

From: <http://www.seattledogspot.com/blog/dog-blog/post/dog-training-program-at-stafford-creek-corrections-center-an-amazing-success>

The screenshot shows the Seattle Dog Spot website. The header features a search bar with the text "go fetch ...", a "Sitemap | Member Login" link, and a navigation menu with links: DOG SPOTS, DOG STUFF, DOG SERVICES, DOG BLOG, ADVERTISE, DIGGING UP WHAT DOGS DIG, Seattle VetSpot, Events, Dog Product Reviews, Lost Dogs, About Us, and Contact. The main content area displays a blog post titled "Dog training program at Stafford Creek Corrections Center an amazing success" by Robert Pregulman, dated September 06, 2013. The post is categorized as "MISCELLANEOUS DOG STORIES". It includes social media sharing buttons for Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Google+. The post text describes the author's experience visiting the Stafford Creek Corrections Center (SCCC) in Aberdeen. To the right of the post is an advertisement for "PUPPY LOVE" by SniffSeattle.com, which includes a "DOG BLOG CATEGORIES" sidebar with links like "Adopt This Dog!", "Dog Adoption & Rescue", "Dog Books", "Dog Friendly Businesses", "Dog Health & Wellness", and "Dog Heroes".

POST CATEGORY: MISCELLANEOUS DOG STORIES

## Dog training program at Stafford Creek Corrections Center an amazing success

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SEPTEMBER 06, 2013 | BY ROBERT PREGULMAN

### My first time in prison

I didn't know what to expect when I pulled up to the **Stafford Creek Corrections Center (SCCC)** in Aberdeen.

I hadn't been in a prison before, but from the outside it looked similar to those you see in the movies or on TV – concrete, ominous-looking buildings surrounded by lines of stark fences and shiny barbed wire.

I met my guide Karen Diehm in the parking lot. She's the Editor and Photographer for the Freedom Tails newsletter and the person who invited me to visit SCCC.

After walking inside, I checked in with the guard, gave him my driver's license, put my keys and cell phone in a lock box, and walked with Karen through several locked doors that slammed shut unceremoniously behind me.

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## A dog bark eases my tension

The buildings were what you would think a prison would have – inmate housing, a library, a recreation facility, a cafeteria.

Correctional Officers stood in clusters around the large open area and by the doors of the buildings, nodding to or greeting Karen as we walked by. We also passed a few offenders – some accompanied by Correctional Officers, some alone – headed to various activities.

I was tense as we walked though the prison although I had no logical reason to feel that way. I never felt threatened, and all the people I met, including the offenders, were friendly.

But I was definitely on edge.



### **Then I heard a dog bark.**

My head jerked involuntarily toward that familiar sound, and in the middle of a large, grassy area I saw something you normally wouldn't expect to see in a prison - **a man throwing a KONG for a tiny, energetic poodle.**

All the tension I felt drained away as I watched them, and whatever concerns I had seconds before suddenly seemed unimportant and irrelevant.



One of the common threads I've read about programs where offenders train dogs in prisons is that **the dogs reduce stress level inside the facility**. This makes sense to anyone who has been around dogs (who can feel stressed when working with, petting, or simply watching a dog, right?), but by feeling my muscles relax and my breathing slow down while watching the dog chase the toy, **I actually experienced the stress reduction myself**.

### **Freedom Tails gives dogs "second chance at life"**

I was at SCCC to see the **Freedom Tails dog training program**. Freedom Tails takes dogs that would most likely be euthanized in animal shelters and gives them “a second chance at life” by pairing them with offenders **who improve the dogs’ chances of adoption by teaching them “socialization, housetraining, and much needed obedience skills.”**



The program is coordinated through [North Beach PAWS](#), an animal shelter in Ocean Shores, WA.

SCCC's Superintendent Pat Glebe, Correctional Unit Supervisor Dennis Cherry, and North Beach PAWS worked together to launch Freedom Tails in 2009. According to the North Beach Paws website, their vision was to create a program that “benefits offenders, dogs, and adopters.”



SCCC was the first male correctional facility in the state to have offenders train dogs. The [Washington Corrections Center for Women](#) in Gig Harbor pioneered the first program, called the [Prison Pet Partnership](#), in 1981.

