds used around the world by law enforcements, they find the breed in their country that performs the job best. In the United States the canine used for tracking was bloodhounds as they proved to be impeccable at their job (Sloan, 1955, p. 388). Back in 1923 Doberman Pinschers, Rottweiler's, German Shepherds, Airedales, Setters, Pointers, and Rhodesian Ridgebacks were the breeds trained in South Africa Quaggaport training facility in order to be more patrol dogs than detection (Sloan, 1955, p.390). As the German Shepherd is world widely utilized in law enforcement, other breeds that people may have unheard of are used as well. For example poodles have been known to be used for their intelligence in detection work, and even American Staffordshire Terriers, or also known as Pitbulls, have made their debut today. In the study done by Tadeusz et al. (2014), they use Labrador Retrievers, German Shepherds, Terriers, and English Cocker Spaniels. Not only does breed matter when finding the right dog for the K-9 job, studies have shown that the gender of the dog does not matter (Tadeusz et al., 2014).

Patrol K-9's are dogs who perform tasks with their handlers instructions such as apprehending suspects, officer protection, area or building clearance, and act as security. These dogs are seen more on social media or out in the streets as they are out more often than the detection dogs. Patrol K-9's have very specific tasks required of them just as a detection dog has their tasks to alert their specific items. These K-9's are trained in specific areas such as obedience, tracking, attacking, and searching (Handy et al., 1961). These dogs must have the most outstanding obedience because when they are patrolling they must be able to adhere from any distractions and listen only to their handler and nobody else. This is very important, as the K-9's job is to only listen to the handler so a suspect cannot call off or distract the dog. These

patrol dogs know their job and focus only on what their task is given to them by their handler. These dogs must be able to work under any conditions and terrain so they are trained to climb walls, ladders, window jumps, crawl spaces, stairs, and be able to drag objects as well (Handy et al., 1961). The patrol K-9's must not be fearful to do anything as they are trained to go through any obstacle to apprehend the suspect no matter where they are (Harris, 2016). In Fox's (2015) article he describes how trainers decide what dog is best suited for the job of patrol dog. The dog must pass all of the tests required seeing how they react to their environment, sociability, and alertness.

These dogs must have a drive to them that shows they would be good patrol dogs (Sanders, 2006). These patrol dogs are trained to protect their handlers at any cost, sometimes it may cost their lives or cause a trip to the emergency room. These types of dogs put their life on the line everyday they work, not all suspects will stop once the dog is present, sometimes the dogs need to go apprehend the suspect because they try to escape or hide from the police, or will not drop their weapons trying to harm the dog or police. These dogs are trained to bite and hold their suspect until they get a command from their handler to let go. As stated in Mesloh's (2006) article the dogs ability to stop in its tracks on verbal command by the handler is important so there are no instances where the K-9 bites the suspect after they decide to comply with law enforcement. This is why the training for patrol K-9's is very extensive and rigorous.

Detection K-9s are dogs that are able to identify and alert the specific item they are detecting. These K9s undergo very intense and extensive training in order to get the job of being a K-9 officer. The dog starts training from when it is a puppy; although in recent years there have been rescues being trained to be detection dogs as well. These dogs must have outstanding obedience and detection abilities. Not every dog is cut out to be a detection dog. As Harris

(2016) explains it is important to make sure the dog is a good match for the job and tasks asked of them. Detection dogs are able to detect explosives, artillery, human remains, missing persons, and drugs (Furst, 2008). During their training they must start off with training with the specific object that they must know how to properly detect. The K9s train constant hours with the objects they must detect and the training slowly begins to get more difficult as the dog ages (Alexander et al., 2011). An article written by Kevin Rooney (2013) states that there's no need for a dual purpose K-9, but it does help even if they do not need the dual-purpose canine.

