



5-13-2014

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## Recommended Citation

Garcia, Kendra. (2014). Prisons and Pups: An Examination of Service Dog Training and Their Weekend Families. In *BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects*. Item 58. Available at: [http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors\\_proj/58](http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/58)  
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**Prisons and Pups: An Examination of Service Dog Training and Their Weekend Families**

Kendra Garcia

Submitted in Partial Completion of the  
Requirements for Departmental Honors in Sociology

Bridgewater State University

May 13, 2014

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## **Prisons and Pups: An Examination of Service Dog Training and Their Weekend Families**

### Abstract

The use of service dogs for people with disabilities has increased in the last few decades. The service dogs come in the form of companion dogs, socialization dogs, medical alert dogs, and dogs for the mobility and hearing impaired. Therapy dogs are also used in clinical settings to ease the tension in hospital, and school settings. Since their use has increased, so has the demand. Training of service dogs can take anywhere from 12-18 months and can cost upwards of \$20,000. Organizations have become creative in meeting the needs of their clients and turned to recruiting incarcerated persons in correctional facilities in helping them meet their demands.

What is missing from the research is the sociological question of why people volunteer to become weekend puppy raisers. They are asked to give up their weekends to care for a puppy and socialize it in public places. There are many rules that need to be followed to ensure the puppy has positive initial experiences. After the puppy has grown up and is now a service dog, the weekend puppy raiser must say good-bye and may choose to start the process all over again with another dog. The research in this article is to examine why people participate in such programs and what keeps them returning as volunteers. Through qualitative interviews, the findings will support that volunteers in the NEADS organization believe strongly in the organizations' mission, feel loyalty to members of the community needing assistance and have a strong sense of dog responsibility.

## ***Introduction***

In the past few decades, people with disabilities have increased their use of service dogs. The service dogs come in the form of companion dogs, socialization dogs, medical alert dogs, and dogs for the mobility and hearing impaired. Therapy dogs are also used in clinical settings to ease the tension in hospital and school settings. The demand for service dogs has increased due to the growth of service dog usage. Cost and time are important factors in obtaining a service dog. Training of service dogs can take anywhere from 12-18 months and can cost upwards of \$20,000. Organizations have become creative in meeting the needs of their clients and turned to recruiting incarcerated persons in correctional facilities in helping them meet their demands.

There is documented evidence showing that animals have been in prisons as early as 1919 (Britton & Button, 2005). During WWII prisoners in American POW camps adopted animals to care for and took pictures with them (Britton & Button, 2005). The staff at Lima State Hospital in Ohio conducted an experiment between two wards, one with animals and one without animals; based upon an inmate who cared for an injured bird and showed positive results in his recovery (Britton & Button, 2005). The results of their year-long documented experiment showed vast improvements in controlling violence and suicide attempts in the patients (Britton & Button, 2005).

Other institutions have found positive results from introducing dog programs into correctional facilities. Many people think of correctional facilities as places of punishment where nothing good can happen, but anecdotal interviews with inmates and guards suggests that the presence of animals in a correctional facility changes the atmosphere for the better and

improves the self-esteem of the inmate (Currie, 2008). Also, it is thought that inmates working with animals decreases the recidivism rate (Strimple, 2003). Through the discovery of anecdotal interviews, inmates and guards state that the presence of animals in a correctional facility changes the atmosphere for the better and improves the self-esteem of the inmate (Currie, 2008; Turner, 2007). Inmates that are dog trainers have reported that their overall patience has increased, social skills with other inmates have increased and their pride in giving back to the community (Turner, 2007; Britton & Button, 2005).

The inmate trainers in prison are able to teach puppies' basic obedience but puppies cannot become socialized in the outside world by prisoners therefore some organizations increase the success rate of the dogs' training by obtaining volunteers to partner with the inmates to further the puppy's training (Burke, Harkrader, & Owen, 2004). Further research is needed to determine why people volunteer to help the inmates by socializing the service dogs on weekends. What is the motivating factor and how do these families contribute to the service animal training? Through interviews with weekend puppy raisers, three key themes were discovered; first, a sense of loyalty to the community, second, dog responsibility in dog ownership and third, a strong belief in the NEADS mission.

## ***Literature Review***

### ***Service dogs: What are they and how are they used?***

Service dog is an umbrella term for assistance dog, guide dog, hearing dog, seizure-alert and therapy dog (Parenti, Foreman, Meade, Wirth, 2013). These terms can be confusing to the general public and not all dogs that perform jobs are allowed in public spaces. For example, a seeing eye dog is a service dog and is protected under the American with Disabilities Act

(ADA). The following paragraph is taken from the ADA website and it is the law protecting Americans with Disabilities and their service animals:

Service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Examples of such work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties. Service animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA. ([http://www.ada.gov/service\\_animals\\_2010.htm](http://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm))

The use of service dogs has become more widespread and because of the talents in helping people with impairments, they need specialized training to allow them to become focused on their handler and the tasks that the handler needs. This specialized training is what allows them to be good citizens in public places and still aid their handlers. Service dogs are asked to work for about 10 years.

