

# LASELL COLLEGE



## **The Power of Prison Pups: The Impact of the NEADS Program on Inmate Dog Trainers, MCI/Framingham, and the Community**

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## Prologue

The “Class of 2013”, the dogs who came to MCI/Framingham as puppies, will soon leave this home bound for the homes of clients who await them. In their honor, MCI/F Superintendent Lynn Bissonnette threw a farewell party. The power of these prison pups was evident, as we listened to the emotional testimony of clients who were given their lives back by skilled and loving assistance dogs trained by the women at Framingham. The MCI/Framingham inmate trainers had the deeply satisfying experience of seeing the tangible good they had done. They understood that, after a few false starts, their lives had real meaning. As the MCI/F puppy trainers received certificates for their volunteer service, they received well-deserved applause. Notably, amid the cheers were heard several enthusiastic “woofs” as the graduates – upon command – barked their gratitude to the women of MCI/Framingham.

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## Purpose of the study

The authors seek to describe the impact of an assistance dog training program in prison. Further, we wish to point out the successes and the challenges of implementing a specific assistance dog training program in a specific correctional setting. The findings and recommendations presented here are specific to the NEADS dog program at MCI/Framingham, the Massachusetts Correctional



Institution for women, and the New England Assistance Dog Services of Princeton, Massachusetts. Readers who wish to learn more about both NEADS and MCI/F are encouraged to visit: <http://www.mass.gov/eopss/law-enforce-and-cj/prisons/doc-facilities/mci-framingham.html> or call Superintendent Bissonnette at 508-532-5100 and NEAD's Gerry DeRoche at 978-422-9064 or [www.NEADS.org/prisonpuppartnership](http://www.NEADS.org/prisonpuppartnership). We hope that our observations will prove useful not only to NEADS and MCI/F, but also to another correctional facility and/or assistance animal training program considering such a collaboration.

## Introduction

### *MCI/F and NEADS*

MCI/Framingham is the oldest continuously operating women’s prison in the United States, the only women’s prison in Massachusetts. It houses 650 women, 240 of whom are awaiting trial, and the rest serving sentences ranging from a weekend commitment through natural life. There are eighteen state prisons in Massachusetts; NEADS operates in nine of them, a tenth prison in Rhode Island. NEADS has existed since 1976, and has placed 1400 dogs with clients with a variety of needs, from hearing impairment, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, mobility challenges to autism. At any time, there are approximately 83 NEADS dogs undergoing socialization and training in state prisons; at the time of the this research there are currently between 8-10 dogs at MCI/Framingham, where the “dog program” has existed since 2004. Dogs trained at MCI/F have been successfully placed as assistance dogs, as “social dogs” especially suited to aid children in their interaction with others, or have been purchased from NEADS as well-trained pets, should temperament or physical ailment make them unsuitable as assistance or social dogs. (Bissonnette, 2013; DeRoche, 2013)



The idea for this collaboration came to current MCI/F Superintendent Lynn Bissonnette in 1998, during her tenure as Superintendent of NCCI/Gardner, a minimum security men’s prison in Central Massachusetts. She approached NEADS, and they

**MCI/F Superintendent  
Lynn Bissonnette**

cautiously agreed to a trial. Since that time, the collaboration between the Department of Correction (DOC) and NEADS has flourished. In the earliest days of the collaboration, incarcerated trainers were paid a small stipend by NEADS; trainers now serve on a volunteer basis, while the cost of instruction and supplies is provided by NEADS, and the DOC provides significant onsite staff support for the program. 90-95% of NEADS dogs are now trained by prisoners.

Dogs enter the prison as 8-week old puppies, and stay for a minimum of one year, often eighteen months. They share a cell with their inmate trainers, who are responsible for their training twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; dogs accompany their trainers to any programming in which the trainer participates within the prison. The trainer's cell includes a dog crate, food and training equipment; the trainer may have a roommate who is not involved in the dog training program. NEADS recruits and trains "weekend raisers" who take the dogs home with them 2-3 weekends per month, in order to socialize the dogs to the sensory stimulation --- the bus, stores, children, sirens --- not found in prison.

Dog trainers at MCI/F are designated "fulltime handlers" or "backup handlers" depending on the primacy of their responsibilities for training the NEADS dog. In order to be selected as an inmate trainer, prisoners must be "d-report free" (Discipline Report, incurred for an infraction of prison rules) for six months prior to their application letter, and remain so for the duration of their participation. Earning a "d-report" is cause for expulsion from the program. In addition, fulltime trainers must have at least eighteen months remaining on their sentence, generally the amount of time needed to train a dog for placement. Prospective



**NEADS CEO Gerry DeRoche and Buddy**

trainers are evaluated for suitability by the mental health staff at MCI/F, and by NEADS staff, as well. Inmate trainers are further supported by an MCI/F mental health worker, whom the trainers call the “dog psych.” Principle support for the program comes from MCI/F corrections program officers specifically assigned to work with NEADS and inmate trainers.

Inmate trainers and their dogs work with a NEADS professional trainer in a weekly session at the prison; the NEADS professional sees to the medical needs of the dog, teaches inmates how to train their pups, monitors the dog’s progress and looks for indications of an appropriate placement. The 8-10 inmate trainers at MCI/F, with a few exceptions, live together in one wing of one X-shaped housing unit, using the public space in the unit and a designated outdoor space in the prison yard for dog training. Inmate trainers must conform to the rules and regulations incumbent upon them as prisoners, while adhering to the requirements of the NEADS dog training program. Newly hired Corrections Officers learn about the dog program in their training academy, and a fuller discussion of the program is available to all MCI/F employees on the facility’s Intranet site. New prisoners learn about the program during their Orientation to MCI/F, and are encouraged to apply, whereupon those with sentences long enough to see a puppy through to graduation are further screened for conduct issues, mental health, and willingness to shoulder the responsibility.

### ***Feral Cats, Injured Birds, Shelter Dogs, and Wild Horses***

The literature on prison-based animal programs reveals universally positive results for animals, prisoners, and institutions (Kohl and Wenner, 2012). While there is a need for more evidence-based efforts at evaluation – primarily to earn the support of grant funding -- there is no shortage of qualitative data attesting to the success of such programs. The following is

a cursory overview, and the reader is guided to the excellent surveys of the field, in particular the work of Gennifer Furst (2012), at New Jersey's William Paterson University: *Animal Programs in Prison: A comprehensive Assessment*. A shorter piece by Furst (2006), published in *The Prison Journal*, is also available.

The NEADS/DOC collaboration is not unique to Massachusetts; the majority of states engage prisoners in programs that involve them in work with animals. Most began within the last 30 years, and not surprisingly, given the gender ratio in prisons, most involve male prisoners (Furst 2006). Within this broad category, however, states have been wildly creative in implementing programs suited to local need. Feral and injured stray cats, having colonized the Central Facility of the DC Department of Corrections in Lorton, Virginia, presented an opportunity for inmates to work with animals. Their work with these cats equipped men from Lorton with job opportunities upon release (Moneymaker & Strimple 1991). Similarly, the care of injured birds, found on the yard and initially hidden by inmates at Ohio's Oakwood Forensic Center, evolved into a program at this facility for the "criminally insane." Even in this dire setting, the presence of a needy bird whom inmates fed captured insects, reduced the amount of medication, violence, and suicides, compared to wards that did not care for birds (Lee 1983).

Shelter dogs, destined for euthanasia, are given a reprieve by programs in prisons. Dogs, rescued from local Humane Societies, have been trained in a women's prison in Washington State (Prison Pet Partnership 2013). In Florida's Coleman Federal Complex, abandoned and abused dogs become the wards of incarcerated juveniles at Oregon's MacLaren Juvenile Correctional Facility at "Project Pooch." These young people, some of whom are surely abandoned and abused themselves, self-report considerable change and

growth, and help to fulfill the Oregon Youth Authority’s mission of “reformation.” (Project Pooch, 2013).

Prisons have land that can be put to effective use with animal training. In particular, New York State’s Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF) needed a safe place for race horses when their racing days were over. After TRF’s success there, the organization approached a state correctional facility for boys 14-17 which responded eagerly and yielded similar positive results for boys and horses alike (Harrison 2013). The Kentucky Thoroughbred Foundation followed suit, supported by Kentucky’s governor, and found a home at the Blackburn Correctional Facility in Lexington. The Bureau of Land Management has formed partnerships with Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas and Oklahoma, saving the government a great deal of money and the lives of some 10,000 wild horses. Through their work with horses, prisoners learn the specialized skills of equine husbandry, as well as how to form healthy emotional attachments. (Zaidlicz 1988, as cited in Stimple, 2003).

*The effect of prison-animal programs on inmates and correctional settings*



The literature is replete with accounts of the positive impact of interaction with animals on the health of humans. Therapy dogs decrease depression and blood

pressure (Fournier et al 2007). Owners of companion animals enjoy higher survival rates



after heart attacks and less isolation in old age (Haynes, 1991; Nieburg, 1984; Friedmann et al, 1988; Levitt, 1988, as cited in Turner, 2007).