As described above canines have a superior ability to smell things that humans cannot smell. Using dogs in detection makes an officer's life easier. As the war on drugs continues the detection K-9 comes in handy when needing to find narcotics. As stated in Bulzomi's (2000) article, "drug detection dogs have been proven highly effective and reliable when detecting illegal narcotics." Another type of detection that a K-9 can be trained in is explosives and artillery. These K-9's detect explosives such as bombs and guns. These types of detection dogs became popular after the 9/11 tragedy (Furst, 2008). During the 9/11 tragedy there were already K-9's that were largely utilized in order to find missing persons. After 9/11 happened the use of detection K-9's grew more popular over the years and unfortunately due to such a horrific event (Furst, 2008). Detection dogs can be seen at airports, theme parks, events or gatherings, and special instances that require a detection K-9. Special instances may be a missing persons search, drug busts, vehicle stops, or border patrols.

Becoming a K-9 Officer

In order to become part of the K-9 Unit, a person must be a sworn police officer of that department for at least a year. Depending on which department the person would like to be in the K-9 unit will determine the steps to becoming an officer. If the person would like to become

part of a local department's K-9 unit, then they must take the civil service test. Local departments may host their own exams as well. Once signed up and prepared to take the exam, the person must have a score above 70 in order to qualify. The same goes for the state departments as well, you must sign up for the state civil service test and receive a score higher than a 70. The department will then contact you in regards to moving forward. The applicant will then be set up for the physical tests, also known as the PT test, and the Cooper test. The Cooper test qualifications depend on the standards set in the state for men and women. The person must pass this Cooper test and move forward to the PT obstacle course test. The PT test is an obstacle course that one will perform multiple tasks within a certain time limit in order to pass. There is a trial date and then at the end of the week the actual test and you can only perform it once. After passing both tests the person will be sent to an academy for a few months in order to prepare themselves correctly for the police duties that will follow in their new career. Each department then requires a psych evaluation. This psychological evaluation helps to determine whether the applicant is mentally stable for the job at hand. The psychological evaluations take place at off-site facilities that have assigned psychologists that read the tests in order to determine if the applicant is deemed sane for the job. Once the person passes these psychological tests then they move on to be sworn into the department they had applied to and become one of the team.

The educational requirements for being a K-9 officer consists of what the department requires for education to be a regular officer, trooper, or special agent. The person would need a high school diploma, and sometimes departments require a degree in criminal justice, criminology, or police science (Phillips, 2022). Having a degree in such studies can make the chances of being selected to be a K-9 officer more likely. The higher the officer's education, the

better off an officer is when applying for new positions. This not only increases the chances of being chosen for the K-9 Unit officer position, but having previous experience with working dogs can also increase this likelihood of being selected as a K-9 officer (Sanders, 2006).

Previous experience can include having your own personal working dog and training them in protection work or advanced obedience training for competitions. Working along-side K-9 trainers and knowing what the job and training may entail can help show that a person is ready for the high responsibilities a K-9 officer takes on (Sanders, 2006). Being a police officer in the first place is a lot of responsibility, so taking on a K-9 partner and being responsible for them and their actions as well can be even more difficult. An officer must be able to be on call 24/7 as the K-9 may be needed at any hours of the day and night (Phillips, 2022). If there are multiple K-9's in a department they may each be assigned a shift with their handler, but if not the handler and K-9 must be prepared to answer any call at any hour of the day (Phillips, 2022). These officers must have interpersonal skills, communication, physical fitness, animal handling, and investigation skills. It is more to take on as a K-9 officer rather than a regular police officer.

After a person is a sworn officer they must be on this department for a minimum of a year before applying for K-9 unit. Even then it does not guarantee that they will be chosen for the K-9 handler position. These tasks must be completed for State and Federal as well, however, the process and requirements of the tests will be much more difficult. Then the officer can apply to be on the K-9 Unit when and if spots open up. The handler that is chosen will be matched up by the K-9 trainers with a K-9 that best suits him or her. The handler may also acquire their own dog if the department does not already have a trained K-9 that needs a new handler. They may acquire from local breeders, import dogs, or K-9 trainers may supply dogs as well (Sanders, 2006). If it is a new puppy, the K-9 will undergo extensive training first and then proceed to

train with the handler as well so the K-9 and handler are acquainted well. It is important that the officer and K-9 are compatible. Some K-9's are able to go home with the officer and are not, depending on the temperament of the dog and how well they would be in a home life or not. Some dogs cannot separate work life and home life and would stay in the police dog kennels and be taken care of there until their handler picks them up for duty. If there is already a canine for the department and a handler is no longer able to be part of the K-9 Unit, whether it be from retirement or some other scenario, then a new handler is chosen to work with the canine.