Now offenders train dogs in 11 of Washington's correctional facilities. Some offenders train shelter dogs to be service dogs. Others, like Freedom Tails, train dogs so they will be adopted into forever homes.

### **Program gives dogs "structure"**

Supervisor Cherry told me that they try to get dogs into the program that “don't have a chance” at getting adopted. The dogs in the Freedom Tails program typically have “kennel stress, no manners, and sometimes medical issues.” Many are also severely malnourished.

Freedom Tails is designed **to give the dogs structure** in their lives, good grooming, house training, medical care, some socialization, and the ability to trust humans again.

Furthermore, the program is designed to give offenders **“a sense of purpose and responsibility.”** And the families that adopt the dogs benefit by getting a dog that is socialized and trained in basic commands.



## Dogs are a Pressure Release Valve

The dogs also serve as **a type of pressure release valve** for the tensions that inevitably build in a contained environment like a correctional facility.

In an interview with [Bark Magazine](#), Robert Wrinkle, a former offender and Freedom Tails trainer, said this when asked about what surprised him the most about the program:

*“The calm in the unit. When the first dog walked into this unit... Within a week, it was like the tension level dropped to about 50%. And the stress level. It was almost as if everybody had new conversation. I don’t know how else to say it. It just was a drastic change. You can even see when there’s no dogs in the unit, in the two-week span when we don’t have dogs sometimes, you can actually see the difference between the stress level and attitudes and everything.”*



During the same interview, Supervisor Cherry added, “Guys who aren’t involved in the program, they can pet the dogs when they see a green or yellow collar. And when



they're petting the dogs, **you can see the smiles on their faces instead of frowns.** It's pretty amazing, really."

### **Dog training program meticulously organized**

Once the dogs arrive at SCCC they are paired with an offender for a 10-week training program. With a few exceptions, the dogs stay with their trainers 24/7. **They even sleep in crates in their trainers' cells.**

Although the program started with 8 dogs per class, it has been so successful that it now has 16 dogs in 2 different living units.

Each dog has 2 handlers responsible for its training, the primary trainer and an secondary trainer. The program also has 4 walkers to take care of the dogs if for some reason its handlers aren't available.



Each trainer keeps a journal about their dog that records everything they worked on

each day. After the dogs graduate from the program **the trainers give the journals to the dogs' new families.**

Including the dogs from the most recent graduation in August, Freedom Tails has rescued, trained, and found homes for 209 dogs. If not for Freedom Tails, most, if not all of them would have been euthanized.

**Participation in the Freedom Tails program is completely voluntary** and is a valued privilege for the offenders. Several are on the waiting list to be trainers in the program.

Not just any offender can be in Freedom Tails. To qualify for the program a potential trainer must have no infractions in the prison for a year. He also cannot have any child,



animal, or domestic abuse charges on his record.



The trainers use a grassy area outside the living units to train the dogs rain or shine. Nearby are 5 outdoor kennels with doghouses where the dogs are sometimes housed for short periods of time when the trainers are in an area, like the dining hall, where the dogs aren't allowed.

**No tax money is used to support Freedom Tails.** It is 100% self-funded through adoption fees, donations, and sales of leather leashes and collars made by the handlers.

**Each dog wears a colored bandana** that indicates their level of training and whether they can be approached by anyone other than their trainers:

- Orange bandanas indicate newly arrived dogs that haven't received any training and may not be safe to approach.
- Yellow bandanas indicate a dog that can be approached with its trainer's permission.
- Green bandanas mean a dog has been trained and is approachable.
- **Dogs with yellow or green bandanas can go with their handlers anywhere around the facility except for a few restricted areas.**



## Basic Training

The trainers teach the dogs basic obedience commands like heel, sit, sit/stay, down, down/stay, stand, stand/stay, come, and leave it. Both verbal and hand signaled commands are used.

Training is conducted in the visit room, education department, or the yard located in front of the living units.

**Pattie McCarty is a professional dog trainer and the volunteer trainer for the program.** She is also a Sergeant at SCCC and has her own canine and equine boarding facility along with 7 of her own dogs.

Sgt. McCarty teaches the offenders how to train the dogs and observes how each dog is progressing. She also gives the trainers commands to work on with their dogs every week.

## Meeting the trainers and dogs

After I watched the offender throw the KONG for a poodle for a few minutes, Karen took me over to meet him.