Inmates who train dogs in prison benefit from the unconditional love of a dog, which does not know the difference between a prisoner and a model citizen, and does not care (Berger 2008). Humans who interact with animals – dogs, horses, cats, birds – while in prison gain in self-confidence, patience, and respect for both people and animals (Lee 1983). Dogs, whether shelter dogs or carefully-bred service dogs, wild horses, feral cats, and birds with broken wings all benefit from the focused care of a prisoner in a carefully-run program (Hennessy et al, 2006). The prisoner grows and changes through the experience of being entrusted with an animal; they find strength of character and realize opportunities to make amends for the harm they have done (Berger, 2008).

The morale of those who come to work every day in the prison is enhanced by sharing space with animals (Bard 2006). And finally, the people on the receiving end of the socialized and adoptable stray dogs, tamed horses, or trained assistance and social dogs benefit most of all. In Massachusetts, before the dog program came to its first prison in 1988, there were far fewer clients able to access trained dogs (Bard 2006). In two-career families, with children and other pets to contend with, the focus required to train a dog can be hard to come by. The literature is clear. It speaks again and again of the “win-win situation” -- for institutions, prisoners, animals and community – created when animals become part of prison life (Harkrader et al, 2004; Deaton, 2005).

## Methodology

### *Sociology 302: Prison Pups Research*



**Back, L to R: Matthew Evans, Associate Professor Jenifer Drew, Tyler Silliman  
Front, L to R: Allison Gagne, Dana McBean, Francesca Saville, Carly Dearborn**

The data on which this study is based were collected by junior and senior undergraduates at Lasell College in Newton, Massachusetts, and their professor. Students enrolled, and were screened for entry into a 300-level Sociology class entitled, “Prison Pups Research”. The remaining six were trained, guided, and supported by Associate Professor Jenifer Drew at Lasell College, and by Lynn Bissonnette, Superintendent of MCI/Framingham and Laura Galvani, Corrections Program Officer in charge of the NEADS program at the prison. Our research question was straightforward: “What is the effect of implementing the NEADS service dog training program at MCI/Framingham?”

Students spent February of 2013 studying qualitative methodology, “grounded theory” (Charmaz 2012, Lofland *et al* 2006), and the techniques they would need to conduct unstructured interviews, using the interview guide they constructed as a research team. During March and April, they entered the prison weekly to conduct from one to three

interviews; each student tallied approximately forty hours of interviewing, in addition to another twenty-five hours conducted by Professor Drew, totaling over 250 hours of data collection, and a commensurate number of hours in discussion and analysis. Students interviewed Superintendent Bissonnette, NEADS CEO Gerry DeRoche, two dozen members of the administration, program staff, and security force at MCI/Framingham. Interview data were augmented by extant data on Discipline Reports among the inmate trainers, and daily profiles reflecting their time management.

Professor Drew had the advantage of being well-acquainted with MCI/Framingham. As the former Director of the Boston University Prison Education program, she had been coming into MCI/F for over 13 years. To maximize that advantage, the selection of dog trainers was limited to those who were also students in the Boston University Prison Education program. Trust and familiarity compensated for what had to be an intense and abbreviated period of data collection, completed within the span of one semester. The six participating trainers at Framingham, matched with Lasell students, ranged in age from their 20s through their 50s; their sentences ranged from life without the possibility of parole, to 19-20, 15-17, 12-15, 4-6; the shortest remaining sentence of a dog trainer was one year.

Students and professor met weekly on campus to analyze, and according to the tenets of grounded theory, to “form categories,” write “memos,” share discoveries, and apply sociological theory to findings. Unlike the professor, the students were new to the prison setting; their outsider perspective was useful, when coupled with the professor’s relative insider view. At semester’s end, the students presented their findings and recommendations at the Lasell College Academic Symposium to a full audience of students, faculty and administrators. The following day, they repeated their presentation to an audience at

MCI/Framingham, to which corrections officers, program staff and administrators from both MCI/F and NEADS were invited.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### *Systems Theory*

A prison is a complex organization, a system of related components; action in one part prompts action in the others (Parsons, 1937). Each component in the prison social system displays a strict hierarchy and multiple competing hierarchies exist within its overall structure. Prison is a place of rigid routines, run on a paramilitary model, with a reluctance to embrace the unusual, the exception, the spontaneous. Issues of control, power, respect, and fear inform the atmosphere despite the administration's best efforts to humanize the environment. Among most who work in a prison setting, suspicion, or at least caution and skepticism, is necessarily the default option.

Enter a bundle of eight-week-old Labrador Retrievers. Puppy-raising requires exceptions to routine, and changes the atmosphere in the prison. The puppies offer inmate trainers an opportunity to be loved without judgment, in a setting where



judgment is paramount. The dog program provides a way for women to move past their shame (Braithwaite, 1989) past the social demotion (Bourvie, 2006) of becoming an

“inmate” and prove that they can do something meaningful, and do it well. And, in the relationship between the dog and inmate trainer, a context exists in which prisoners can be trusted and can exercise limited autonomy despite their otherwise powerless position. Thus, the puppies, delightful and welcomed, innocently have impacted the prison’s social system.

The introduction of a change in a fairly rigid social system is not easily accomplished. To help explain the impact of a dog program in a woman’s prison, we rely on classic theory from sociology and criminology. Social Bond theory and theoretical notions of Reintegrative Shaming, Labeling, and Status Inconsistency help explain the strength and direction of the effect a dog program has on a prison, specifically the NEADS program at MCI/Framingham.

### ***Social Bond Theory***

Social Bond theory posits that individuals will adhere to pro-social behaviors when they have something to lose. Hirschi’s (1969) theory explains what engenders a social bond and discusses why bonded adolescents are more likely to succeed in conventional ways. Applying Hirschi’s theoretical scheme, prisoners in the dog program have the opportunity to *commit* to the idea of dog training for the disabled, to *believe* in the goodness of the mission, to be busily *involved* in dog training and to be *attached* to a positive peer group of fellow dog trainers, NEADS and DOC staff. They have much to lose, since they value their participation in the program. As such, compliance with the requirement that they remain Discipline-Report-free would be, according to Hirschi, an external regulation less powerful than their internalized one. The figure below summarizes the incidence of D-reports among the inmate trainers who participated and reveals a reduction in D-reports, and sometimes an increase in programming, since acceptance to the program.

## Discipline Reports Before and Since Acceptance into NEADS Program

Length in Program	Start Date	D-Reports Current	D-Reports Prior	Sick Calls Current	Sick Calls Prior	Program Current	Program Prior
A 8yr 6 mos	9/17/04	Total-0	2001- Tweezers 2012 Did not want to go to work Total- 2	3	0	Self-Esteem, religious retreats, BU, NEADS, Peer Support Program. WRA Total- 6	Computer Tech Training, Healthy Human Relationship, Life Skills 1 & 2, Domestic Violence Total- 5
B 2yr 3 mos	11/19/10	2011- Poss. Property not on list. 2011- Did not stand for count. 2012- Verbal Argument. 2012- Did not go to work. 2012- Reusing a stamp. 2012- Out of place. Total-6	2010- Had property of a released inmate 2008- Possession of a ring not on property Total-2	20	2	NEADS, Peer Support, Victims of Violence Total- 3	BU, Life Skills, MT. Wachusett Program Total-3
C 1yr	4/20/06	Total-0	Total-0	13	4	BU, NEADS, Peer Support, Reading for the blind, Tutor Training Class Total-5	BU Total- 1
D 2yr 3 mos	12/3/10	2010- Contraband ear buds, glasses 2011- Disrupting the unit, language 2011- Contraband X2, 2012- Missed appointment 2012 wearing shower shoes outside 2012- Property Total-7	2008- Threat to disrupt 2009- Unsecure property x2 2009- Lying 2009- Out of Place x3 2009- Refusing direct order 2010- Contraband ring Total- 7	3	10	BU, NEADS, Life Skills Total-3	GMP, Building Trades, BU, CRA, Parenting Education Total- 5
E 1yr 6 mos	6/2/11	2012- Refused work Total- 1	2010- Caustics in room 2011- Contraband jewelry Total- 2	26	38	BU, NEADS, Peer Support, Yoga Hope, Victims of Violence Total- 5	BU, Parenting Ed Program Total- 2
F 1yr 6 mos	7/21/11	Total-0	2010- Out of place x3 2010- Stole onion 2010- 3 <sup>rd</sup> party money 2011- Contraband medication Total- 7	23	8	Victims of Violence, NEADS Total- 3	BU, CRA, Cognitive Skills Total- 3
G 2yr 3 mos	11/19/10	2010- Contraband property 2011- Contraband property 2011- Dest. State Property Total-3	2008- Contraband property 2008- Verbal argument 2009- Out of place 2009- Opened door to block fight from video 2009- Misuse pin # 2010- Contraband property 2010- Stealing from culinary Total- 7	1	7	BU, NEADS, Culinary Arts Total- 3	BU, CRA, Mt. Wachusett Program Total- 3
H 6 mos	9/29/12	Total-0	2012- Out of place Total- 1	7	30	BU, NEADS Total- 2	Healthy Relationships for Women Total- 1
I	6/2/11	Total-0	Total-0	2	0	Computer Tech Training, BU, NEADS, Cosmetology, Gender Roles/Relationships in the media, Peer Support, Self-Esteem, Yoga Hope Total-8	BU, Parenting Ed. Total- 3
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>26</b>

### *Reintegrative Shaming*

John Braithwaite (1989) distinguishes between Stigmatizing Shaming and Reintegrative Shaming. Braithwaite does not reject the appropriateness of shame brought on by criminal behavior, by deeds contrary to the society's best interest. However, he notes that

*Stigmatizing* Shaming destroys the relationship between the errant individual and society, perhaps forever. Such is the contemporary stigmatizing effect of incarceration, a lifelong blemish that is internalized and can be even lead to further criminality (Lemert 1952). In contrast, *Reintegrative* Shaming offers a way back into the good graces of society, a way to surmount the shame of being punished for mistakes made. Such is the opportunity offered by the dog program, through which inmate trainers have an opportunity to contribute to society in a powerful way and to be part of the solution, no longer part of the problem.