The career path of becoming a K-9 unit handler is not for the weak. Training the dogs can become very dangerous and you must be prepared to receive a few scars and scratches as the dogs can be unpredictable while training (Sanders, 2006). In Sander's (2006) article he wrote how the handlers kept a "stitch count" to mark dog bite injuries during the training cycle. The officer must consider the needs of the canine as well. Becoming partners with a canine requires an intense amount of structure. The canine must keep up with its training so it may be able to perform their tasks with ease and guarantee. This is of the utmost importance because continuing to train outside of work not only ensures the canine will perform their duties with ease and least amount of mistakes, but helps to create a stronger bond between the canine and handler. This is one of the most important things to have between the canine and handler as the handler wants to be able to trust the canine and their actions, and the canine will perform their best when they trust their handler as well (Harris, 2016). The canine may have more than one task to perform while on the job and it is the handler's job to keep this canine fit for their tasks. The canine may be a detection K-9, patrol K-9, or even be able to perform both jobs.

The salary of a K-9 officer can range depending on how long the officer is on the job. This range can be between 46,871 dollars, and 67,719 dollars per year (Phillips, 2022). These

handlers have the same benefits as any police officer, except that they get a very loyal companion and partner added to the list. The benefits and pay will depend on what department the officers are on as well. Thus meaning, the benefits and pay for local and state positions will be different within their state as well as what state they are located in. The federal positions however are consistent and both pay and benefits depend on how long you are on their K-9 Unit and which federal department a person is a part of.

The opportunities for promotion and career advancement include being a K-9 Officer and moving to different levels of K-9 Officer, such as state and federal. Typically, departments have very few K-9 Units and will use state and federal K-9's to assist local departments if they do not have K-9's themselves. State and federal departments will take their own tasks and calls first as well and make the local departments wait if their K-9's are being used already. Being a handler for a department could open doors to become a trainer for future handlers and K-9 officers, or to be a K-9 officer anywhere in the United States because of previous experience. Becoming a K-9 unit trainer could also give the opportunity to go on the business and management side of the job and promote benefits of having a K-9 Unit to local departments, convincing them to have their own K-9's rather than waiting for the state or federal departments to deploy their units.

The officer can also enhance their resume and their dog's resume by entering their dog in competitions such as Schutzhund, and winning titles. Schutzhund is an obedience-based training and has been found to reduce the amount of bites on a canine, which could help police K-9s when patrolling (Mesloh, 2007). Entering the K-9 in Schutzhund competitions can create a stronger bond between the handler and K-9. This can also sharpen the tasks the dog must perform as well on the streets and make sure to keep up with training. This is very important so

there are no mistakes that happen while on the job. It is important for the K-9 to have that impulse control so they do not go right for a bite and use lethal force unless instructed to do so (Mesloh, 2007).

Current Policies and Issues

Over the course of history canines have been utilized to assist in wars, hunting, and guarding. However, some citizens believe canines should not be utilized to aid law enforcement, arguing it is unethical to utilize canines to perform tasks to aid in the war on crime. One argument consists of how using drug detection K-9s impedes on privacy rights as the dog can detect illegal substances before the officer sees the substance itself (Beato, 2011). Another argument against patrol K-9s includes how officers utilize these dogs as a lethal force when there is no need for the dog to perform a bite (Shiavone, 2019). On the other hand some believe it is unethical to use animals to do our own bidding and put them into dangerous situations. However, over the years training has developed and revamped in order to make sure the canines and handlers are updated on the best training methods that work best for both canine and handler. The positive reinforcement method has been utilized more in today's day in age and proven more effective in the canine's performance than any negative reinforcement training (Alexander et al., 2011). The training is so extensive and important, but during this process is whether they find out if the canine will be a good candidate for law enforcement duties. The puppies that show enough drive and want to work become "police prospects." These puppies are then taken into an intensive training program. The dogs who do not show enough "drive" are typically given to families looking for a high-energy pet (Sanders, 2006). Even though the canine may not be a good police dog, does not mean the dog will not need as much mental