Jesse was the handler training the poodle whose name was Fred (short for Sir Frederick). As Karen introduced us I tried figure out the best way to begin the interview,



but once Karen told him why I was there, he began to talk so quickly and excitedly about Fred and the program I hardly had time to write down what he was saying. It was like **talking with someone at the dog park who had just adopted a new puppy.**

Jesse told me that Fred was a purebred poodle that had a tough life before he came to SCCC. He was rescued from a puppy mill where he spent most of his life in a tiny crate.

He had several health problems when he arrived, one of which was that he was severely underweight. He also had several infected teeth that had to be pulled.

But after just a few weeks in the program with Jesse, Fred looked to me like **he was**



**happy, healthy, and ready for his forever home.** Next, I met Andrew and Korky, a 3-year-old boxer. Andrew knew EVERYTHING about Korky. He told me how much weight she had recently gained, what she had learned, and all her behavior quirks.



He had also done a lot of research on boxers so he could understand Korky better as he trained her.

Dean was the next trainer I met. He introduced me to Oscar, a headstrong miniature dachshund (aren't they all headstrong?). In addition to training, Dean also coordinates **the production of leather collars and leashes made by the offenders and which are made available to the public to help raise money for Freedom Tails.**

You can purchase them on the [North Beach Paws website](#). Small collars are \$15, medium/large collars are \$20. Regular leashes are \$15, medium leashes are \$20. You can get a personalized leash or collar for \$25. Shipping for all items is \$3. If you're interested, email [jeannettebucklin@yahoo.com](mailto:jeannettebucklin@yahoo.com).

**The sweetest and gentlest dog I met** was a 3-year-old boxer/lab mix named Lexi. Her trainer Dwayne had already trained 5 other dogs, and his experience showed as Lexi was extremely well behaved.

Dwayne volunteered that he was in SCCC for life. He was the only trainer that told me his sentence.

He said that since he wouldn't ever leave SCCC, **he loved taking a dog not fit for adoption, training/rehabilitating it, and "giving it back to society."** Working with rescued dogs is his way of paying back society for his crime.



I tried to pet Shadow, a Basenji/Australian Kelpie that approached cautiously as I spoke to Dwayne, but he was a bit scared and skittish. His trainer, Steve, said Shadow wouldn't let anyone near when he first arrived at SCCC.

Steve gained his trust by simply sitting in his kennel for 20 minutes and waiting until Shadow felt comfortable enough to come to him.

He told me that Shadow mainly liked people wearing vests. That made sense because all the trainers wore them. **It was also a testament to the effectiveness of the training process** because Shadow had probably never bonded with anyone before.

Steve was concerned that Shadow may have trouble with the family that will adopt him since he was still little skittish around new people. But given the progress Shadow had made with Steve's guidance, I'm sure he'll be just fine in his new home.

Steve is also an experienced trainer. Shadow was the 9<sup>th</sup> dog he trained in the program.

After meeting the trainers and their dogs, I went to the visitation room to watch a training session.

### Watching a training session

As the men filed into the room they made a circle around Howard who led the training. Each 10-week training period has a different person leading the training sessions.



Howard called out different commands for the trainers to give their dogs – sometimes each trainer and dog practiced a command individually, other times they all did them together.

One particularly effective training method they used was having the dogs in a down-stay position on the floor while one of the trainers and his dog tried to distract them by



weaving in and out of the dogs and trainers around the circle. **None of the dogs broke their stay positions** while this happened.

The trainers also put their dogs into a down-stay and then all of them walked around the circle. I didn't see one dog get up until its trainer went all the way around the circle back to it and gave it the command to get up.

Some of the dogs I saw knew all of the commands. Others knew most of them. But all of the dogs knew some of the commands, and with about 3 weeks left before graduation, they had plenty



of time to learn the rest. And, without exception, **all the dogs were extremely well behaved.**

The training session lasted about an hour. At the end of it, Sgt. McCarty took over and explained what went well and what the men still needed to work on with their dogs.

**Practicing speeches, reading journals**

At the dogs' graduation ceremony, each trainer will speak about the dogs he trained to the group of families who will be there to adopt the dogs. At the end of the session I watched them practice what they were going to say.

I never asked but I'm sure that some of the trainers had never spoken in front of an audience before they started training dogs at SCCC.