### ***Status Inconsistency***

The conceptual notion of Status Inconsistency has the power to explain some of the difficulties encountered when a dog program becomes part of a prison. Lenski's (1954) original notion pointed to a condition in which a person occupies different statuses in two or more hierarchies within the system; the classic example is the highly educated and well-paid member of a minority group, who despite significant achievements in one hierarchy, is still subject to prejudice and discrimination in another. Such an individual seeks to be perceived through the lens of his/her higher status, while maintaining loyalty to the lower status, eschewing opportunities to merge with higher status individuals. In prison, status hierarchies are multiple: certainly the two represented by corrections officers and prisoners; another, of program staff and security staff; in addition, distinct hierarchies of relative (perceived) privilege exist within the inmate population.

In prison, status is fixed and largely immutable; generally, it only alters through formal, institutionally-mandated procedure. Participation in a dog training program, however, introduces subtle shifts in the way status is perceived by all. Prisoners enact their higher

status – dog trainer – as they seek more autonomy to meet a dog’s needs that don’t, for example, fit institutionally-mandated “movement” times for inmates moving from place to place. Being “out of place” at movement means a Discipline Report. Granted exceptions, sometimes required for the higher dog trainer status, can cause tension between inmate trainers and other inmates or with some corrections officers. Similar tensions exist between officers and prisoners when inmates give the impression of being “more free” than others.

### ***Labeling Theory***

Labeling Theory, or Societal Reaction, emerged in the original work of Goffman (1959) and Becker (1969) and remains relevant. Prisoners are punished for violating laws, or formal norms; society judges their behavior as deviant, and deserving of sanction. Societal reaction to those adjudged deviant can prompt the totality of the so-labeled person’s actions to be perceived as tainted, as socially polluted. That is, once labeled, all the actions of the deviant are seen as a function of their stigmatizing label.

Inmate dog trainers bear the stigma of incarceration and a status labeled deviant. Under these circumstances, much of their behavior – including actions undertaken in their dog trainer role – are perceived by some only in the context of this label, their tainted social role. Fellow prisoners, corrections officers, NEADS personnel, and community members can, without awareness, interpret dog trainers’ behavior as reflective of a stigmatized status.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

Data obtained in interviews, observation, and institutional records, evolved into a set of findings which can then be understood within the preceding theoretical framework. A



prison is a complex social system, wherein competing hierarchies exist. The rules correctional professionals enforce are designed to keep the public safe from the inmates, and the inmates safe from one another; rigidity wards off chaos. Prisoners have been judged, found wanting, and labeled as social deviants. Society has agreed to punish those who break its laws by incarceration. Incarceration requires differences in power and authority, between prison workers and prisoners; fine differences in status are keenly felt by workers and prisoners alike. Corrections professionals and the wider culture are split as to whether, once incarcerated, prison should simply incapacitate the incorrigible, or strive to rehabilitate those who made bad choices but can change. Both sides of that disagreement are reflected in the beliefs of DOC workers, NEADS, the community, and prisoners themselves, and affect the interaction of all those impacted by NEADS at MCI/F.

It is also true that the primary purpose of the dog program – especially to NEADS – is the raising and training of skilled service dogs in a cost-effective manner, to keep costs down for NEADS and make the service dogs affordable for its clients. For NEADS, prisoner rehabilitation is positive, but secondary. MCI/F however, focuses on the rehabilitative aspect of participation in the NEADS program, while taking pride in the training of successful service dogs in the process. The twin goals of the program are complementary, but awareness of this dualism is necessary to understand the program’s impact on the prison.

The dog program at MCI/F clearly serves the community: disabled citizens need well-trained service dogs. A rehabilitated prisoner serves the prison community as well, as constructively engaged prisoners and their puppies make the prison a happier place to work. Finally, to the extent that participation in the dog program contributes to rehabilitation upon release, public safety is enhanced. Rarely, does a program succeed on so many fronts at

once. NEADS at MCI/Framingham – under the leadership of Superintendent Lynn Bissonnette – has braved the complexities of implementation, and sought the feedback contained in this study. These findings and recommendations are intended to lend another pair of eyes to observe this unique partnership and enhance the experience of all.

### *Strengthening the bond*



The status of inmate is difficult. Prison is hard to adjust to, and hard to make the best of. Yet that is what prison would like inmates to do, and the NEADS program furthers that aim. Strong social bonds encourage pro-social behavior, as bonds give inmates something to value, “something to lose.” Prison staff report knowing this:

“Having another life to care for, it’s an opportunity to gain self-confidence, self-worth. Being in the program, if they have to make a choice, it helps them make a healthier choice. If you have ten women in the dog program, that’s generally ten women you don’t have to worry about.”

Inmate trainers confirm:

“The dogs give me a reason to get up. I think that if I didn’t have a dog I would sleep all day.”

“The program has taught me patience, to be more respectful. I think the program is a life-altering thing. Without the program, I was constantly in trouble. I think of all the consequences more than I used to.”

“My dog actually taught me about myself. I didn’t think it was possible to change me from within, but I got confidence from (my dog). I still had my moments when I

would get upset, but he would always give me hope. Every time I went to get mad, I would look at my dog and the anger melted away. “

“I was hardened and my dog made me softer.”

It is difficult to stay out of “the mix,” the intense social world of inmates, who, from their demoted status battle for increments of comfort, status and privilege. Living in close proximity while deprived of their autonomy, relations among inmates sometimes focus on small differences, tiny advantages, perceived slights, seemingly petty complaints. Being in “the mix” can lead to rule infractions, and infractions can lead to “hard time.” The dog program mitigates against this by culling from the population a pro-social cohort for those who participate and wish to remain discipline report-free:

“I wanted to keep my distance from everybody, but every time I’d take (my dog) out to do her business, I’d see the other people in the dog program out there too. I was socialized by them not because I wanted to but because being in the dog program made me, and I finally started making relationships in prison.”

The basis of the bond the inmate forms with the program is strengthened when her dog is placed with a client in need.

Successful placement reinforces the social bond of the dog training program; success in the NEADS program is when one’s dog is placed with a deaf or disabled client.

However, despite the best efforts of

NEADS and the inmate trainer, some dogs cannot be placed with a NEADS client.

Temperamental issues and medical problems rule them out for placement with a client who needs the dog to be absolutely free of any such problem. In those cases, the dogs become



potentially very well-trained pets, open for adoption. However, when that happens, the bond is threatened and must be managed when a dog cannot be placed. According to NEADS,

“There is no difference in the caliber of the dogs trained by the men versus the women, but there is a big difference in their reaction when dogs fail. The men tend to blame the dog, but the women always blame themselves.”

Characterizing dogs who cannot be placed because of temperamental or physical features, as “failing” or even, “flunking” creates a sense in the trainer of having failed in the program.

Failure is a familiar feeling to inmate trainers, and so it may be advisable to find a new way to characterize what happens when a dog, through no fault of the trainer or the dog, isn’t

placed. One trainer, whose dog had not been placed with a client, remembers:

“Sometimes dogs don’t make it because of medical reasons, or they have fear issues, and there is nothing you can do about it if that’s so... the dog that flunked on me for the fear of cars, there was nothing I could have done for that. But there is that little bit of me that says if I would have done something different, he wouldn’t have failed.”



Of course, those in the DOC and NEADS who use the term use it lightly, even facetiously.

There is no bad intent; the dog is not hurt by this, of course, but the trainer is. It might be simpler just to delineate between becoming a “working dog” and a “pet,” omitting the stigma associated with “flunking out.” An innocent remark by a

corrections officer can be very discouraging to a hard-working trainer:

“I used to walk around with (my dog) and this one officer used to really like him, and he’d say, ‘Let me know if he flunks out, OK?’ It was like he wanted us both to fail.”