stimulation and physical exercise as well. The dog would be placed with a family who is ready to take on such a canine.

The canines will be tested on their tasks needed to be performed for the job and if they do not meet the requirements and keep the drive then they are let go and no longer a prospect (Fox, 2015). In order to ensure that the animals on the police force are taken care of properly, congress passed an act in 2000 ensuring that “any person who willfully and maliciously harms any police animal, or attempts or conspires to do so” will be punished (Scheiner, 2001). The Federal Law Enforcement Animal Protection Act makes it so there is no cruelty done to any of the animals that aid in law enforcement. This act mainly talks about harm done to any law enforcement animal by criminals, but it is used against any persons who are cruel and harm the law enforcement animal (Scheiner, 2001). Many still believe that these canines are being forced to perform their jobs at the expense of their happiness, however the canines enjoy their jobs and the breeds chosen to be part of K-9 Unit are the breeds that have the high drive and ability to perform detection or patrol duties with ease. In order to ensure the canine enjoys their job, they undergo all of the training stages and pass their tests becoming a K-9 officer. If the canine does not want to work, it will not perform the tasks given to them (Sanders, 2006). As stated above, the canine will no longer be a police prospect and be given a home and live the pet life (Sanders, 2006).

Sanders (2004) wrote in their article how much the handlers must take care of their canines. The canines are treated with the utmost respect by all law enforcement, but especially their handlers. The handlers are chosen and paired with the right canine that fits each other to ensure the two will coexist and work incredibly well together. The better the handler and canine are paired, the more insurance there is that the handler will take good care of the canine. The

handler must take care of their canine as they would their own family dog, but with even more care and respect as the canines are seen as police officers and are treated as such. The canines are sworn into a department just as an officer would be, giving them the respect and honor a normal officer would be given as well. The handler ensures the health of the canines, keeps up with the training, and most go home with their handlers and live with them and their families (Sanders, 2004). These canines are to be protected and entrusted to be taken well care of by the handler they are matched up with. Sanders discusses how he observed the trainer and handlers talk to and about the canine while training stating it was like a “dog-as-child orientation in the training program” (Sanders, 2006). The way the handlers talk to and treat their K-9s have a child and parent like relationship. One trainer even stated, “See the way he’s looking at you? He’s wondering what Dad wants him to do” (Sanders, 2006). This relationship can be seen within regular people and their pets, but important for the handler and canine to have this type of relationship in order to work well together. This also can show the public how canines are treated like part of the family of these handlers.

In Scheiner’s (2004) article, he states that “until society recognizes that all sentient beings, not just humans, should be free from exploitation, many police canines will continue to be ‘sacrificed.’” What he means by this is, if those in society who do not believe the canine are a true officer and do not respect them as part of law enforcement, then there will be more deaths of canines to continue when fighting law enforcement. Making sure society sees the K9s as sworn and respected officers, more laws have been passed to ensure this. The Federal Law Enforcement Animal Protection Act (2000), and the Nero’s Law (2022) have been put in place giving these law enforcement animals more rights. Nero’s Law started based on a handler, Officer Gannon and his K-9 Nero. Officer Gannon was shot and killed while serving a warrant

and his Belgian Malinois, K-9 Nero, was shot in the face and a bullet lodged in his shoulder. The canine was not allowed to be treated by EMT's and was taken to the animal hospital as Massachusetts previous law prohibited any medical attention to animals. This incident happened in 2018, and Nero's Law was passed in 2022. Passing more laws protecting the canines helps to show how much law enforcement and the government cares about their four-legged officers. The canines assist law enforcement very bravely to catch these criminals and take them off of the streets just as any other officer. Canines can be awarded with medals just as any military or police officer would be for any heroic actions. Medals such as the Purple Heart can be awarded to a canine just as if they were an officer. If a person has the opportunity to watch these canines do their training, they can see just how much the canines enjoy performing their jobs well. These canines that fall in the line of duty get a similar ceremonial funeral just as any other officer would (Schiavone, 2019).