Perhaps the best known and most recognizable service dogs are seeing eye dogs. Seeing eye dogs have been formally trained for the purpose of assisting blind or visually impaired people for over seventy years. In the last thirty years, service dogs have been trained to further assist people with disabilities and impairments and the success has been abundant (Wells, 2007). This therapy has expanded to include dogs that are able to provide assistance in the following areas: mobility, hearing, companionship, retrieval, and there is new research to indicate that dogs can be used as early cancer detectors (Wells, 2007; Winkle, Crowe, & Hendrix, 2012)

There are multiple benefits associated with service dogs. Their purpose is to aid people with disabilities in their daily living and help them achieve a sense of independence (Sachs-Ericsson, Hansen, Fitzgerald, 2002) but a latent function of service dogs opens a window to

socialization with the general public that probably would not take place if the presence of a dog were absent (Wells, 2007). Isolation and lack of freedom is a reported problem with people suffering from many physical and mental ailments. Dogs have been able to assist patients in closing this gap by providing them with improved social interactions and self-confidence (Wells, 2007; Sashas-Ericsson, Hanse, & Fitzgerald, 2002)

With the success of service dogs as aides for people with disabilities, their use has increased dramatically (Parenti, Foreman, Meade, Wirth, 2013). Dogs are utilized to assist people with disabilities such as diabetes, psychiatric issues, hearing impairments and physical limitations. The use of service dogs has also expanded to include pediatric patients that use them for hearing assistance, social dogs and specially trained service dogs that can retrieve dropped items (Davis, Natrass, O'Brien, Patronek & MacCollin, 2004).

Another increasingly effective use of service dogs is placement with veterans who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Taylor, Edwards & Pooley, 2013). PTSD is a trauma induced psychological illness that affects one of every six Americans coming home from war zones (Taylor, Edwards & Pooley, 2013; Walsh, 2006). "The diagnostic symptoms of PTSD include nightmare flashbacks, increased arousal, hyper vigilance, avoidance, and anger, as well as, significant manifestations of social detachment, low sexual intimacy, poor conflict resolution, substance abuse, generalized anxiety, and depression" (Taylor, Edwards & Pooley, 2013, p. 594, 2013). Veterans also convey a certain pride and are not necessarily willing to admit they need psychiatric help. If they are, then the treatments can be effective, but Taylor, Edwards & Pooley (2013) found that combat veterans are more willing to accept help in the form of animal assisted therapy. The effectiveness of this method is backed by anecdotal evidence, but more empirical research needs to be completed.

## *Service dog training*

Various breeds may be used for service work and do not have any bearing on the cost of training. Generally, labrador retrievers and golden retrievers are used for service work and german shepherds are used for police and military work. Different breeds have different talents that make them genetically predisposed to perform specific tasks well. Knowing the breed and its traits can help ensure the success of a future service dog. Dogs can be selected for purposeful roles and this assists in matching the dog with its future job. Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (GDBA) use puppy behavioral tests to choose puppies from their breeding program according to desired temperaments and reactions to certain stimuli (Asher, Blythe, Craigon, England, Evans, Green, Toothill, Roberts, 2012). Using puppy tests helps to determine if the puppy is suited for guide dog work or should be eliminated from the program. This is helpful to know in avoiding costly training if a dog is not suited to work. Not all dogs come from an organizations' private breeding program. Some breeders donate dogs to service organizations and volunteers working at shelters call service organizations to alert them of potential dogs suited for service work (NEADS, 2014).

Obedience training is the first step in training a dog for any kind of job that it may be doing. Methods of training include “tug and release”, “positive reinforcement” and “clicker training” or a combination of “positive and negative” reinforcements. In recent years, trainers have moved away from negative punishment and embraced positive reinforcement (Schlegl-Kofler, 2011). The positive reinforcement method uses praise and patience to train the dog (Schlegl-Kofler, 2011). Hitting a dog is never an option and will present problem behaviors later on in the dog's life such as barking, aggression, and biting (Blackwell, Twells, Seawright & Casey, 2012; Rooley & Cowan, 2011; Arhand et al, 2010)



### *Training dogs in prisons*

Correctional facilities across the country have starting introducing Prison Animal Programs (PAP) in their facilities and they are in forty out of fifty states (Furst, 2007). The community and inmates benefit from such programs (Furst, 2006). The superintendent of a correctional facility in Wisconsin stated that between 1997 and the time of his interview in 2003, of the 68 inmates that participated in the PAP there was a zero recidivism rate (Stimple, 2003). The inmates are able to train dogs and learn compassion for another living thing. This responsibility allows them to experience unconditional love from a dog that has no interest in the history of the inmate or what crime has been committed (Furst, 2006). Experiencing acceptance and feeling love in a cold place where none exists is therapeutic to the offender. This could be the first time in his life that he has received unconditional love and that is powerful to him. Prison officials have noticed positive changes in inmates' behaviors including decreased depression, and increased cooperation with staff and other inmates (Stimple, 2003).

Various prisons across the country have different levels of PAP in their prisons. These programs include visitation programs where animals are brought in by organizations to visit with the inmates at specific times, wildlife rehabilitation programs where inmates care for injured animals and then release them back to the wild, livestock care programs which teach care of farm animals including milking and raising calves (Furst, 2006). Inmates also have the opportunity to turn their time in prison into an educational experience and learn a trade with programs which offer certificate programs for veterinary technicians and groomers (Furst, 2006). Some towns have teamed up with inmate trainers to train unruly dogs from their shelters which increase the dogs' chance of adoption and reduce euthanasia rates (Furst, 2006). The idea of inmates training pet dogs to be adopted into families in society serves several purposes: inmates are learning

valuable skills and responsibility, dogs going to homes and the prison can charge adoption fees to help alleviate the cost of the program (Furst, 2006). Service dog organizations are using inmate trainers to train dogs for over eighty commands. Inmates who participate in service dog training report that they are proud of what they are doing and proud to be giving back to the community (Turner, 2007).

National Education for Assistance Dog Services (NEADS) is an organization that partners with ten New England prisons to train service dogs. The cost of training a service dog is 10,000 to 20,000 dollars and inmate trainers can cut this cost dramatically (NEADS, 2014). Dogs trained by inmates assist in shortening the waiting time of dogs for their clients (NEADS, 2014). The dogs that leave the prison training program are trained at a faster rate than the dogs coming from fulltime puppy trainers. At about one year old the puppy is evaluated by a NEADS veterinarian and checked for health issues that would disqualify the puppy from the program. If the puppy passes, the next step in training after leaving the prison requires the dog to attend advanced training with NEADS trainers at their facility in Princeton, Ma (NEADS, 2014).