“Some of these officers ‘shop’ our dogs, and then if they fail, get to buy them at a good price. I heard they go to the head of the list before the community people who are waiting. I don’t think it’s fair, and it makes me want to hide my dog from them.”

Current practice is to, whenever possible, give a trainer a new puppy when their current dog leaves: inmates call this “leash to leash.” It is motivated both by a shortage of trainers, and the desire to soften the blow of having to give up a dog whose training in prison is complete. When possible, the inmate trainer is given a puppy on the same day she gives up the dog she has raised for a year and a half. Diverting the natural pain of loss with this new responsibility may work in the short term, and ensure the bond remains, but it may be unnatural to encourage inmate trainers to repress the emotional upheaval of their loss. Some trainers would prefer a break, if not to mourn, at least to process the time they’ve invested:

“I don’t like it that as soon as one dog leaves, we get another. I’d like to be able to go back to my room, and have a good cry. Then, I’d be ready for the next one, but I need a little time to get over it.”

Even a week’s delay might establish a more natural rhythm, acknowledging the deep attachment that inmate trainers form with their dogs, as it is precisely that attachment which accounts for their success. It is likely if they knew another pup were coming, it would provide the comfort an immediate one does, and not preclude their natural reaction at separation. The mental health staff at MCI/F would doubtless be very effective in helping trainers process their grief and integrate it into their personal growth, after each dog.

It is worth noting that not all inmate trainers would seek to have that delay, however. It might be best to respond to the needs of the individual trainer, and tailor the placement of the next pup to the wishes of the trainer.

“...it’s hard because you have your dog that you just trained for over a year and they bring in this little puppy, and you walk your dog out and start all over with this

puppy. I'd rather it be that way, though, so I don't have to sit and think about the fact that the dog I just loved and trained for a year is gone. It's bittersweet."

The exigencies of timing and the desire to raise more dogs for clients affects the structure of the program. Inmate Trainers are a mix of inmates with long sentences and relatively short ones; long-termers tend to be main inmate trainers while short-termers serve as back-ups. The mixing of these populations in Massachusetts's only women's prison women is managed as best as can be expected, but can cause friction apparent in the dog program:

"Some of these short-termers are only in the program for the good time, so they can leave earlier. When they're my back-ups, sometimes I feel like 'I would never give her my dog' "

"I don't want to hear them with their skid bids (*short sentences*), crying about being in prison"

Prisoners with less time to serve become "back up handlers" who take the dog when the main handlers (the long-termer) has an obligation and needs to be dog-free for a few hours. While staff may see the back-up handler as "trainers in waiting," only those with more than two years to serve can ever advance from "back up" to "main."



Thus, while a staff member may cite "DUIs (*those incarcerated for driving under the influence*) that are "very nice people and would make good trainers" the long-term trainers distinguish between the perceived higher level of commitment of the long-termers over short-termers. Commitment is key to maintaining a social bond, one that supports pro-social behavior. It is beyond the scope of this report to make a fully informed recommendation in

this regard. It is, however, worth noting that the orientation of those in the dog program for the long haul – the long-termers - do seem to approach it with a seriousness that NEADS might wish to recognize. Some staff agree:

“Some do it for the good time, those are mostly the short termers. The lifers do it to be productive. 40% of the handlers are lifers – that’s why NEADS is such a success – we have a nice little foundation of handlers”

*Reward* is key in reinforcing a social bond, in increasing the motivation for positive actions lest something of value be lost. From all reports, gestures of recognition are critical in reinforcing the social bond wrought by the dog program. An example: when dogs graduate, NEADS produces a card, patterned on a baseball card, with the dog’s vital statistics, picture, and the phrase, “trained at MCI/Framingham.” Some inmate trainers have expressed a desire to:

“just have our names – just our first names, we know is all we could have – on those cards. So it says, ‘trained by (her name) at MCI/Framingham’ ”

The \$2 cost of the card, meant to be a fundraiser for NEADS, probably ought to be waived for inmate trainers as well, who should receive two cards *gratis*, one to keep and another to send home to loved ones.

The greatest reward, the strongest reinforcement of the social bond created by participation in the program occurs at “Graduation.” Every year in June, nearly a dozen dogs, some of whom have already been placed with a client, graduate at MCI/Framingham. They are honored at an event which inmate trainers, community members who have received dogs, weekend trainers, NEADS and DOC officials attend. There is nothing more rewarding than when a dog trained at MCI/F returns to graduation with the client who received the dog; the inmate gets to see firsthand the fruits of her labor. While a few clients do return for

graduation, more might if they realized how meaningful it is to the trainers to see the dogs they trained succeed:

“Seeing that the client’s life is restored and made easier because of my work gives me such a high. Months later, I’m still riding that high.”

“We don’t get a lot of credit for what we do. There was one dog placed with a Senator, but it was never spoken of or addressed that a woman in prison raised this dog to help her out. Us convicts, criminals, whatever you want to call us, we’re not seen as good enough to do something good or right.”

A member of Congress -- Gabrielle Giffords from Arizona -- received a dog trained at MCI/F but could not visit MCI/F for graduation, so MCI/F arranged a *Skype* between Giffords and the incarcerated trainer who had raised her dog. The dog recognized the inmate’s voice, and the inmate was gratified to see that the dog had adjusted to her new home. Graduation grants “closure” and aids in the mourning process inmates experience when their dogs leave; it can be painful, but with the support of skilled program and mental health staff, it becomes a valuable life lesson. About a dog she had trained that she saw again at graduation, an inmate trainer reports,

“I thought he couldn’t live without me, but when he came back, he didn’t run back to me, he came over like to say hi, but went right back to the client. For me that was closure. I want to see the connection, and I have never not seen it, with any dog that has come back. I don’t know how NEADS does it, but they match the dogs up perfectly.”

A staff member recalls a conversation with an inmate trainer.

“She said, ‘I saw (my dog) at graduation, and he ran over to me, and then turned right around and went and sat by his owner, like I wasn’t anyone to him anymore.’ She was upset and I told the inmate, ‘(your dog) can do that because of *you*, because of what *you* did.’ A lot of these women have never done anything this important before, and I tell them they can stand up to anyone who ever told them they wouldn’t amount to anything in life, and they can say: ‘*I did that!*’”

Graduation at MCI/F is a wonderful occasion. The prison hosts a lovely event, replete with speeches, dog skill demonstrations and pastry, and MCI/F invites everyone. It would be a



positive addition to the training provided by NEADS – to the clients, and the weekend trainers – to emphasize the importance of attending at the end of a dog’s time at MCI/F with their inmate trainer. It affords everyone a chance to say thank you to the trainers, and provides the closure which reinforces the bond created by the program.

***Reintegration through giving back***

Inmate trainers attach different meanings to the dogs. Some are very business-like, viewing it as a job. Others view it as an opportunity to learn responsibility and improve their caretaking skills. All agree however that raising a dog for a deaf or a disabled person affords them an opportunity to give back, to compensate for the harm they have caused. This successful act of “paying it forward” can come in fits and starts. One trainer, accepted to the program earned a Discipline Report and was out of the program for a time. She wanted to be part of the program, so she remained “D-report” free for the six months prior to re-admittance and has been D-report-free ever since. She says, speaking of her own tendency to be critical of new trainers, but also reflecting on her own participation in the program:

“The reality is...you learn by trial and error, and it’s not fair to judge new handlers by their prior reputation. They need to have a chance to prove they have changed. I’m a prime example of someone who was able to change people’s negative perception of me through my involvement with the program.”

It is likely that no one, prisoner or staff, would argue that the inmate handlers should not be incarcerated. However, as one staff member states, inmates are also “someone’s mother, sister, wife – they are more than just inmates.” Another reminds us that, “90% of them go home, so why not get them used to being treated as human beings?” Another staff member states:

“they get a chance to selflessly give back ...in Laurel (*the unit where dog trainers live*) there are some women who are ill – the people in the dog program take their dogs over to them and give them a nudge...it changes people.”

Just as it does in forming a pro-social bond, graduation looms large for inmate trainers, who are motivated by the desire to “give back” to the community they have wronged. They feel keenly the disdain and disrespect associated with “convict” and wish there were more recognition by the public of the hard work they do. One laments that,

“I think only four clients of dogs trained in the prison have come back to graduation. I wish more people took the time to meet the women who worked so hard to train the dogs that help them everyday.”

Selfless service is ideal, but recognition goes a long way to reduce prisoners’ internalized shame, the stigma of incarceration, and to repair the rift between the prisoner and society. However, the 24/7 work of the trainers is too often invisible outside the walls. Instead, their work for NEADS may even be interpreted as NEADS’ service to them. Their participation does do them good, in ways already noted, but their contribution to clients’ lives is inestimable, and their service could to be elevated and made more visible.

NEADS reports that inmate trainers do a better job than community raisers, that a dog raised in prison requires half the time devoted to advanced training than do dogs raised in the community. (DeRoche 2013). NEADS reports that prison-raised pups are the gentlest dogs, the best dogs to place with children. Still, prisoners’ success is too often chalked up to “they have the time”, rather than skill and dedication. In fact, based on their schedules, a sample one included below, these inmate trainers have precious little free time not devoted to programming, to schooling, to a prison job.