The citizens who argue whether it is ethical to use canines in aiding law enforcement should look at the benefits they have brought to the war on crime. These canines help to keep their district and even others as safe as possible. Looking at Schiavone's (2019) discussion of K-9 Rocco, the officers survived the attacks from suspect Mr. Rush because Rocco gave them time to apprehend the suspect who was wielding a knife. Mr. Rush ended up stabbing K-9 Rocco, his handler, and two other officers before being apprehended. This unfortunately led to K-9 Rocco's death, but the officer's on scene with K-9 Rocco survived including his handler (2019). Rocco made it possible for those officers to go home that day and helped to take down a criminal.

Past court cases have been brought up to discuss the debate of the usage of police K-9's. There have been court cases that rule what is legal for K-9's and whether law enforcement has

utilized them for unnecessary means. In a 2005 court case, *Illinois v. Caballes*, it was ruled that a canine sniff for narcotics at a traffic stop was not a search, even when there was no reasonable cause for suspicion (Beato, 2011). This court case made the rule so any detection from a canine at traffic stops does not count as a search. This is important in order to ensure the person's privacy rights are not being impeded on. The officer must have probable cause before releasing the K-9 for a legal search. In *United States v. Gonzalez-Acosta the Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit* (1993) denied the defense access for a drug detection dog's training records, veterinary records, alert reports, and other miscellaneous documents. The defendant wanted documents to review in a court case against them, whereas the court did not see it reasonable. This was due to the fact that the records of the canine before the canine was sworn and passed all of their tests was not relevant (Bulzomi, 2000). The court allowed the defense to review limited records because the dog was certified before the event had occurred (Bulzomi, 2000). The defendant was found guilty because there was no doubt the canine had alerted the drugs correctly. This case is important because it shows a multitude of things. One would be that the canine is being treated the same as an officer would be in court, this meaning the records before the canine became a sworn officer and received its certification weren't relevant would be just as any previous records before becoming a sworn officer would be irrelevant when dealing with court cases. This also shows how the canine yet again has helped take another criminal off of the streets making their city a safer place, one person at a time.

In the court case *United States v. Navarro* (2015), the defendant claimed that the calling and use of a drug detection dog upon a motor vehicle stop was unconstitutional even though the dog alerted cocaine at the driver's door. The defendant claimed it was unconstitutional based on they had no probable cause to stop and perform a drug search on the car. The court of appeals

did not agree based on the tip the officers received of Navarro's possible possession of contraband (Bulzomi, 2000). This is important because the officer would not have been able to search the car without a warrant if he did not have the drug detection dog at hand and possibly lose Navarro after the fact. Navarro could have gotten away, except the detection K-9 prevented this by alerting the hidden cocaine. The next court case *Romo v. Champion* (1995), holds that if a vehicle is otherwise lawfully detained, consent is not required for a canine sniff, even absent any reasonable suspicion (Bulzomi, 2000). As it is difficult to rule in court what is a legal search by a detection dog, it is important to have these court cases so officers can assist in taking criminals off the streets the right way so they are not let go if they appeal in court. As detection K-9's can detect even while at home on an afternoon walk off duty, it is important to follow the rules while having a K-9.