The presence of training dogs in prisons, provide a social and positive atmosphere for the offenders and staff (Furst, 2007). Inmates who train dogs for organizations such as NEADS are trained by their trainer once a week for two hours and the rest of the training is completed by the inmate (NEADS, 2014). The inmates are interviewed and screened for the program. There is a long waiting list to be considered for participation. Each inmate is required to have exemplary behavior on their prison record and offenders of certain crimes are not eligible for the program (NEADS, 2014).

Participation in the program is not necessarily focused on an outcome at first. Motivations to join the program could consist of: time off of their sentence, the appeal of a single cell or simply the love of dogs. Britton and Button (2005) conducted a survey of male inmate trainers in the Ellsworth Correctional Facility in Kansas and found that the top three reasons for participating in their dog training program Canine Assistance Rehabilitation Education and Services (CARES) was the love of dogs, freedom of movement in the facility, and giving back to the community.

### ***Human Animal Bond***

Animals have shown to improve a human's health in a variety of ways and there are numerous studies to support this claim (Walsh, 2009). Dogs have been shown to reduce a person's blood pressure, improve the immune system, aid in the recovery of chronic illness, improve mental health (Walsh, 2009; Sachs-Ericsson, Hansen, Fitzgerald, 2002) and detect early cancers (Wells, 2007). Walsh (2009) states that "More than 63% of U.S. households, and over 75% with children, currently have at least one pet (p. 464). Dogs are able to sense emotions of their human companions and connect with them in various ways (Walsh, 2009). It is because of the canines' ability to connect with their human partners and their ability to be trained, they have become widely incorporated in the use of service.

### ***Socialization***

One drawback with inmate animal training programs is that the dogs are not socialized to the outside world. They are very obedient in the prison atmosphere, but they have never been exposed to a car ride, hair dryer, children or everyday household items. One way NEADS thought to solve this problem was with the implementation of weekend puppy raisers. These are

individuals who volunteer to take the puppies into their homes every weekend from Friday night to Sunday afternoon. They are required to take the puppy on field trips which entail specific visits to public places. These are places that a client may ultimately go; therefore, the dog must be desensitized to the environment. The puppy raisers follow guidelines provided by NEADS trainers and complete weekly paperwork to be turned in to the inmate trainer. The weekend puppy raiser also attends training classes once a month to help them overcome any hurdles they encounter while training in public.

### ***Research Questions***

The following questions guided my research and are answered in findings.

1. What is the relationship between the prison training programs and the weekend families?
2. How do the families contribute to service animal training?
3. Why do families choose to get involved and stay with the program?

### ***Methods***

In examining why weekend puppy raisers participate in prison animal programs and their contributions to the service animal training, looking at research about dog training, prison animal training, service dogs, and human animal relationships was necessary. There is no known data available about what motivates people to volunteer in raising puppies every weekend. This study aims to provide insight into the role that weekend puppy raisers have in the program and why they participate.

I have performed nine interviews with weekend puppy raisers between the ages of 25 and 65. The interview sample included people who were single, married, retired, working full time and working part-time. The participants lived in Massachusetts and picked up their puppies at

minimum and maximum security correctional facilities. The varying degrees of security require different pick up procedures from the prison. Some puppy raisers knew the inmate trainers' first name and had consistent interaction with him/her while others only communicated through paper. Two of my weekend puppy raisers were Council members at NEADS and one worked at a correctional facility. Though this happened to be convenience sampling, I was able to get other perspectives of the program from these Council Members.

Participants signed a consent form approved by Bridgewater State University's Institutional Review Board. All participants' names have been changed to protect the identity of the interviewees. As the interviews proceeded, the questions were readjusted to account for data that had not been previously thought of and each interview after that included additional questions. All of the interview responses were transcribed within twenty-four hours of completing the interview. They were printed out and coded by hand, looking for recurring themes throughout.

The qualitative interviews were designed with questions to elicit information about how they became involved in the organization, how many dogs have they taken through the program, and what their interaction is with the inmate trainer. I also asked about their perceptions about the importance of the puppy to the inmate, and what the graduation ceremony is like. Finally, I was interested in what keeps them motivated to train a puppy until NEADS trainers determine that the dog is ready to move on to advanced training and then say good-bye to the puppy only to start the process all over again.

All puppy raisers were contacted through the NEADS organization with the exception of one which was a referral from a friend. All respondents were eager to share their stories. Some

were teary-eyed when they spoke of their successes. The interviews lasted roughly one hour to an hour and a half and we met in public places that were mutually agreeable to both parties. Some interviews were conducted over the phone due to distance and time constraints. Participants signed a consent form approved by Bridgewater State University's Institutional Review Board. All participants' names have been changed to protect the identity of the interviewees. As the interviews proceeded, the questions were readjusted to account for data that had not been previously thought of and each interview after that included additional questions. All of the interview responses were transcribed within twenty-four hours of completing the interview. They were printed out and coded by hand, looking for recurring themes throughout.

### ***Overview of NEADS Organization***

Since NEADS is an organization that places service dogs with combat veterans, people with physical disabilities and psychological disabilities, research was needed to determine why these dogs are important to the functionality of their world. Some interviewees have strong ties to the military and doing anything to help a veteran is well worth their time. NEADS does not guarantee the puppy raiser that their puppy will be placed with a veteran, but that does not stop the puppy raisers from continuing to volunteer. Interviews revealed that the weekend puppy raiser strongly supports the organization and the work that it does.