## Time Chart

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
12:00 AM							
1:00 AM							
2:00 AM							
3:00 AM							
4:00 AM							
5:00 AM							
6:00 AM	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count
7:00 AM	Work	school	work	work	work	work	work
8:00 AM		school			School	canteen	
9:00 AM	train	school	train	train	School		
10:00 AM		school		training	School		
11:00 AM	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count
12:00 PM	Work	work	Work	work	work	work	work
1:00 PM	Gym	train	train	train	train	train	
2:00 PM	train	Gym	Gym	Gym	Gym	Gym	Gym
3:00 PM	Gym			peer support meeting			
4:00 PM	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count
5:00 PM	homework	Homework	Homework	Homework	Homework	Homework	Homework
6:00 PM	Homework			School	School		
7:00 PM				School	School		
8:00 PM				School	School		
9:00 PM							
10:00 PM							
11:00 PM							
12:00 AM							

So it is not free time, but dedication and devotion that makes prison pups special. The dogs accompany their inmate trainers to school, the library, the visiting room – all the activities of a productive inmate who “programs.” As one staff member questioned,

“In what world, what family with kids, pets, running a household does someone have the single-minded focus to train a dog like they do? In here, the inmates’ focus is 24/7, constant, every moment is a teaching moment”

The NEADS/MCI/F partnership is a powerful one between the inmate and the community; it offers an opportunity for reparation when the prisoner feels appreciated. One inmate states,

“ I love (*my dog’s*) weekend people because they send me pictures and they are so good with telling me everything that happens with him...I think the weekend handlers are open to the dog program being conducted in the prison, the current people really try to spread the word in the community about the program in prison.”

The NEADS program is truly restorative, in that it offers a “way back in” to the good graces of society, a means by which – in the midst of shame – to prove one’s worth.

For it to work as a tool of reintegration, however, society has to know about it and honor the inmates' service.

### ***Rethinking the label***

Labeling theory holds that it is possible for everything a person does to be wrongly interpreted as a function of their label; this is especially true if that label is a stigmatizing one. Such is the case with the dog trainer who is also an inmate. As one corrections officer characterizes inmate trainers,

“You don't know who you're dealing with in here. The fundamental baseline is that you can't trust them, they are likely to be sociopaths. No person of sound mind would do well in prison.... Inmates tend to be narcissistic sociopaths, but the dog program mitigates against that as inmates form a sincere relationship to another living thing”

Another likes the program, but says “it doesn't belong in a prison”. He continues,

“To me it's not a real program, the inmates, they get attached and feel like it's their dog, their buddy to hang out with, and play with, and a lot of them forget this is a prison.... Whether or not the dog passes or fails, they are given another puppy within a short amount of time. That's not good for the women because some of them may have had their children taken away from them and ...they are just given another dog and told not to worry about it. I think the program itself is good and great, for the service it provides and the positive actions it has for people, but it is not meant for the prisons.”

Fortunately, this view is not shared by all staff. Colleagues of these officers say some just “dislike change, and buck any new program.” But the NEADS program is no longer new. Staff report that a dislike of the program by those apparently immune to the charms of dogs in their workplace is attributable to people who “are just plain grumpy”. Perhaps the best explanation comes from a staff member who reports that, “Some people just have a hard time saying an inmate does anything well.”

The overarching stigma of incarceration, especially in the midst of the power relations between C.O.s and inmates, can taint the most neutral, the most innocent actions of inmate trainers. Some C.O.s say they “care too much,” “have too many privileges,” when, for example, they have to take a younger dog out in the middle of the night. Dedication is interpreted as manipulation, caring as neurotic attachment. Some have difficulty reconciling the actions as expert dog trainers with the stigmatized inmate role.

Even fellow inmates can judge the actions of inmate trainers from a negative presumption, attached to the stigmatizing label that inmates have internalized. Not understanding training procedures, inmate trainers have been heckled, called abusive when they are stern with the dog in the course of a lesson. Inmate trainers have learned to avoid certain lessons in public, such as a “hard down” in which the lead is shortened abruptly. Training sessions are time-limited especially when dogs are young; when the dog is not working, “playing” with the dog is an essential part of puppy-raising. Yet some inmates characterize the play time as proof of irresponsibility, or of gaming the system.

The notion that inmates are responsible trainers is difficult for some officers to reconcile with the inmate label. For example, NEADS dogs eat only kibble, no human food is allowed, as it causes intestinal distress, and can keep a dog from going out for the weekend. When a dog has a stomach upset, and cannot leave the prison for the weekend, the assumption by some is that the trainers are violating that rule, feeding them food “from their canteen.” Inmate trainers have a vested interest in their dogs being well, and able to leave for the weekend, so they are motivated to adhere strictly to the nutritional guidelines of NEADS. It is just as likely that a corrections officer, who may mean well, gives the dog “treats” as he would at home. The officer may have a hard time listening to the inmate trainer who tells

him the dogs cannot have human food. Just as likely is the inmate trainer, who knows a C.O. does not respect them or their wishes, and is intimidated to forcefully challenge the authority of the C.O. A trainer reports,

“I’ve just gotten to the point like ‘Just do what you want to do’ If I tattle on them, nothing is going to happen to them and at the end of the day, that is just going to make them more pissy with me and I have to be here.”

Caution is justified by the report of a C.O. who resents agency on the part of inmates, saying

“There is a level of frustration here, there should be a strict set of rules, so that inmates can’t just use the dog as an excuse. They have too many privileges. It is just aggravating because if the inmates don’t get what they want they will go over the chain of command. That’s an insult to me.”

“Inmate” is a powerful label, associated with scarcely anything positive. In addition, it is a powerless status, where independent agency is discouraged, beyond the prescribed control of one’s own behavior. It is therefore not surprising that the pejorative label of “inmate” can contaminate the perception of everything an inmate does, and prompt resistance in her role of skilled “dog trainer.” Their authority is questioned, their efforts to control the process seen as pathological; at other times, their service is merely invisible. Happily, many DOC workers enthusiastically embrace inmates’ participation in the dog program and easily accommodate the departures the program requires from the usual role of prisoners. The program is hindered, however, by those who believe that, while the work may be good, inmates cannot be good – therefore, who feel justified in viewing dog trainers as unprofessional and unethical in their role performance.

The role of dog trainer can reduce the likelihood that the label of prisoner will become a “master status”, that is, the only role in which a prisoner is perceived. The master status of inmate can guide interactions with DOC workers, NEADS workers, and even the families of

prisoners, who while they remember loved ones as free citizens, for so long have only seen them in the Visiting Room. Program participation can make contact with loved ones outside the prison go more smoothly, and mitigate against “prisoner” becoming a loved one’s master status. Conversations of the dog trainer no longer must only revolve around incarceration, always a painful topic, and one that depicts the inmate according to that status alone.

Program participation normalizes interactions as one inmate trainer reports,

“now my family will say ‘How’s college?’ or ‘How’s the dog program?’ instead of just, you know, ‘How’s prison?’”

### ***Managing Status Inconsistency***

A status is a position in a particular social setting within the social structure. All of us occupy several statuses, and some statuses render us more powerful than others. As a consequence, in interaction we seek to be perceived in the highest status available to us, so that, in essence, the interaction will go in our favor. Prisoners and DOC workers, as well as NEADS workers, interact in carefully circumscribed ways. Security demands that DOC workers’ “outside” identities be kept from prisoners, and prisoners’ “outside” identities are of no consequence in prison. Furthermore, in a prison community, statuses are designed to be fully articulated by authority figures, and not subject to individual control or definition.

Corrections program staff and security staff are arranged, each group in its own hierarchy, in a “chain of command.” Each ascending rung on the hierarchy is designed to demand greater responsibility and offer greater control. In contrast, the social structure of the prison requires that all prisoners be on the same low rung, subject to the same constraints. That is, not only is the status of prisoner distinct from that of non-prisoner, but each prisoner must occupy a status that is undifferentiated, one inmate from another. Finally, in the prison

community, the relationship between DOC employee and inmate is unequal. One has power over the other, reciprocity is not the norm; those unequal social relations are encoded in the status obligations of each. The design of status relations prison is intended to ensure the smooth functioning of the prison.

The NEADS program causes a slight but important recalibration of those status relations. First of all, it creates a class of prisoners who must, in the performance of their duties as dog trainers, exercise more autonomy than their fellow-inmates. Secondly, the status obligations of program staff can accommodate independent judgment exercised by prisoners, more easily than can the security staff, as the latter's performance is more reliant on the absolute predictability of prisoner behavior. The NEADS program has introduced enough variation into the system that multiple respondents characterized the new status arrangements as: "black, white, and gray." Some were untroubled by the changes wrought by the NEADS program, while others reject the program as inappropriate, disruptive, even unwise.