One benefit of having a canine on the force is that citizens these days will fight for all animals and put them before themselves in most cases. Having a K-9 unit and announcing on social media may entice the public to want to see the K-9 at work and create a better bond with law enforcement if they held public seminars to show demonstrations of the K-9. As there are benefits, there are also risks to take into consideration when launching a K-9 unit. A risk could be that the dog is unpredictable, as highly trained as a K-9 is, they are still a dog and can be unpredictable Sanders (2004) had found in his research. It is difficult to overcome the unpredictability of a canine as they are animals at heart, but extensive training and exposure can help reduce the unpredictability's (Sanders, 2006). The department does not need to be a big agency either in order to have a K-9 Unit. As Rooney (2013), proposes the purpose of the canine unit is to enhance the officer's ability to deter and or prevent crime and illegal activity. He also makes claims from other psychological research done that having a K-9 vehicle patrolling

makes a big statement that the department intends to deter crime (Rooney, 2013). As having a K-9 Unit can be costly, the longer lasting benefits of keeping the officers safe, giving the appearance that there will be more efforts to deter crime, and being able to put more people behind bars, are all worth it in the end. There are too many benefits of having a K-9 Unit not to invest in one as well.

Solutions

Some solutions to the concerns of cruelty being done to the dogs could be to have open events for citizens to watch the dogs perform their training tasks. Having events such as this can help to show how much these canines love to perform their jobs. Not many citizens are able to see the training and watch how the canine works in the field as typically it is blocked off when they are performing their duties live on actual calls where they are needed. If the department hosted events that show their K-9 units off then the citizens could see just how much the handler and canine work well together and trust each other to perform their best while on the job.

Another solution would be to inform citizens of the process and extensive training done in order for a canine to become a K-9 officer. As a handler stated to Sanders (2006), "People's lives depend on these dogs. It's not like you're training 'fluffy' to be a house pet." The handler was talking about the amount of training and importance obedience has when training a K-9. The extensive and constant amount of training done can be the difference to whether an officer or even suspect may live with the canine on the job. As the job can be dangerous especially within the training period of the dog, it may be hard for those to be able to come watch the dogs train or put a strain on the handlers who are training with their dog as well. Having one show day towards the end of the training process could be helpful as it is a little more safe as the dogs would be more trained rather than in the beginning (Sanders, 2006). Making slideshows and or

presentations to show the process in which the canines are being trained and answer any audience's questions can also ease any suspicions and allegations that the canines are being forced into their job or abused in the process.

There are no guarantees of changing the way people think, however educating them on the subject to show how well the dogs are treated and how much they enjoy their job can possibly persuade them. Another issue that can come into play with this are the expenses of the unit itself. These units are very costly given the department must pay for the canine, the training that comes along with it, new cruisers with a crate and extras for the canine in the cruiser, and the care that must be arranged for the canine. Not only can the unit itself be expensive, but to keep up with the training techniques and types of breeds being utilized can be a problem down the line when thinking about making a K-9 unit for the department.

The care that must be arranged includes yearly vet check ups, if something seems wrong with the K-9 then any vet appointments, surgeries, or emergency care the canine might need covered when injured on the job. These appointments can cost thousands of dollars depending on what happens during the K-9's career. The department must be able to afford another cruiser that has the right equipment for the canine and handler to utilize during their shifts. There must be a cage in the back for the canine to be, water and food bowls, a fan and or working air conditioner and heat in the car. According to research done by Minton (2008) on Texas departments and the costs of their K-9 units, the cost average of all the departments was \$5,541 per team. This seems pricey, but the cost will continue to go down once the department has the correct equipment for the K-9 after starting the unit up. They will have equipment from the first K-9's ready for the next (2008). The dog and the training are what makes this unit pricey, depending on where the department gets its canine can determine some of the cost. Not all dogs

are imported and many have exquisite working lines within the United States itself to contact (Sanders, 2006). This can help to keep the cost down, or if they find someone who has a very high drive canine that does not suit the pet life will sometimes be donated to K-9 trainers as well. The department can move costs around as well and reduce the number of body worn cameras or new cruisers for example, in order to fund for a K-9 unit that would prove most helpful instead of calling in and waiting for other departments to send their K-9 unit out to where it is needed and have to pay for that.