NEADS explains the values of their organization as:

**Integrity:** We are an honorable organization that embraces integrity in all that we do. This is manifested through our commitments to honesty, trust, sincerity and transparency.

**Passion:** We are passionate about the welfare of our dogs and the independence that they provide to those they assist.

Collaboration: We recognize that collaboration plays a vital role in the successful fulfillment of our mission. We depend upon and appreciate the supportive individuals and organizations who work with us in the spirit of teamwork and partnership.

Thoughtfulness: We care about our clients' wellbeing, and strive to provide the level of support that each person needs by being thoughtful in our service. -

The client is asked to raise \$10,000 for the acquisition of their service dog and NEADS helps them fundraise to achieve this goal (NEADS, 2014). NEADS also expresses a loyalty to the community and it is demonstrated through the generous donation of service dogs to Veterans and Boston Marathon survival victims at no charge (NEADS, 2014). NEADS covers the cost of this donation.

In an article written by Foreman and Crosson (2012), they explain the lengths that NEADS has undergone to meet the needs of U.S. veterans. They conducted interviews at Walter Reed Army Medical Center to look for ways that NEADS service dogs could assist them. What they found was that veterans often fell and needed help getting up. They also suffered from fear of closed spaces or episodes of trauma while out in public that related to their PTSD. They also needed aid while getting used to their prosthesis as many have come home from the war as amputees. The veterans were embarrassed by these problems and would not want to leave their homes, in essence becoming prisoners of their disabilities. NEADS has sought to train service dogs specifically to aid with mobility issues. They designed a special harness that would fit on the service dog and on the veteran. At the time this was implemented in 2006 and 2007, all of the veterans are now able to walk by 2012 without the special harness and can balance on their own.

The veterans also utilize their service dogs for retrieval and opening doors. The dogs are able to open the refrigerator and bring the veteran a bottle of water or pick up dropped items from the floor. When someone is wheelchair bound, what seems like small acts gives back freedom and independence. Restoring freedom to veterans is what NEADS strives to do.

### ***Requirements of weekend puppy raisers***

Weekend puppy raisers come into the prison and receive the dog from the inmate trainer. NEADS has strict rules about the puppy raiser and inmate interaction. The inmate handler and weekend puppy raiser are on a first name basis only and are prohibited from sharing any personal information (NEADS, 2013). The weekend report that the puppy raiser turns in should list generic locations on the paperwork to assist in concealing the location that the puppy raiser is from (NEADS, 2013). For example, instead of Shaw's in Plymouth, a grocery store would be listed. Inmates should know nothing personal about the puppy raiser and the puppy raiser is prohibited from asking any questions about their incarceration (NEADS, 2013).

Weekend puppy raisers are asked to make a 12-18 month commitment in the training of their puppy (NEADS, 2013; NEADS, 2014). They are asked to raise the puppy three out of four weekends per month (NEADS, 2014; NEADS, 2013). They will work with the puppy from puppyhood, through adolescence and then adulthood. The puppy requires different levels of care and exercise through each stage. In the beginning months, for example, the puppy will need frequent trips for elimination and require more frequent naps for resting. Puppy raisers have reported that they plan their weekend errands according to the needs of the puppy and as the puppy changes and grows, they adjust their errands to include field trips that accommodate the puppy training. NEADS trainers are there to help with any questions or concerns that the new



weekend puppy raiser may have. They have recently started a mentor program where a long term puppy person is the contact person for the new weekend puppy raiser. This has proven to be successful in helping new volunteers navigate the pickup process at their facility and get their new puppy settled for the first time.

Weekend puppy raisers follow a specific set of guidelines for socialization of the puppy. This ensures that the puppy has positive experiences as they explore the world around them. Promoting a positive environment is absolutely essential to their success. It is much easier to introduce a puppy to a new situation slowly than to break a puppy of fear and nervousness after having a bad experience. Some puppies can never come back from bad social experiences and that is enough to flunk them out of the training program. Service dogs have to be solid in their behaviors in any situation. A person with a disability cannot worry about controlling their dog in an unsettling situation. In some cases, the service dog is the one controlling unsettling situations for the client, such as Veterans with PTSD.

Weekend puppy raisers follow levels of training provided for them by the NEADS organization. The levels range from one through ten and they vary in degrees of difficulty. For example, the first weekend a puppy comes to a new home of the weekend puppy raiser, field trips are prohibited. The puppy is getting acclimated to their new environment and surroundings. The puppy must establish a level of comfort and bond with the new handler. This is important because the puppy has transitioned through many changes since it has left its mother. The puppy is taken from its mother no earlier than eight weeks old. Then is transported to the puppy house to undergo observations and waits to be matched with an inmate trainer and weekend puppy raiser. If a puppy is showing high levels of energy, it is important to match the puppy with an experienced inmate handler who knows how to handle the training in a proper manner. The

same theory is applied to a weekend puppy raiser. High energy puppies should be matched with high energy raisers who do a lot of outdoor activities. Ensuring that the matching process is followed leads to a high level of success in the training.

Weekend puppy raisers are asked to have access to email to stay in constant communication with the NEADS staff. They are asked to email the puppy raiser coordinator and the prison liaison by Wednesday of each week to notify them if they are taking the puppy out that weekend or not. The majority of the interviewees do not take a weekend off per month. Some feel that the inmate needs that break while others are dedicated to the success of socializing the puppy. Puppies are allowed out of the prison from Friday night to Sunday night and each specific prison will give the weekend puppy raisers times for pick up that do not conflict with head counts or work release programs.