### *Black, White, and Grey*

Both the status positions of prisoner and DOC worker are what social scientists refer to *ideal types*. Even though role behavior is clearly articulated and encoded by the DOC, real people who occupy these statuses can and do deviate, within the setting's strict limits. In interviews with C.O.s, some reported,

"A lot of people want to see the prison as black and white, they expect it to be that way, but there is a lot of gray area that is overlooked. The dog program is a big part of that gray area."

"In the old days, the 80's and 90's, officers were taught that it was just black or white, no gray. There was an 'us/them' mentality, they were the bad guys and we were the good guys. 99% of the emphasis was on just keeping them locked up, on security. Now we're taught about the gray area. It's a generational thing."



### *Vulnerability of inmate trainers*

Sometimes, when inmates are perceived, by those who adhere to the black/white model and the us/them mentality, as violating their role, DOC workers violate theirs as well. A prisoner noted,

“some guards are OK and others are just disrespectful. When one guard is harassing a handler or an inmate, other guards will join in and follow the lead of that officer. And a lot of the guards have issues with power; there is a power struggle because the dog program allows for inmates to have more access to outside.”

When this is true, the inmate trainer cannot win. Hostility to the inmate trainer can put a “target on my back” as one trainer put it.

“If a C.O. has it in for you, he can roust your cell and find something, anything, to get you kicked out of the program – he can give you a D-report for an extra blanket and you’re through.”

Similarly, fellow inmates, not in the dog program, may try to sabotage the clean record required for participation in the dog program.

“Some of these women will try to get you to fight them, and get you a ticket, or make it look like you did something wrong, so you’ll get kicked out. This happens more when the new puppies come in, than when the dogs are older. I just think it’s jealousy.”

Participation in the dog training program at Framingham makes for status inconsistency that must be managed by inmates. It is indeed a privilege to be a dog trainer, earned by maintaining a spotless record for 6-month before entering, and thereafter. Further, it is true that it does afford small gradations of greater autonomy, and the opportunity to give back, to do something important. But these privileges do not come without a price, paid by the inmate trainer who may be resented by the C.O. who clings to the “black/white” division between powerless inmate and powerful corrections officer --- and by the fellow inmate, who for

reasons of her own, resents the good fortune and success of her sister. Thus, while participation in the program is desirable, it is not entirely so. And the position of the prisoner, powerless by definition, makes it difficult to manage interactions where status is uneven, and in which only one status wields any power. This vulnerability on the part of inmate trainers may decrease the willingness of more prisoners to occupy this complicated status. Both NEADS and the DOC have the power to protect these inmates, who make the choice to give back, and in so doing incur a special vulnerability within the institution.

### ***The System***

No one - inmate trainer, NEADS, the DOC, community members - would argue that NEADS at MCI/F does not conform to the “win-win” characterization in the literature. Given its success over the years, this conclusion was almost foregone: animals become useful to those outside the walls, while the prisoner gains in pride, self-esteem, empathy, self-control and responsibility. This report looks more closely at the NEADS dog program at MCI/Framingham, and discovers how that mutual “win” comes about, and how it can be made even stronger, thereby reducing the obstacles to greater participation in the program.

To fully understand how the NEADS program impacts the system at MCI/F, it may be useful to include to this detailed and lengthy description of how it impacts one inmate trainer:

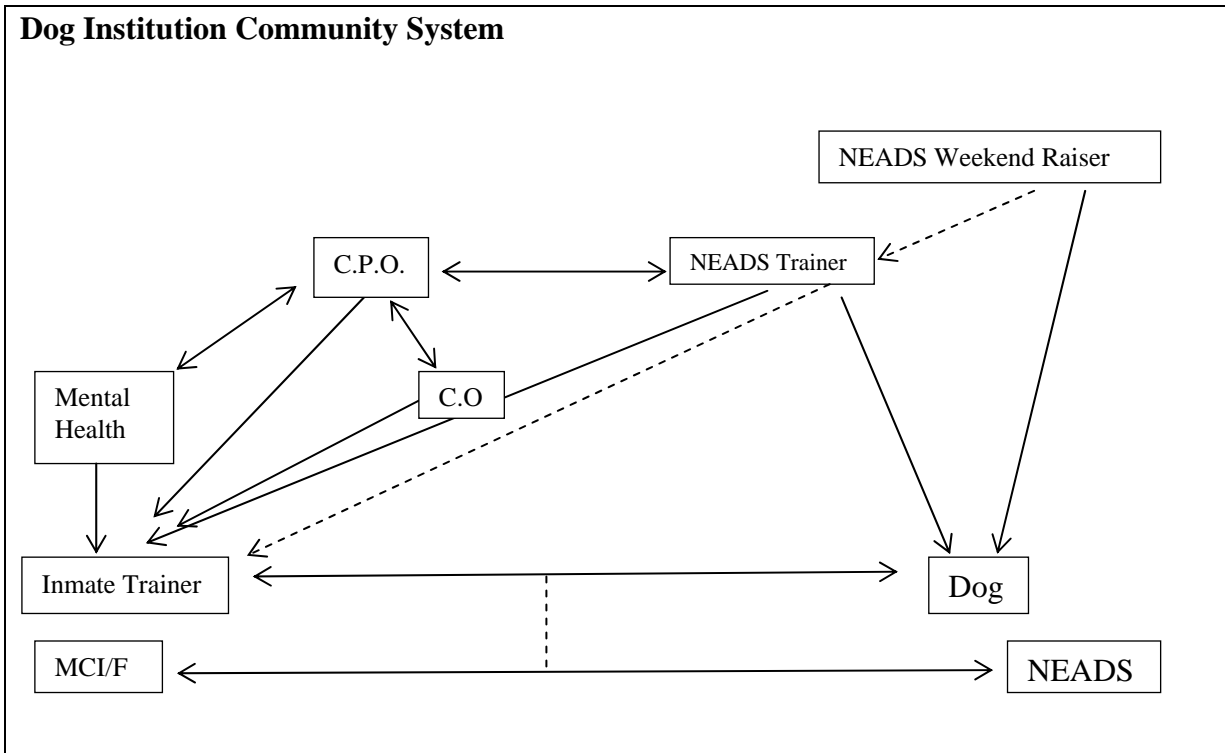
“6:00 am marks count number one for the day. After count #1 I take (*my dog*) out to do her business. I put her back to sleep after –she’s a really good sleeper. 7:30 am I take her out again, and then she is fed breakfast in my room. 8:00, I go to work at (*work assignment*). During this time my boss might take (*my dog*) out to play, while I work. At 9:00 I do my first training session of the day, inside the unit for about 20-30 minutes. The training time will increase as (*my dog*) gets older and can stay focused for longer periods of time. After training, (*my dog*) usually takes a nap. I take her out following her nap – while she’s awake she needs to be taken out about every twenty minutes, or she’ll do her business in the unit.

Then I feed her lunch, which is followed by another 20-30 minute training session – that'll get longer eventually. After this session I take her out to the Day Room in the unit, where I settle her around lots of human traffic, voices, sounds, and people in general. This is essential so that the dogs will stay calm and obedient in all circumstances once they have been placed with their eventual owners. I stay doing this until around 2:00, when the older dogs come back from NEADS weekly training, and (*my dog*) is let out to play off-leash with the other dogs. During this time (*my dog*) usually does her business again and then it's her naptime again at approximately 3:30 pm. She then goes out again right before the afternoon count around 4:00 pm.

Chow is at 5 to 5:30. When she's this little, I sometimes skip dinner. It's kind of a motherly instinct I guess – I want to make sure she is taken care of before I take care of myself. After dinner I do another training session doing commands while the other dogs play. This ensures my dominance because (*my dog*) is VERY dog-driven. I try to maintain the “alpha attitude” in any situation that the two of us are presented with. Then it's time for some quiet time and relaxation for (*my dog*) and me. That wraps up the day – as far as dog responsibilities go.”

### ***Reciprocity***

The system of which the dog program at MCI/F is part includes the inmate trainers and their dogs, the security staff, the program staff, the administration, the NEADS staff, the community weekend trainers, and the waiting client population. If this system existed in the “free world” many of these relationships would be interactive and reciprocal. In that it exists in prison, the system is captured in the chart below.



The only relationship that is truly reciprocal is that between the trainer and her dog. All other players in the system relate unilaterally to the inmate trainer, or to their counterpart in power and authority. This is an important aspect of the system, as the trainer/dog relationship is the lynchpin, the very center of the enterprise, and the relationship upon which a positive outcome for NEADS rests. The social setting of the system – MCI/F and NEADS - can be viewed as either supporting the system, or as stressing it. For these reasons, it is important to examine not only the points in the system that effect a unquestioned “win,” but to also examine the aspects that add stress to the system and could be enhanced for the betterment of all.

***Support for the system***

*Institutional*

There is no question that Superintendent Lynn Bissonnette is due the credit for the success of the NEADS program at MCI/F, and at the other prisons in Massachusetts that have instituted the program subsequent to her early success at Gardner. As a program officer states,

“the support for the program has to start from the top. The Super here is all about programs, more, more, more – there’s like 858 volunteers at Framingham. If she weren’t into programs, you could tell her how great a program is, and if the Super didn’t want it, they’d make up some reason not to do it”.