One person told me that the trainers bond so closely with their dogs that some have



broken down while talking about their dog at graduation. For some of the men, **their relationship with their dog was the most significant connection with anyone or anything they have ever had.**

While the men waited for lunch, several of them **showed me their training journals**. Most of them were meticulously kept with entries for each day as well as information about the breed of dog trained.

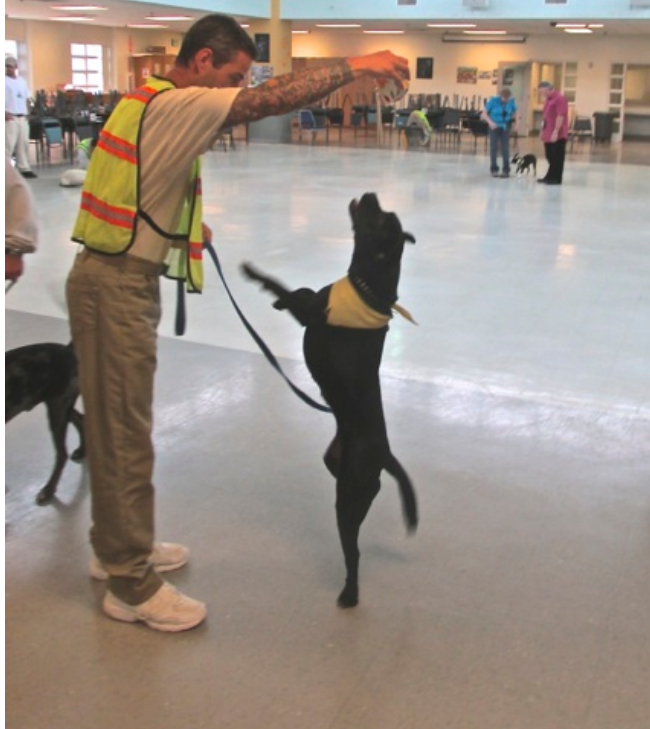
### **"Dog People" share a strong bond**

I left for home after the training session, my head spinning with the amazing work I had seen by the trainers and staff with these dogs that, like some of the offenders, **had entered the program full of pain and drained of hope.**



When I told people about my visit to SCCC, many of them wanted to know what crimes the offenders committed. Some asked out of curiosity, others asked because they were concerned about the safety of the dogs. But I have no idea. I never asked. **And I don't care.**





Many of us have done things in our lives that we regret. Some of them are horrific, some less so.

But dog people are dog people, and **our love of dogs trumps the fear or judgments** that can divide us.

It's like when you're at the dog park and you meet someone with whom you **KNOW** you have nothing in common.

Maybe you're a liberal and he got out of a car with a conservative bumper sticker. Or she has a designer dog she bought from a breeder and you have a mutt you got at the animal shelter.

But regardless of your differences, **you could talk for hours with each other about your dogs because you're both dog lovers.**

### **Freedom Tails changes lives**

I don't know if all the trainers were dog lovers before they entered the Freedom Tails program. But these men I met clearly loved the dogs they trained, and anyone who

loves dogs, regardless of what they have done, has some seeds of love and compassion within them.

Finding those seeds and nurturing them is one of the benefits of the Freedom Tails program. Those seeds may have been overpowered and smothered by poor decisions, fear, insecurity, hopelessness, or any number of other things, but they are still present.

Working with these dogs helps the trainers nourish those seeds and make them flourish. And as the seeds flourish, lives can change.

As many of us dog lovers know, **dogs are among the most selfless animals on the planet.** By forging relationships with them, the men have the perfect role models for learning how to trust and give while expecting nothing in return.

Committing a crime is, among other things, an act of selfishness. Working with dogs gives these men the opportunity to perform **an incredibly selfless act.**

They take these abused dogs, help them heal mentally and physically, train them, and then, after building an extremely close relationship with them, give them to a loving family so they can have happy lives.

And they do this knowing the pain they will feel when they give their dogs up after their



lives revolved around them for almost 3 months.

This is an incredible sacrifice, **a type of sacrifice many of the men probably would never have made if they hadn't participated in the Freedom Tails program.**

### **Dogs give offenders second chance too**

Prison is not supposed to be a place to house offenders and then kick them out into society unchanged. It's supposed to be about **rehabilitation and second chances.**

I'm not so idealistic that I can discount the problems with our prison system that can make rehabilitation difficult, and in some cases, impossible. I also know that some offenders can't be rehabilitated.