The field trips are the heart of success for the puppy and its service career. The levels are determined by NEADS trainers and assessments are performed routinely to determine when the puppy can advance to the next level. Field trips include any possible place that their client may go. For example, grocery stores, shopping centers, work, sporting events, schools, libraries, restaurant, airplanes or airports. This socialization process is taken on slowly because puppies themselves progress through stages where they are fearless and then fearful and for each puppy it happens at a different age. The end result in the socialization process is that the dog must be comfortable with any situation that the client places them in and client must feel confident that the dog will react with appropriate behavior.

The volunteers are also taught how to engage with the general public. In some situations there are business owners who are not informed of the laws regarding service dogs and service

dogs in training and it is up to the weekend puppy raiser to try to educate them. In the state of Massachusetts, service dogs and service dogs in training are allowed in any public space. Owners do not have the right to refuse entry and through the interviews, weekend puppy raisers have explained that they leave any business that asks them to leave without making any scenes because they do not want to tarnish the NEADS name in any way. They are instructed to call the NEADS office which will then send out a letter explaining the laws surrounding service dogs, the NEADS mission and hope that the business will be more welcoming in the future.

### ***Findings and Discussion***

A motivating factor in my study was my interest in why individuals and families would follow all the necessary rules and put all the work into being a weekend puppy raiser. I wanted to know “why do people volunteer?” My interviewees were people whom had been volunteering most of their lives in one capacity or another whether it was through school activities with their children or activities that they had close connections to through their everyday lives. All of the individuals expressed enjoyment when discussing their volunteer work. They also projected the feelings of pride they felt while describing the work that they were doing. They wanted to educate me on the importance of the organization and their strong beliefs in the mission of the organization. In particular three themes arose among the interviews; belief in the NEADS mission, loyalty to members of the community needing assistance and dog responsibility.

### ***Belief in the NEADS mission***

The passion and dedication toward the NEADS mission is one thing that shines through in the interviews with the weekend puppy raisers. They all are part of the organization’s ability to provide service dogs to people with disabilities. They are proud that their organization is

thoughtful about its clients and meeting the needs of the client. They also said that educating the public was a huge part of what they do. Field trips are an opportunity to spread the word of the NEADS mission.

When out in public on field trips with their puppies, weekend puppy raisers spoke about educating the public about NEADS. Linda said this about the general public:

I enjoy educating the public on what the NEADS program is all about and the good that they do for people. I see myself as an ambassador for the program and feel that if you don't want to talk to the public, then you shouldn't be involved with the program. I carry NEADS cards to pass out to spread the word of what they do.

Don is also passionate about the NEADS mission and wants to educate the public so people with disabilities will not have bad experiences taking their service dog into public places.

Don said this:

My motivator to volunteer is that I believe in the mission of NEADS. I feel that people should volunteer when they can and volunteerism is a spirit that is in someone's heart. I like to educate the public when I'm on field trips and if I have a bad experience with a business owner I want to educate them. What if I were an actual person with a disability? I don't ever want someone to be refused entry somewhere because of someone else's lack of knowledge. I once had a business owner tell me that his customers might have allergies so the dog could not come in and I told him that an amputee that needs a service dog trumps allergies.

The interviewees all said that sometimes their interactions with the public can be a little long and that there is never a "quick" trip to the drug store or supermarket. Abby said this about her experiences with the public:

When I go on field trips in public, I'm always approached. People ask questions about service dogs and their training. I like to tell them about the NEADS program and everything we do. Some people overstay their welcome and tell me about every dog they have ever owned and then show me pictures on their cell

phones. It comes with the territory but most of my field trips are rewarding and satisfying.

Rose said that most of her experiences have been positive but laughed about one in particular while telling me:

I once went on a field trip to a restaurant and my puppy was pretty big and looked more like a dog than a puppy. The waitress gave me a large print menu because she thought I had a disability. When I told her about my job as a socializer, we both had a good laugh and I was glad that I was able to educate her about our purpose.

Tracee had this to say when asked why she volunteers at NEADS:

I can't really explain it. The more involved you get, the more you want to do. These are the nicest people that I have ever met. There is so much negativity in the world that when I am working for NEADS at a fundraising event or training, I get this warm fuzzy feeling inside and that I just want more and more of it. I am proud to be working for NEADS and believe in their mission. NEADS improves the quality of life for people and the dogs are doing something that they love.

Tracee has trained six dogs through the program and says that each one that comes through changes her life and this explains why she wants to participate. She goes on to state that dog people are a special "breed" of people and they look at each dog with the ability to recognize each different personality and that each dog has different inherent talents that repeatedly show how important they could become in someone's life. She has experienced this recognition of talent through training. To know that the dogs move on and give this talent to someone in need strengthens the desire to continue weekend puppy raising opportunities.

Tracee is also asked to participate in fundraisers and events on weekends. This outreach to the public aids in raising public awareness about the NEADS organization and solicitation of new donors. Her dedication to the organization is so obvious and her talent in educating the public about its mission is heartfelt. Weekend puppy raisers are committed to what they do and it is obvious when speaking to them.

*Loyalty to members of the community needing assistance*

Another common thread in the interview was the bond that they felt with the potential clients that they have not even met yet. The puppy raisers are compassionate for those who suffer from impairments and are willing to work toward the goal of training a service dog that can help them. Two of my interviewees had strong military ties and the loyalty they felt to the Veterans was powerful. One mother expressed undying loyalty because two of her sons are in the military. This is what Charlene said,

I am the mother of two sons in the military. One is deployed and the other in the states. I am a member of Blue Star Mothers and they had a speaker from NEADS come to a meeting and talk to us. When I heard about this project I knew it was for me. I have such respect for our Veterans that I have to be involved with a program that could potentially help a Veteran. I am not guaranteed that the puppy I am raising will go to a Vet, but the potential is there and that is good enough for me.