Supported by leadership at the top of the institution, program staff work carefully throughout the institution to quell any discord between security and program personnel. Line officers acknowledge C.P.O. Laura Galvani’s skill in the selection of inmate dog trainers, and feel acknowledged by her awareness that there are times when the needs of the dog program conflict with security protocols. She is everywhere within the facility, making sure that every officer has her extension, urging them to call her with the slightest question. This research itself was a disruption in the routine of the prison; CPO Galvani accommodated our team, smoothed our entry, and used her familiarity with the institution to help us accomplish our research goals in the short time we had on-site.

Laura Galvani works with George Brown and Leo Nortey, Corrections Program Officers who are strongly invested in the dog program, work closely with Laura and with outside volunteers and visitors. The NEADS program is supported by Morgan McGinty, mental health worker, responsible for screening initial candidates for the program and providing needed opportunities to vent. Though not technically a part of the NEADS program, the Grievance Officer – with dog pictures on her bulletin board, a dog bed in the corner, and a sock attached to her desk drawer – is a crucial support to the success of the program.

## *Climate*

An ancillary benefit of having dogs in a prison is what dogs can do to the institutional climate. An inmate trainer, who takes her dog to her work assignment, reports,

“I work in Admissions, and so I see people when they first come into the prison and they are distraught and scared and sometimes just seeing (*my dog*) can make their day a little better.”

Another inmate trainer takes her dog to the Visiting Room with her,

“I get visits usually once a week from family and friends, and I always take (*my dog*). All the kids go right for the dog. It’s happy, you know, it’s happy for the kids and it’s happy for me, I enjoy watching that.”

A DOC worker observes,

“The prison environment is grim, but the puppies lighten it up. This place is awful, then you just see the puppies and you can’t help but get happy. It’s the best thing the institution ever did.”

A corrections officer echoes his colleague,

“You know, it’s like you take a room full of ten strangers and you put a puppy in there, at one time or another one of all of those strangers will end up communicating with the others because the puppy is there. It opens up a line of communication between staff and inmates, that can be seen as appropriate and good. You know if you see an inmate with a puppy, and you’ve never seen this inmate before and you speak to them and say ‘hey, how is the dog doing?’, you’ve opened that line, and further down the road if a situation arises, that inmate knows that have someone to talk to or go to. (*the program*) has created a better environment with the dogs being here. There is more harmony here now than before. “

## ***Stress on the system***

NEADS tells us they have “dogs circling the runway,” that they are crowded with dogs (DeRoche 2013). They say that if there were more trainers at Framingham, they could, and would, place more dogs there. Given the acknowledged success of the program, what then keeps prisoners from petitioning to be screened, accepted, and trained? We would argue that stressors on the system prevent some from coming forward, and that removing these

obstacles would increase the pool from which inmate dog trainers could be chosen.

Stressors exist at NEADS, MCI/F, and within the community of inmate trainers themselves.

*The relationship between inmate trainers and weekend raisers*

NEADS would like to have more weekend volunteers in its arsenal, and inmate trainers would like to know they will be afforded a break from their 24/7 sometimes exhausting



responsibilities in the prison. NEADS cannot force volunteer weekend raisers to keep their commitment to pick up the dog at the prison three out of every four weekends, although that is what is requested. Inmate trainers are disappointed when weekend trainers do not “show,” sometimes at the last minute. Their imaginations even run to thoughts that, as one said, “I don’t think

the weekend people like my dog.” In an effort to ensure reliable weekend volunteers, therefore, NEADS does a thorough job of discouraging those only marginally interested and rewarding those who are reliable.

Dogs who leave the prison for the weekend are characterized as “excited to be home”, meaning the home of the community raiser. Adherence to dietary regimen is highlighted by discussing how stomach distress will keep the dog from leaving the prison for the weekend, and may be casually attributed to inmate trainers feeding their dogs inappropriately. Whether or not this is true, it is an assumption that diminishes the regard that the weekend raisers have for the inmate trainers.

Communication with inmate trainers is strictly limited to written communiqués, and inmates tell us that it is supremely important to them, both from an emotional point of view,

and from their desire that weekend raisers do not depart from their dog's training regimen. NEADS reviews what inmate trainers write to weekend raisers, to ensure its correctness and assuage security concerns. The program would be strengthened if this relationship were if not more direct, then more complete. The two share the care of the dog, yet the one who is mainly responsible for the dog's training is restricted to minimal communication with those who have the dog 6 days out of the month. The two sets of custodians are natural allies; security concerns are paramount, but their experience with the dog for the previous week or two could mean there is more to say than can be said in the limited space provided inmate trainers. In addition, photographs - of the puppy in the community -- are not universally allowed, and perhaps ought to be.

In light of the central role played by the volunteer inmate trainers, it is surprising that community members and NEADS sometimes proceed as if the NEADS program were a service to the inmate trainers, instead of the other way around. The NEADS program is indeed a service to the incarcerated, but their status as prisoners should not invalidate what they do or say. The NEADS program, while "not about them", would suffer without them, and the demanding work they do. Weekend raisers may underestimate the demands of training a puppy 24 out of 30 days. They may, in turn then, underestimate how important their six days are to the inmate's well-being, as well as the dog's, and eventually the client's. Weekend raisers are a vital part of training the dog and relieving its fulltime primary trainer. When inmate trainers are related to according to their lowly status, and kept at arm's length, weekend trainers may miss the opportunity to work as a vital part of a genuine team.



### *One prison, two dog programs*

At MCI/F, the NEADS program has been an unqualified success. So successful, in fact, that it inspired a second dog training program within the institution: dogs trained to work specifically with disabled veterans. The Vet Dogs program was introduced to the prison by a former NEADS employee in 2011, and trains an average 4-6 dogs at MCI/F each year. The training protocols differ slightly, as the Vet dogs are intended for a different client population. Vet inmate trainers live in a separate housing unit from NEADS trainers, but share administrative support from the MCI/F program officers. They share training facilities, and institutional policies regarding inmates' purchasing gifts and supplies for their dogs. Still, there are problems of competition, when prisoners, with few other sources of pride, feel their turf challenged.

This competition would occur in any group setting, and while it can be managed, it isn't necessarily a benefit, or a source of "healthy competition", as some would have it. It can best be addressed by a coalition of the DOC, NEADS and VETS. There is an argument to be made that the primary identity of an inmate dog trainer at MCI/F ought to be MCI/F. That is, that the pride in raising quality puppies could reflect on the MCI/Framingham's commitment to dog training, and to a much lesser extent to the individual agency, techniques, or even client populations. It is natural for inmate dog trainers to feel this competition; it is up to the institution and outside agencies to find ways to alleviate it. One means of doing so is by providing MCI/F dog trainers – NEADS and VETS – with a shared symbol which emphasizes the identity they share, and de-emphasizes the one they don't.

MCI/F, the Vet program, and NEADS has already worked out the differences in funding levels between the two programs, in the resources trainers in each group have with which to

buy toys for their dogs. We assume such negotiations could be extended to equipping MCI/F Puppy Trainers with a t-shirt that touted their shared identity. We offer a proposal for the design of such a t-shirt that would credit MCI/F as the locus of the excellent dog training provided each agency.



### *Emphasizing the Grey Area*

The uneven reception of the dog program throughout the workforce at MCI/F may be due to lack of onsite training specific to NEADS. The DOC does provide training at its Academy regarding the dog program. The training occurs outside the walls, so no dogs or trainers attend; the discussion is theoretical only. In-service training of officers, we are told, is largely a place to air grievances, certainly a needed function, but not an opportunity for those who did not pass through the Academy recently enough to become attuned to the dog program. While not always the “generational thing” one officer suggested, there appears to be lack of “buy in” about the dog program among some officers. It should be noted that there is a training manual available to those officers who wish to be consistent with training goals in their interaction with prisoners and their dogs, and the DOC Intranet has information

on the program. However, seeking this out is largely voluntary and there is a case to be made for specific training, with the dogs, at the Academy. Further, it could be useful to provide in-service training for those officers for whom the dog program came to MCI/F well into their careers.

### *The Role of Drama*

Inmate dog trainers themselves bear responsibility for a stressor which may discourage greater participation in the program: the inmate trainers call it “drama.” Prison does not include choice of association; however, inmates are not required to participate in any voluntary programs at all. If a program features too much “drama” --- cattiness, backbiting, rumors, and sniping --- that program will not be replete with eager volunteers. Once accepted to the program, however, inmate trainers have a responsibility to work as a team, to reduce the drama. This sort of teamwork is not unprecedented; program staff report that of the last class of eight dogs, seven were successfully placed because the group of trainers did indeed work successfully as a team.