But I can't ignore the positive impact the Freedom Tails program has on these men either.

Here's how Robert Wrinkle explains it in the Bark Magazine interview:

***"It's actually put life back into my life. I don't know how else to say it. It's given me back a lot of stuff that I've lost over the years. And it's not just for me, but for my family. It's helped me re-interact with my family as far as how they're feeling. That's a topic of conversation every single time I talk with my family. They want to know what's going on with training, just about everything about it."***

As I drove home, I keep replaying scenes of the day in my head:

- Jesse throwing the toy for Fred
- Steve expressing concern that Shadow wouldn't find a home because he was too scared
- Dean brimming with pride as he showed me the leather goods he made to raise money for Freedom Tails
- The gentle pets and scratches the trainers gave the dogs as they waited their turn during the training session
- The care that the trainers used to record daily events in their diaries



It was then I realized that these dogs that had been starved and beaten, that had never known the loving touch of a human hand, that were days away from being killed, these dogs, when given a second chance, are reaching deep into men that many thought were unreachable and **giving them the capacity to take advantage of THEIR second chances.**

It was a good drive home.

*Here are excerpts from emails sent to North Beach Paws by families that adopted the dogs last month. You'll see from their comments that they appreciate how well-trained the dogs are.*

**SHADOW:** We want to pass along to the trainers what a testament to their success that Shadow responded to me yesterday when he slipped his collar and bolted away.



Even when he was anxious, panicky and cornered he had enough presence of mind to sit and stay!

**Please pass that along to Speakman and Knight. Shadow clearly did not want to leave them. He was nervous the whole car ride home.**

Shadow is settling in nicely. He is most comfortable in my room where his crate is. He is unsure about many things, but is already looking to me for direction and reassurance.

At the moment our 10-year old daughter is playing ball with him. He is such a beautiful dog and gentle spirit. I am already in love with him!

**Thank you again for being part of his rescue.**

**OSCAR:** We had a truly eventful weekend, starting with the ceremony at Stafford Creek. We were so proud of our little guy, and so very impressed with Rob and Dean, Oscar's trainers and best friends for the past 10 weeks.

I read the journal cover to cover, and can see all the wonderful love and care that our



guy was given at Stafford. It's something we will always treasure. I hope you can forward this message to them. Please also tell Patti that her volunteer time training the dogs and their handlers is simply wonderful.

We will do what we can to help the program and send others your way as well. **From the time we got to spend with Dean and Rob, we hope that one day they will be able to have a dog that they can call their own forever.**

For now, we are so very grateful to them for the training, care and love that has made this little guy all the better for having known and loved them. *They are stamped in his heart forever.*



**FRED:** Thank you for your concern and information about Fred (now Finn). He is doing great! The vet diagnosed a bulging disc in his neck, put him on prednisone, and the next day he was almost normal.



Now, 3 days later, he is a happy, vibrant dog running around the house with his Kong in his mouth.

I'm taking him to the vet again tomorrow just to get this checked out again. Meanwhile, he is doing fantastic!

Thank you for all the great work you do, and thank you for bringing this sweet dog into my life!



**ALIKA:** I wanted to tell you that Alika is doing really well at our house. We've been taking her out on walks and she seems to love to go out.

You were right in how Alika just wants to be with people. She is always with us and just wants to be petted.

My mom and nephew met her this weekend and they loved her. Alika actually laid across my nephew while he was on the ground with her. Guess she needed to find a way to be REALLY close.

The graduation ceremony was great and the handlers were really helpful.

*I'd recommend this to anyone interested in adopting.*

Thanks again for helping us adopt Alika. She's already on her way to being spoiled.

**OTIS:** I wanted to share a quick update on how Otis is adjusting to his new home. I



hope that you can share this with Otis' handler. He mentions in his journal how much he enjoys hearing updates.

Otis went to soccer practice and was immediately the hit of the practice. He was such a gentleman, letting all the girls on the team pet him and admire him. He is so gentle around kids and has such great manners.

**We thank the handler for instilling these great leash skills.** I know that he spent countless hours to keep him from pulling on the leash and it definitely shows. He has great leash skills!

