



Freedom Tails

Stafford Creek Corrections Center – March 2015 Vol 7/No 8

All 11 Dogs Find New Forever Homes!!



Wednesday, June 24th, Freedom Tails held their second graduation of the year. We had a full audience of adopters, shelter members, staff, and outside community members and businesses who support the program. We were actually able to convince The Daily World to come visit and check out the program. Writer Jake Schild and photographer Gabe Green showed up with a note pad and camera, and created a wonderful article to spread the news (see article and photos below). Additionally, one of the adopters was also a media guy who covered Freedom Tails in 2013 on his website, www.seattledogspot.com, Robert Pregulman. But, Robert didn't come to do an article this time (though he has, you'll see that below also), he came as an adopter for a wonderful Lab named Haley!! A shout out goes to Pet Sense and manager Brittany Schultz for the generous goodie bags that went home with the adopters. With this graduation, Freedom Tails has now found new forever, loving homes for over **275** dogs!

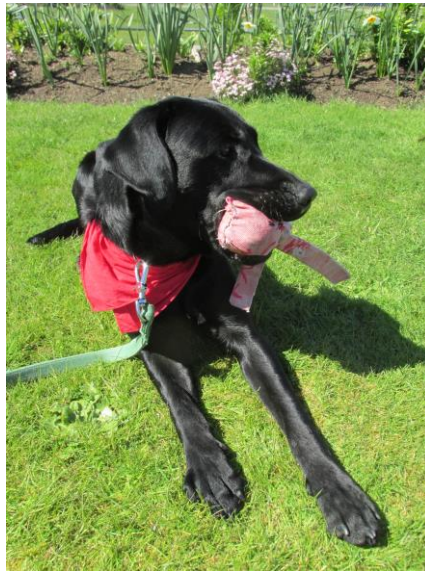


L: So, the thought was to get a group photo of the H3 dogs. Well, the dogs had other thoughts.....

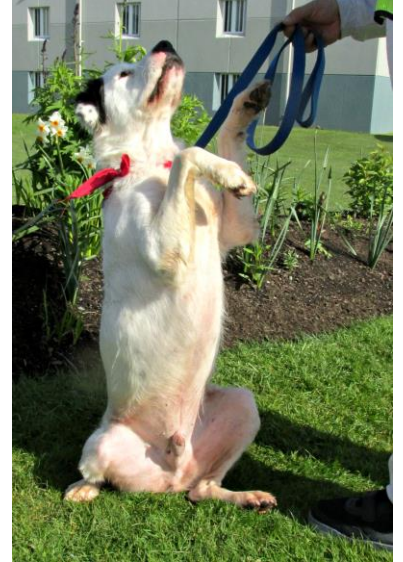
R: Die-hard Seahawks fan, Buck, not only shows off his support with his beautiful pendant, but shouts out "Go Hawks!" at the same time!



Graduation and Session Shots



I love to stretch.....



Our tri-colored Labrador assortment!



The Daily World Comes to SECC

Community members, inmates share love of dogs at Freedom Tails graduation

Posted July 1, 2015 - 8:30am By Jake Schild – Photos by Gabe Green - The Daily World

<http://thedailyworld.com/news/local/community-members-inmates-share-love-dogs-freedom-tails-graduation>



A Freedom Tails dog nuzzles his trainer as Stafford Creek inmates pose for a group photo at the end of Wednesday's adoption ceremony.

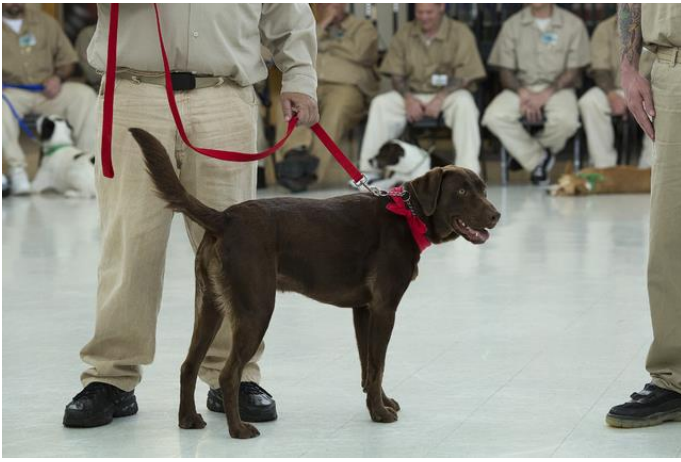
Looking past the steel doors and the barbed wire canopy over the entry way at a Stafford Creek visiting room one day last month, one might have had a hard time interpreting the atmosphere inside as reminiscent of a prison. Inmates and community members filled the room, sitting on folding chairs around a beige concrete floor for the Freedom Tails graduation, an event that drew prisoners and locals together through their mutual love for man's best

friend. The program allows inmates to live with and train dogs from local animal shelters before giving the canines up for adoption to families in the community. On this day, inmates involved with Freedom Tails gave the dogs to their new owners after looking after them for the past 10 weeks.