There is always the problem of what breed is best suited for law enforcement work. As discussed earlier there are many different types of breeds utilized in police departments, more so what is available to the department. Breeds such as German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers, Belgian Malinois, Dutch Shepherds, and any hound type of breed are most commonly used (Handy et al., 1961). This is because these dogs have herding and hunting drives to them that best suit them for law enforcement jobs (Sanders, 2006). The breed that has been mostly used for decades as aids in war and law enforcement are the German Shepherds, as they have a high drive but also good temperament to them as well (Handy et al., 1961). As the breeds utilized and changed throughout the years it can affect how the dogs are trained as well. Some may need more training than others as some breeds have different learning capacities. The Belgian Malinois has become a popular breed utilized in the military and law enforcement as the drive of these dogs is unmatched. Some might say they have too much drive, which in this case those dogs are not suitable for law enforcement as they can be too unpredictable (Sanders, 2006). However, the Belgian, like the German, are eager to please their “masters,” hence making them one of the easiest breeds to train. This is why they became popular in law enforcement and the military as patrol or dual purpose K-9s. Other breeds may take a little more time and effort into

their training depending on how easily trainable their breeds are. As breeds may change, it can cause changes to training to happen as well. Training itself constantly changes and updates as well to find what best works when training the canines to become K-9s. It was found in changes of training over the years that positive reinforcement training was more effective in dog responses and learning rather than compulsive training (Alexander et al., 2011). Compulsive training was done by stressing the dog out in order to get the reaction they wanted, however this was not as effective as the positive reinforcement trainings (Alexander et al., 2011). In order to exploit which breeds are best fit for these types of jobs, I believe there should be testing with other breeds to see which one truly fits the position of K-9 officer. As the German shepherd has been the face of police K-9s all around, having more breeds participate and given the chance may entice people to want to look into the K-9 unit more and support the use of K-9s in the force. This is because when people see their breed of dog on a cover or news somewhere they may talk about it with others and word will spread. This could also be beneficial to police departments and give them the opportunity to show the differences in departments so society does not believe they are all one in the same. Other people who know the certain breed may be able to give more information on the breed as well and help training programs for K-9s to better understand how to change their training for these breeds to be utilized as well. Trainers going to conventions and traveling for competitions even can help to keep them updated on what better ways to train these canines to get the best results and have them pass to become K-9 unit dogs. These conventions have people who help to find better and more positive ways to improve the canines' performances while training, while using their natural instincts but not forcing them to do something they do not want to do.

Conclusion

Knowing the concerns and controversy of using canines in aiding law enforcement can help to inform my future career in many ways. It can help to prepare me for any backlash that I may get for being part of the K-9 Unit and the canines are being forced into their job, and this way I can properly educate the person so they can learn how the dogs are being protected as true officers themselves. Having this knowledge can help me to understand the canines and help to educate myself on the matter more to understand the other side of the controversy as well. This shows me how others think and not everyone will be on the same page about something and how I have to be willing to explain and educate so they understand the other side of the controversy as well. The more knowledge passed on the more we can improve the way training is done and eliminate any suspicion that abuse is happening to make the K-9s perform their jobs. This way I could possibly bring any new ideas to the department of how to educate the public on K-9 unit and the use of the canine. If the department can educate their town then it could possibly even save the department for any backlash or anger towards them.

Educating others and being educated on the matter itself can help to bring light on the controversy. I hope it would eventually spread to other departments as well that have K-9 unit or are thinking of getting a K-9 unit as well but are afraid of the backlash they may get from citizens and animal rights activists. In the end it is important to make sure both handler and canine are safe on the job and are able to perform their best to help the war against crime. The knowledge of the unit and job are important to know before taking on these intense responsibilities. Knowing what the job entails beforehand can help better prepare a person for what is to come and be expected. This can aid in ensuring the person is right for the job as well.

If someone is not willing to take on the responsibilities of being a K-9 handler, then this job is not for them and it gives another person the opportunity to experience this amazing career.

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