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# Nature's Path Therapy Responds to Grand Lake Dog Crisis With Compassion and Canine Intervention

*Treehouse-Based Sanctuary Offers Healing Model Amid Local Dog Overpopulation Challenges*

**Eucha, OK** — After the heartbreaking loss of a 14-year-old family pet to a feral dog pack in northeastern Oklahoma, the urgency of addressing the region's growing stray dog crisis has never been more real. In response, **Nature's Path Therapy**, a trauma-informed mental wellness practice nestled in the wooded hills south of Disney, has quietly stepped in—not as part of a formal partnership, but through an organic collaboration—with **Second Chance Pet Rescue** in Grove to create space for healing, safety, and hope. Nature's Path Therapy's founder, **Joseph Atkins**, a **psychology major at Northeastern State University**, had already adopted eight rescue dogs from Second Chance when the news of the fatal incident broke earlier this year. Struck by the horror and heartbreak on all sides of the situation, Atkins made the decision to do more—modifying his facilities and gradually adopting eight more dogs, bringing the total to sixteen.

"These are dogs that came from uncertainty, and now they're helping humans feel safe again," said Atkins. "It's not an official partnership—we're just doing what we can. Second Chance made it possible through their tireless work, and our role is to provide the structure, training, and care that helps these dogs become therapeutic companions."

The therapy dogs live and train on-site at Nature's Path, a nature-integrated retreat designed for clients recovering from trauma, anxiety, and chronic stress. Many of these dogs will go on to participate in **Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI)**, which research has shown to positively impact everything from **cortisol levels and blood pressure to social engagement, emotional regulation, and trauma recovery**.

"This isn't just feel-good therapy—it's neuroscience," Atkins explained. "When a person pets a dog, their brain releases oxytocin and dopamine. When that dog has also overcome adversity, it creates a shared experience of resilience that's both symbolic and physiological."

Still under development, Nature's Path is more than a sanctuary for people—it's a second chance for dogs who might have otherwise not been able to reach their full potential. The property integrates behavioral science, therapeutic architecture, and sustainable living to support healing from the inside out.

"The dogs aren't the centerpiece," said Atkins. "And I think that speaks to the bigger picture. They're part of a healing ecosystem—one where people, animals, and nature work together to restore safety, trust, and hope. This is about more than therapy dogs—it's about reimagining what healing can look like when we embrace compassion on every level."

**Dario Ginella**, Director of Canine Enrichment and Property Planning at Nature's Path and a **business management undergraduate at Rogers State University**, adds, "These dogs are part of something transformational. My role is to help create the structure that allows them to thrive—from their living spaces to their enrichment routines to their social interactions. They're not just surviving anymore. They're healing—and helping others heal too."

The issue of overpopulation in **Delaware County** is well-documented. News outlets such as **Fox 23** and **News On 6** have reported on the region's worsening stray dog problem, highlighting community concerns around safety and the burden on local shelters. In this context, the informal, community-based approach emerging between Nature's Path and Second Chance offers one small—but impactful—model for how therapeutic practice, ethical rescue, and rural development can come together to serve a broader purpose. While Nature's Path does not formally partner with any shelter or agency, Atkins has expressed a desire to **expand facilities to foster and train more dogs**, offering therapeutic services while alleviating local shelter pressures—**as resources allow**.

"This is a long game," Atkins said. "But the more we do this work, the more I see what's possible. These dogs aren't broken—they're brave. And in their healing, our clients find courage too."

#### **About Nature's Path Therapy**

Nature's Path Therapy is a private, trauma-informed mental wellness practice based in a treehouse sanctuary near Grand Lake in Eucha, Oklahoma. Founded by psychology student and behavioral science professional Joseph Atkins, the practice combines neuroscience, nature, and animal-assisted interventions to offer holistic mental health support in a non-clinical setting.

#### **About Second Chance Pet Rescue**

Second Chance Pet Rescue is a no-kill shelter located in Grove, Oklahoma. Under the leadership of Director Cassie Owens, Second Chance provides vital rescue, medical care, rehabilitation, and adoption services for abandoned, neglected, and stray animals throughout northeastern Oklahoma.

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