The program started in 2009 and has graduated 275 dogs since its inception. Inmates who participate must be infraction-free and go through a screening process to be accepted to the program. Stafford Creek was the first male prison in the state of Washington to incorporate a dog program for inmates. Over the 10-week process, the dogs live with their assigned inmates 24/7, sleeping in their cells and parting ways only when the offenders go the dining hall or work. The dogs are donated by PAWS of Grays Harbor or Raymond-based Harbor Association of Volunteers for Animals, and would most likely have been euthanized if they were not adopted by the prison. "It gives the offenders a sense of responsibility and a sense of giving back to the community," said Dennis Cherry, a correctional unit supervisor at Stafford Creek.

During the ceremony, the inmates introduced their dogs to the crowd of adopting parents and accompanied the dogs on an obstacle course the prison set up in the visiting room. Inmates walked around in a circle with their dogs while being told by an inmate to give hand commands to the animals over a microphone. "Sit your dog," commanded inmate Dean Royer from the middle of the circle. "Down and stay your dog." Impressively, each dog in the circle complied with their companion's commands, making obvious the time and effort each offender had put in over the 10-week training period.

As they spent what they knew would be their last moments with their pets before they were taken in by an adoptive family, many inmates were obviously emotional. When asked to speak about their dog, some handed the microphone off, unable to hold back tears when talking about the bond they had established with the animals. Royer, who said he has been in jail since he was young, said he has been involved in the Freedom Tails program at both Walla Walla and Stafford Creek. Royer said having the dog helps to give inmates structure and allows them to think about someone else other than themselves as they care for the pet. He said he was a "horrible" burglar when on the outside, joking that the first dog he remembers having is one he thinks he stole outside of a 7-11. "I remember I thought somebody left a basset hound in front of 7-11, but looking back I think I stole it," he said.



A dog stands by its trainers during the Freedom Tails adoption Ceremony on Wednesday.

Living a life that can often be isolated and lonely in the prison, he said the dog program helps to alleviate struggles offenders have while locked up. "When you're living in a box with somebody, they don't jump up and smile every time you come in," said Royer. "The dog does. The dog is happy to see you at morning and at night and all throughout the day."

Alicia Ruiz watched "Skeeter," a black lab, play with other dogs in the visiting room after the ceremony. A friend of Ruiz found the dog and gave it to her to foster at her house.

She then talked to a HAVA member and donated the dog to the Freedom Tails program. "It's a great program. He was very active and definitely needed some help to be highly adoptable," she said. "This clearly has helped him."



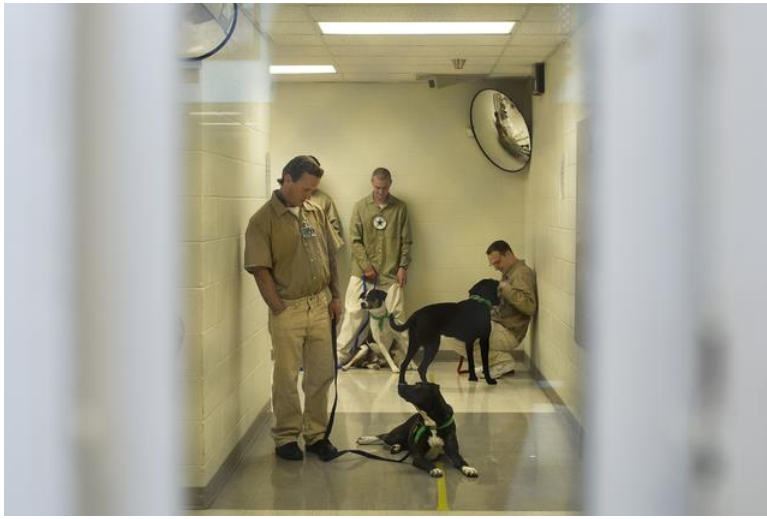
L: (Gabe Green | The Daily World) A Stafford Creek inmate talks about his dog during the Freedom Tails adoption ceremony.

Below: (Gabe Green | The Daily World) A inmate volunteer praises Penny as her trainer has her walk along a platform during the Freedom Tails adoption ceremony on Wednesday at Stafford Creek Corrections Center.



Above: Trainers walk their dogs in a circle during the Freedom Tails adoption ceremony on Wednesday at Stafford Creek Corrections Center. **R:** A dog displays its "stay" command during the Freedom Tails adoption ceremony.