Charlene expresses such devotion in her statement. The potential for a service dog to be matched with a veteran, not guaranteed, is enough for her to want to volunteer. She spoke highly of veterans and how she feels a sense of obligation to support them. She also spoke of how she would frequently spot a veteran out in public in his/her uniform and if they were in line to buy a coffee or lunch, she would rush to the front of the line to pay for their order and thank them for

their service to our country. Her strong patriotic feelings keep her motivated to participate in the NEADS program.

The other interviewee, Linda, is a veteran herself from the Marines and she said,

My husband is not a dog lover, but I am and he supports what I do. Participation in this program allows me to get my puppy fix and do something good for veterans. I am a veteran myself and to be able to give a vet their freedom back from PTSD is something that I have to be involved in. I can never say no when asked to do something for NEADS. I just can't. I believe so strongly in what they do, I have to support them.

Linda's military service and experience speaks to the brotherhood and sisterhood that is shared amongst veterans and active military personnel.

Don, a veteran, said this about another veteran:

I was once at a graduation when a veteran thanked NEADS for his service dog. He said that before he got his dog, he once had a .45 caliber gun in his mouth ready to pull the trigger. Since he got his dog, he no longer wanted to commit suicide.

Both Linda and Don spoke about sacrifices in their interviews and conveyed the message that each person in the military knows what they have given up to be a service member and the losses that they have experienced which many people will never know about. Other sacrifices are more obvious when veterans identify themselves and then you see the wheel chair or the missing limb.

Another way that interviewees showed concern for members of the community was their discussion of the relationship they had with the inmate trainer. Inmate's privacy and respect for their work was shown by the interviewees with admiration.

Volunteering to help inmates in their participation in the NEADS program was not a specific reason why weekend puppy raisers volunteered.

Don had this to say about the inmate trainers that she has worked with in the past:

Inmate trainers are wonderful. They do all the tedious training that I don't want to do. I can tell that they care about their puppy and the work they are doing. They are very proud when they tell me about the homework they were assigned by the NEADS trainer or new accomplishments they have made with the puppy. Once I had to pick up a puppy from a prison that was finished with his training and take him to the NEADS campus. It was awful to watch the inmate trainer try not to cry and say goodbye to the puppy. Now his world will be empty until the next puppy comes along and it could be days or weeks before he gets another one.

Sarah also had a lot of respect for the inmate trainer that she sees but her situation is different because she works at a correctional facility and has interactions with the inmate trainers there, although she does not get her puppy there. She had this to say:

When I speak to the inmate trainers in the facility that I work in, I can tell they are very appreciative of being involved with the dog training program. They feel that they are training for a good cause. They do receive separate housing in a different block and get their own cell. All the inmates come from all different walks of life and I can't generalize a reason why they participate. Some have told me that they are grateful for the chance to give back to the community while others have said that when the client comes back to the prison to thank them it means the world.

Abby had no interest in the reason why the inmate trainer that she worked with was incarcerated. She cared about the progress of the puppy and that he was taken care of. She said:

I pick up my dog a minimum security correctional facility. I know my inmate trainer, but only his first name and not his last name. I have no desire to know anything about him or why he is in prison in the first place.



Most weekend puppy raisers feel the same way and they follow the NEADS protocols.

Rose spoke highly about the training results of her inmate trainer and said this:

My interaction with the inmate trainer is limited to talk about the puppy only. I know his first name and don't care about anything else. I am glad to have an unbiased opinion of him and I know all the hard work he does with the puppy now. He is hardworking and dedicated and I tell him about the success of the puppy during field trips and tell him how proud he should feel when the puppy does well. I can tell he has a vested interest in its success. I do find myself remembering he is incarcerated, but I feel safe when I go to the prison. I tell people that I am not a trainer, but a socializer. The inmate does all the hard work.

Most of the interviewees describe themselves as socializers. They see their role as very important in the success of service dog training and some also said that they are partners with the inmate trainer working towards a common goal. Both the inmate trainer and the weekend puppy raisers show that they have the best interest of the puppy at heart. They are concerned about the puppy's first experience with new encounters and maintaining his training knowledge while away for the weekends.

Finally, Patrick spoke of his interactions with the inmate trainer and said this:

My conversations with the inmate trainer consist of what the puppy is working on, when his last trip to the bathroom was and any issues the puppy might be having that I should know about. The entire conversation is about the puppy. I have no curiosity about the background of the inmate and feel that his privacy should be respected. He obviously earned this privilege to get into the dog program. He has always been very polite to me and I feel he has a true love of what he is doing. He does get time off his sentence, but there are other ways to do that, so it leads me to believe that he does it because he loves dogs.

In most of the interviews there was a common respect amongst the weekend puppy raisers for the inmate trainers. Most of them did not address themselves as

trainers, but as socializers instead. They had a strong respect for the inmate and the work he does every day with the puppy and saw their jobs as important but also hard work and fun.

### ***Dog Responsibility***

The final theme from the interviews was the role that dog responsibility played in the motivation of weekend puppy raisers. My interviews showed that these volunteers feel that being a weekend puppy raiser allows them to have all the benefits of having a dog even if their lives do not allow full-time dog ownership.

All interviewees expressed respect and love for dogs. Their sacrifice was also noted. People were able give up the selfishness of pet ownership because they felt that their lives were too busy. Michelle had this to say about not owning a dog:

I work too many hours to own a dog responsibly. My day starts at 6:00 a.m. and I commute to work for thirty minutes. I do not get home until sometimes 6:00 p.m. It is unfair to keep a dog in the house all day long by himself. I just could not do it to him. Besides, I'm selfish, I just love having a puppy.