We continue to work on his commands. **Thanks again to our handler for such a fantastic training period.** He's doing great at sit, stay and down. Otis responds very quickly to those commands and ***we credit the handler for that!***

Thanks again for the very helpful journal. Both my husband and I read it in its entirety and it gave us so much insight into Otis' behavior and training techniques. Again, we sincerely appreciate your time working with Otis.



**MISSY:** Missy is doing well. We are all still in transition but she is less timid and always very excited to see us when we wake or come home.



Thank you for all your help and continued support.

We are so grateful for the inmates and volunteers with the Freedom Tails program.

Missy is a blessing and we are very lucky to have her.

Thank you again.

**TAWNY:** We've had a busy week but Tawny is doing very well and settling in. When I go to work, I leave her in the crate,



but I'm home within 4-5 hours and she's out and then Kevin is home and she's out the rest of the day 'til we go to bed.

She and Kadie are getting along just fine. When I call Tawny, Kadie, our yellow Lab barks for her. It's pretty funny.

Keith and the photographer told us about a You Tube WA DOC video that Keith and Tawny are on. When Tawny heard Keith's voice, she made a little whimper sound and looked around for him.

So, if you can pass the word to Keith, she hasn't forgotten him. It was sweet and we didn't expect that from her.

Thanks so much for our beautiful new girl!



**KORKY:** Korky is settled and trying to figure out where she fits in at as are we. She loves running at the beach, through the waves in the dunes chasing birds as far as we let her and **she always comes as trained as soon as she hears us.**

Her left front still gives her trouble, looks like she'll have to have a more thorough examination and probably some sort of treatment.

I was reading her diary and the trainer mentions her left side giving her problems from the beginning, we sure hope it can be figured out.

**She makes us smile everyday. We love her. Thank you.**









Dog: LEXIE

BREED: BOXER, LAB Mix FEMALE

AGE: 2.9 YEARS

HEIGHT: 26.5 in @ the top of her head.

WEIGHT: 55 lbs @ arrival.

NOTES: HAS TO HAVE A GRAIN (GLUTEN) FREE D

Spayed

Owner Surrender

This is Lexie's journal. I will be writing in it daily to explain what I am doing with her, how she is doing and what is coming up next for her. There are some things I want to tell you about the Freedom Tails dog program first.

Us handlers the primary and Secondary spend 24 hours a day 7 days a week with our assigned dog. The dog shares our cell with us, goes to recreation yard with us, and goes to most of our cell-outs with us.

The reason there is a Primary and a Secondary handler is two-fold. The first reason is so that there is no confusion in training the dog. If one handler has a specific way of training that is the way



5/12/2013

I took Shadow out side in front of the unit and we did some walking he pretty scared dog around people. I give him a bath today too.

This afternoon we did some more walking out side in front of the unit. I think he likes walking around he not so afraid when he walking around.



5 comment(s)

[Post a comment](#)

5 comment(s)

This is a wonderful program. It's not only good for the dogs but it gives the men responsibility.

BY: phyllisking on Sep 6, 2013 at 5:46pm

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We are the proud parents of Oscar, the mini Dachshund. He is such a loving little guy and we feel so lucky to have been chosen as his parents. He has a sister that we have raised from a puppy. The difference is palpable. She is confident, and he stays back. She is selfish and territorial, he is grateful for food and love. His look of utter contentment as he sits on my lap is so sweet. While his sister knows nothing of going without either food or love, he does. It makes us want to love him even more to make up for whatever his life was before. The two play together, chase and play tag and tug of war, and we love every minute of it. What a great program. Thank you.

BY: christinegoff on Sep 7, 2013 at 10:22am

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I have personally met some of the offenders who work with the dogs and it is such an amazing program. It is helpful for inmate and dogs alike.

BY: alicelewis on Sep 7, 2013 at 11:40am

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What a inspiring story. What I think is so valuable about this program is that it both the trainer and the dog are learning to trust, learning to understand the needs of others, and practicing discipline.

BY: debbielewis on Sep 8, 2013 at 8:09am

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Robert, thank you so much for taking the time to come visit SCCC and Freedom Tails!!  
You did an outstanding job in promoting everything about the program!!! Thank you  
again, Karen

BY: karendiehm on Sep 9, 2013 at 9:50pm

From: <http://www.seattledogspot.com/blog/dog-blog/post/dog-training-program-at-stafford-creek-corrections-center-an-amazing-success>