To foster teamwork, DOC Mental Health offers what the trainers call “team building” sessions, conducted by the inmate-labelled “puppy psych” which is now mandatory. These meetings are designed to work out differences, come to consensus, deal with issues -- explicitly to reduce the drama. Reaction is mixed. Inmate trainers appreciate the effort, but some report that nothing of consequence is addressed, and others report that those who bring up touchy subjects are sanctioned by the rest of the group. It is possible that group members in a prison setting just have too much to lose to reveal “what’s really going on.” Mental health professionals are no doubt aware of this reluctance, and are the best ones to

arrive at a solution. Ultimately, the self-reported “cattiness” among inmate trainers is not inevitable; it is a choice. Inmates need to work as a team and find ways to rise above it, and the program should embrace those applicants that reject it as a response

*Differential Length of Sentence.*

There is the oft-reported division between long-termers and short-termers, based on length of sentence, in the MCI/F population. As the program is currently constituted, long-term roughly corresponds to full-time trainers, while short-term prisoners most often – but not always -- assume duties as back-up trainers. NEADS has shown a preference for long-termers as inmate trainers. It withdrew from a minimum security facility as many of the inmates there were not incarcerated long enough to commit the eighteen-months needed to train a puppy, or to justify all the training NEADS has invested in inmate trainers. Unlike most prisons, MCI/F has a mix of long and short term prisoners: from a weekend to life. This unavoidable aspect of the MCI/F population causes friction within the NEADS inmate trainers. Long-terms and full-time trainers sometimes resent what they see as a lack of seriousness in the short-termers/back-up trainers.

This division reflects the general difficulty of housing two populations in one prison; it will come as no surprise that the friction is felt among the dog trainers. A recommendation about resolution of this issue lies outside the scope of this report. However, it might be worth considering limiting participation as inmate dog trainers to long-termers. We are told, in interviews, that it takes roughly five years to adjust to prison, to resign yourself to prison, and determine to be productive (or not). That suggests that, if long-term inmates were to rotate in, during breaks between dogs, these inmates, who would have the skills and trust of

other trainers, could serve as back-up for one another between dogs. This would eliminate the notion that back-up trainers are “full-time trainers in waiting,” and the long-term fulltime trainers’ perception that short-termers are not trustworthy. Other solutions are possible, but the perception of different levels of competence and commitment contributes to “drama.” This element of “drama” is clearly an obstacle and a disincentive for those who might wish to join the program.

#### *A word about words*

One of the reasons participation in the dog program creates success for both dogs and inmates is that inmates take pride in their work. It is important that they feel their work is recognized, and the choice of words used to describe what they do goes a long way to accomplishing that end. People use symbols in interaction to convey meaning and words are the ultimate symbols.

NEADS and MCI/F know this. Both stopped saying its weekend trainers were taking the dogs out of the prison “on furlough” because it sounded as if on weekends, dogs and weekend raisers were free to disregard all their training done in prison. In parallel fashion, throughout this report, the authors have used “inmate trainer” or “inmate dog trainer” for the women of MCI/F who work with NEADS to train dogs. The institution and NEADS calls them “inmate handlers” which does not reflect what they do. It is dismissive to say they only “handle” these dogs five days a week, for twenty-four hours, for eighteen months.

Inmates at MCI/F raise these dogs and train them and the prison is these dogs’ primary home. 95% of NEADS dogs now are trained this way, and NEADS is very clear that dogs raised in prison are superior to those raised exclusively in the community. Yet, community

volunteers rate the title of “community raisers” or “weekend raisers” which most would agree is a more elevated title than the mere “handler.” Differences in titles matter a great deal throughout our culture, and it is no different in prison. The stigmatizing label associated with incarceration should not allow the volunteer work these inmates do to seem less than work of those in the free world who volunteer. The inmates’ work is distinct from their stigmatized status and their past mistakes, and the words used to describe their contributions should be accurate and respectful.

### **Summary**

Everyone who is touched by the NEADS program, benefits. The women who participate change their lives; they learn to sacrifice the immediate response for the long-term goal, they give back to the community they have harmed, they feel pride and accomplishment, and give and receive love as they raise these dogs for others. The program allows NEADS to train more dogs, at lessened expense to clients, and realize a superior product for its clients. The clients get a conscientiously-trained, well-loved, gentle dog. Even weekend trainers get the grandparental pleasure of a part-time dog, while they contribute to NEADS, and spread a different image of prison into their communities. A prison-raised NEADS dog is the product of much devotion on everyone’s part.

The “win-win” is obvious: dogs grow and change, inmates grow and change. However, what happens when you insert this “win-win” proposition in the center of a prison? The answer, optimally, is that the prison grows and changes, too. That has happened at MCI/F: the institution has benefited from the sunny presence of dogs, a presence that has made it “more like a real community” as one respondent put it. Corrections is hard on prisoners, but it is

also hard on workers. The prison becomes a happier place when puppies share workspace with corrections officers. We are told that puppies mitigate against the “grim.”

In sum, there is ample evidence that MCI/F has grown and changed, and that NEADS dogs and the inmate trainers have, as well. The dual goals of ensuring successful dogs for NEADS and a rehabilitative program for MCI/F have been accomplished. However, to insure that it stays a “win-win-win” proposition, there is more work to do. The stressors on the system can be reduced by changes on an organizational level – at MCI/F and NEADS, and secondarily, on an individual level – by the inmate trainers, and the weekend raisers.

We end with a summary of general recommendations and suggest ways to reward all of those who give so much of themselves to this program. The authors -- and Lasell College -- deeply appreciate the opportunity to have conducted this research, and would like to express our gratitude to all those who took the time to speak with us. We sincerely hope our research benefits NEADS and its clients, the inmate trainers, and the administration and staff of MCI/Framingham.

### ***1. Strengthen the bond***

- Consider using only long-term prisoners as FT dog trainers
- Establish a “break” between dogs, to allow for the normal period of grief for dog trainers, while mental health workers help trainers work through loss.
- Eliminate (or become extremely selective) permitting short-termers to become dog trainers, even as handlers.
- Instead, use the period “between dogs” to allow long-termers/FT trainers to act as back-up as needed.
- Eliminate the word “failed” or “flunked” when characterizing a dog better suited to become a pet.
- Eliminate the incentive of C.O.s to “shop” a dog that “flunks” and becomes available for adoption.

- Reward inmate trainers by recognizing them by first name on “baseball cards” produced when dogs graduate, and provide two free cards to each inmate trainer.

## ***2. View the NEADS program as reintegrative, as a “way back in”***

- NEADS could reinforce the MCI/F invitation to weekend raisers and clients to graduation to meet the woman who raised and trained their dog.
- When clients cannot attend graduation, institute a Skype reunion between trainer, dog, and client.
- Make the work of the inmate trainers more “visible”. That is, educate clients and weekend raisers regarding the demands of being an incarcerated dog trainer.
- Accentuate the superior quality of the dogs trained by prisoners, to clients and to the community.

## ***3. Replace the label, ignore the stigma***

- Do not pathologize, as neurotic attachment, the love inmate trainers feel for their dogs, or construe their attentiveness to their dogs’ needs as manipulation.
- Do not assume that deviation from NEADS rules (dietary, e.g.) is committed by inmates.
- Distinguish between the lowly and powerless status as prisoner, and the powerful and impactful work as dog trainer.
- Call them “inmate trainers” not “inmate handlers.”

## ***4. Embrace the status shift, the “gray area” occupied by MCI/F-NEADS dog trainers***

- Introduce in-service training for C.O.s, specific to dealing with the demands of the NEADS program, and use demonstrations with the dogs.
- Expand training regarding the NEADS program in the Academy, including bringing a dog, with a NEADS trainer.
- Ensure that C.P.O.s Laura Galvani, George Brown and Leo Nortey have the opportunity to play an active role in orienting new officers to inmate trainer role.
- At Orientation of both C.O.’s and new inmates, stress inmate trainers’ area of authority over the dog, and urge that it be respected.



- Protect inmate trainers from resentful peers, unneeded C.O. surveillance/harassment

***5. Support the system, make it more reciprocal and accountable***

- Fully recognize the needs of inmate trainers for the “break,” provided by weekend raisers.
- Consider having two weekend raisers per dog, to reduce burden on weekend raisers while ensuring a respite for FT inmate trainer. Here, back-ups would be helpful.
- Honor the work of the inmates by calling them “inmate trainers” or “inmate dog trainers” as that describes what they do more than “handlers”, which diminishes the work they do.
- Consider merging the two programs under the MCI/F banner, as “MCI/F Puppy Trainer”, with NEADS/VETS secondary in identity, retaining different training regimens, while reducing the competition between the programs.
- Make MCI/Framingham synonymous with dog training; raise its profile in Massachusetts and the nation.
- Demand maturity among inmate trainers, requiring that they work as a team for the sake of the dogs: that, in confidential settings, they openly acknowledge tension, resolve to defuse it, and not contribute to it.
- Reinforce and reward the formal participation of MCI/F mental health workers, not only in “dog psych” but also in ongoing mental health support for individual trainers, as needed, and on the group process required of teamwork.
- Consider limiting participation in the program to long-term prisoners, having FT trainers serve as back-ups between dogs.
- Measure success by lowered D-reports not lowered recidivism.
- Consider seeking input from inmate trainers themselves about future decisions regarding the program and their work.

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