The exercise that a puppy/dog needs also depends on the size and the breed. Medium sized dogs from the herding or working groups can need much more daily exercise and will exhibit destructive behavior such as chewing and eliminating in the house. Michelle's responsible decision allows her to have the energy she needs on the weekends to put the proper effort into weekend puppy raising.

Dogs can also be very expensive to raise, especially if one develops costly medical issues. Shelby had this to say about the cost:

I cannot afford the cost that goes into dog ownership. The monthly cost of food, frontline, heartworm and vet bills would not allow me to make ends meet. This program allows me to expose my children to my love of dogs while still paying the bills and teaching them the value of community service.

Shelby has a valid point about the cost of medical bills. It is very responsible to forego pet ownership because you cannot care for it. The monthly cost of dog ownership can be overwhelming depending on the breed type that you own. A one month supply of Front Line, the flea and tick prevention costs thirty dollars for an eighty pound dog. The contraction of Lyme disease can be fatal if not treated and can be costly if it is contracted and caught in time and the threat of reoccurrence is always there. Large breed dogs are prone to more costly medical conditions as they age, such as hip dysplasia or wobblers and these can be costly to treat. The cost of food varies depending on the variety that is purchased. On average \$75 could be spent monthly to feed a dog. Kenneling a dog can be as much as twenty-five dollars per day while your family is on vacation, and if you need to hire a dog walker it can cost on average \$10.00 per day.

Rose said:

This is a great program because people who can't afford dogs or don't have the time, have an opportunity to have a dog in their life. There is no financial obligation except the gas I use to pick up and drop off the dog. I don't have to take the dog to the vet, but I do it just for the field trip requirements to get the puppy used to the scale.

There are also emotional costs to dog ownership. Marie is retired and stated one of the benefits of not owning a dog for her is about end of life issues:

I cannot bear the thought of old age and putting another dog to sleep. I am retired and have owned dogs my life. Making the decision to put a dog to sleep because of health issues is something I can avoid by working for NEADS. I enjoy raising puppies and watching them progress as the get

older. I like teaching them new things and showing them the world for the first time.

One drawback to owning a dog is that their life span is so short. Putting a dog to sleep is probably the hardest decision a pet owner will make in their life time.

Judy also added content to the passing of her dogs:

I became involved because I had two senior golden retrievers that passed away. I had a female with lymphoma in her throat and we did chemo to extend her life for a year but it was difficult when we made the decision to put her down. I had a male who died from bloat. I needed a break from the emotions that comes along with saying goodbye to my family members.

For many, the fun of spending time with dogs is about the puppy years. Georgia loves to raise puppies and this is what she said:

I love and need my puppy fix. It's fun to teach them new things. I mean, who doesn't love a cute cuddly puppy. All they want to do is play and sleep. We go on field trips and everyone talks to me much more so than if I were by myself. I love the social aspect from raising a puppy. I get to talk to everyone and tell them about the work that NEADS does. Educating the public is the fun part along with my puppy.

Many people said the draw to a puppy is one that is undeniable and that it cannot be explained in words. For some, the unconditional love that is received from a puppy is overwhelming. Georgia loves the attention she gets from the public when working on her field trips. She loves to educate people and share the importance of service dogs with them.

Many times, behavior issues are caused by dogs not getting enough exercise or becoming infected with a disease that could have been easily preventable if they had been to the veterinarian. Dogs get adopted into a household and then become a bother and are no longer

important to the family or financial situations change and the dog is the first one to suffer. The responsible act of foregoing dog ownership is not to be taken lightly as it is very difficult for some people to make the right decision.

## **Connecting The Mission and The Clients**

### ***The Graduation***

NEADS hosts graduation ceremonies twice a year. It is not mandatory for the client to attend but they asked to participate because of its importance to the organization. This is the pinnacle of what everyone has worked toward. At this point the client has already been matched to a service dog and has lived with them in the NEADS campus house for two weeks learning how to give commands and developing a strong bond with their partner. Clients are presented to an audience filled with weekend puppy raisers, community sponsors, volunteers, trainers, staff and family members. This is an opportunity for Clients to thank NEADS, but also for the weekend puppy raiser to see their dog matched with a client. Tracee said this about graduation:

“Bring the Kleenex! I have attended eight graduations and they are all very moving experiences. They are held in an auditorium in a local high school. The curtains are closed when you come in to be seated. When the curtains are opened, there are 20-30 dogs and clients on the stage. This is a culmination of everyone’s hard work and it’s amazing to know that our organization has helped so many people and I am proud to be part of that. Clients are given the opportunity to speak and some are very comfortable in front of a large audience and some are not. The ones who are not say a quick thank you but the ones who are share their emotions and stories about how their service dog has changed their life. One man said that before I got my dog, I did not want to get out of bed in the morning, now I look forward to living my life”.

Sarah who said that she has only attended one graduation also felt the emotional connection with the clients. She said:

I have only attended one graduation, but I needed Kleenex. There are such beautiful stories of clients who are so thankful and appreciative of receiving a service dog. When veterans speak it is especially moving because they talk of how their life has changed since they got their service dog and they have been given back freedom they had lost when they came home from deployment.

Rita has many years in volunteering for NEADS. She has attended many graduations and clearly stated how important the graduation is to everyone involved. Rita said:

The graduation ceremony is extremely important and rewarding. I have trained 10 dogs and it is an event I never miss. People in attendance are current puppy raisers along with their puppy in training, trainers, volunteers, staff, graduates and their families, corporate sponsors, disabled American veterans, Lion's clubs, veterans of foreign wars and political people. Our next graduation is April 6<sup>th</sup> and Martha Coakley is the speaker. I go because I get to see "my dog" after being away from me for a few months and see how they interact with the client. I love that part. This is an event filled with tears and tissues.

Abby liked to hear from the clients directly. She said that it was very moving to hear how their service dog had changed their life. Abby said:

Graduation is a combination of these feelings: satisfying, emotional, informative and interesting. Clients speak about how the dogs have changed their lives. Some clients are more articulate than others so there is a wide range of information coming from them. Sometimes boyfriends or girlfriends, parents or spouses will speak depending on the ability of the client. Graduation is a very moving time.

Some puppy raisers said that it was not that hard to give up the dog when their time together was done. Looking forward to graduation is sometimes nerve-racking because attendance at graduation is not a requirement for clients so there have been times that they have not been able to see their dogs but when they do get to see them, they say it is an amazing part of the process. Don said this about his experiences:

Graduation fixes the hole in my heart that a dog leaves when you stop working with it. It is hard to stop working with them, but when you see where they go and who they go with and hear the differences that they have made, it makes it all worth it. They are doing what they meant to do. Graduation is always a full house and very crowded. It's very exciting to see the whole process come together. There are so many working pieces and this is the completion of the process. Some people have never seen their service dog working and graduation is a place to see it happen. I have only missed one graduation and have been volunteering for seven years.

Graduation is the closure that all the puppy raisers said that they needed. It reinforces why they do what they do. It validates that they work that they do is for a greater purpose. The interviewees stated that it was very important to them to see what "their" dog is doing. Some commented on how proud they were that the service dog has bonded so strongly with the client and that having a service dog has made a difference in the clients' life. Being able to see the smiles on the faces of the clients and their gratitude toward NEADS is what keeps the volunteers volunteering. Interviewees find this important on so many different levels. The weekend puppy raiser can say a final goodbye, the client can thank everyone involved and donors and sponsors can see what a difference this organization makes in peoples' lives.

Some clients choose to meet their weekend puppy raiser and even stay in contact through social media posting pictures and updates about the service dog and the changes that the client is experiencing. Contact is completely voluntary on the part of the client, but the puppy raisers who enjoy this privilege say it is wonderful. Rita said this about a client:

I have raised many dogs and am friends with 3 clients on Facebook. I am especially close to one particular family and love it when they post pictures of their daughter and her service dog. It makes me feel good to know that I was part of the process in helping her.

## *Conclusion*

The Pups in Prison partnership with the weekend puppy raiser provides opportunities. The service dogs are trained by inmates who devote every minute they have to the puppy to ensure its training is a success. The cost of training a service dog is drastically decreased because of the voluntary participation of the inmates in the facility. The inmate trainers win because they are able to give back to the community and in some instances meet the client who was matched with the service dog they trained. This small act of kindness on the part of the client is a monumental act for the inmate trainer.

The volunteer weekend puppy raisers generously devote their time, energy and love to the success of the service dog. My interviews show that the weekend puppy raisers win because they are doing something that they love. The importance of their job is the heart of the program and without them the service dog would not be able to continue their training simultaneously while trained in a facility. The client wins because he/she is able to receive a service dog that will aid them in their everyday living which is challenging without the service dog.

The graduation ceremony is the pinnacle of everyone's work. While this is an extremely emotional time, it is the time that weekend puppy raisers say goodbye to their dog for the last time and they can see how the service dog has already changed the lives of the clients forever. A client is given independence and freedom because of everyone's hard work.

This research has added to the understanding of what motivates weekend puppy raisers to take on the responsibility of puppy raising and socialization. Their dedication to the importance of service dogs and the important role they play in the lives of the client is unwavering. I found



three important themes in my research: a strong belief in the NEADS mission, loyalty to members of the community who need assistance, and dog responsibility.

### ***Limitations and Further Research***

This study began to provide an understanding of the motivating factors for weekend puppy raisers but as a small qualitative study is not generalizable to the larger population. It provides interesting insights to the motivations of these individuals. A longer study that included more interviews might provide more insight into the motivations and experiences of weekend puppy raisers.

If I were to given the opportunity to carry this research further, I would expand the work that I have done. My goal would be to follow numerous service dogs though their journey of coming to the puppy house at the NEADS campus though their placement with a client. I would interview the inmate trainers and discuss the pros and cons of the program. I especially want to know why they participate. Is it for the opportunity to give back, have a single cell, or simply for their love of dogs? I want to know how he/she feels when their dog leaves and when the service dog returns to the correctional facility with their client to say thank you. I also want to know how the inmate trainer feels about the weekend socialization process and what is it like for them when their dog is gone for the weekend; are they glad for a break or do they miss their puppy? All of these are expansive questions and the goal would be to follow the journey of the service dog. Nonetheless, this study adds to the overall understanding of the service dog training programs in prisons and the important role of the weekend families.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Guide

### Original Involvement:

1. How did you become involved with the NEADS organization?
2. How long was the process to become an approved furlough family?
3. What influenced you to become a weekend puppy trainer?
4. Describe your training process to become a trainer.

### Process:

5. What is the adjustment process like for the family and the new puppy when the new puppy comes into your home?
6. How do you juggle the weekend puppy and family pets and what difficulties are there?
7. What difficulties have you encountered while training in public?
8. How does your family function differently when the puppy is in your home than when the puppy is away?

### Prisoner Interaction

9. Describe the pick-up process at the prison.
10. Describe the interaction you have with the inmate trainer?
11. If you have personal interactions with the inmate trainer, can you describe the importance of this service dog to the inmate trainer and your perceptions?
12. Are you given instructions by the inmate trainer on new commands and requests for certain socialization activities?
13. What records are required to be kept while the puppy is in your care?

### Emotional Feelings

14. Describe the feeling when you and your family find out that the puppy will graduate from your care?
15. What is the graduation like?
16. Does the NEADS organization require or offer a break between puppies?
17. What is your contact with the puppy after they are placed with a client, are you allowed updates?