L: Stafford Creek inmates wait in a hallway with their dogs before the start of Wednesday's Freedom Tails adoption ceremony. **Below:** A Stafford Creek inmate extends his hand to his dog during Wednesday's Freedom Tails adoption ceremony at Stafford Creek Corrections Center.



Below: Stafford Creek inmates pose for a group photo at the end of Wednesday's adoption ceremony.



<http://www.seattledogspot.com/dog-adoption-rescue/>

Why we visited our new dog in prison twice before we decided to adopt her

June 23, 2015 - Last month I wrote that we're adopting a new dog into our family, a young yellow Labrador Retriever named Haley. Since we already have a dog and a cat, I wrote about the lengthy process we went through to determine what kind of dog that would be the best fit for everyone, both 2-legged and 4-legged, in our house. As I've said before, we're adopting Haley from the HAVA's Freedom Tails program at the Stafford Creek Correctional Center in Aberdeen. 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, house training, and much needed obedience skills." While we were wildly excited to adopt Haley, after we met her the first time we considered passing on her and adopting a different dog.



L: This is how Haley looked during our first visit. Totally fixated on a tennis ball. Completely oblivious to us. Photos from Seattle DogSpot.

We set up our initial meeting with her on a Saturday. When Randy and I arrived at Stafford Creek, our anticipation about seeing her had grown exponentially because we were certain she would be the perfect match for us because she met all the criteria we had carefully pieced together.

We were scheduled to meet her in a grassy area next to the entrance to the Correctional Center. When we got out of the car with our other dog Miguel, who

we brought to meet her too, we immediately saw a little yellow speck in the distance that we knew was her. Like a teenaged boy approaching a girl to ask her out, we tried to look cool, calm, and collected as we walked up to Haley. It wasn't easy, but somehow we managed to do it.

We thought the meeting would just be a formality. We expected that Haley would take one look at us and bound over to give up a tail helicoptering, butt wagging, slobbery kissing greeting. We also knew we would fall in love with her seconds after meeting her. But none of those things happened. After giving us a cursory glance when we walked up to her, she ignored us.

She *completely* ignored us. Instead, she focused another dog in the program that was also meeting its potential adopter. That dog had what we learned was Haley's favorite thing – a tennis ball. For the entire hour we were there, Haley didn't divert her attention from the ball either when the other dog or she had it. Even treats couldn't break the spell the ball cast over her.

Haley had no problem going for a short walk with each one of us, but as soon as we returned her attention went back to the ball. The one encouraging thing that happened during our visit was that Haley and Miguel appeared to get along. They didn't do any play bows or play chase, but they acknowledged each other and walked together with no problem. We were a little depressed on the ride home. While Haley was a beautiful, well-trained dog, her indifference towards us was deflating, especially after the build-up of our excitement about meeting her.



Did I mention she was completely focused on a tennis ball?

When we got home we realized we had three options:

- Don't adopt Haley
- Adopt Haley and hope her inattention to us was an aberration
- Meet Haley one more time with no other dogs, balls, or people nearby

After some thought we nixed the thought that we wouldn't adopt her. Even though she ignored us, we realized that if we had met Dylan, our ball crazy Labrador Retriever that died last October, under the same circumstances, he would have done exactly the same thing. He would even refuse treats if he knew a ball was nearby. That's a big deal for a Lab. We also didn't want to break our commitment to adopt Haley. But we also realized we couldn't adopt her and just hope for the best. If she was truly indifferent to us for whatever reason, it would have been unfair to her for us to adopt her.



Miguel and Haley got along just fine.

We decided to ask HAVA if we could meet her again with no distractions. Just us and her. HAVA didn't hesitate to allow us to visit Haley again. Like all reputable rescues, they wanted their dogs to spend as much time as possible with potential adopters to ensure their dogs were placed in a home where they had the best chance to be happy and thrive. So about a week later we made the 2-1/2 hour drive to Stafford Creek again to see Haley again with no distractions. No other people. No other dogs. No balls. No Miguel. What a *huge* difference it made.

With no one and no toys around, Haley focused her attention on us and, like most Labs, she was friendly, engaging, fun, and playful. She had extremely good manners as well, thanks to her training. She had sit, down, and stay with no problem. She had a little trouble with heeling but she had a few weeks to work on it before coming home with us.

We also got the added bonus to see how she reacted to overly aggressive dogs. While I walked her, a guard with one of Stafford Creek's search dogs came around the corner of a building. The dog was off leash, and when it saw Haley it immediately ran towards her barking and snarling. Since it was about 100 feet away I had time to move in front of Haley to prevent the dog from reaching her. While the dog tried to get at Haley and I turned in circles trying stay between them. During this time, Haley remained perfectly calm and made no attempt to engage the other dog. After about 10 seconds the dog's handler arrived and got him on leash and under control. Once that happened, Haley immediately did a play bow, wagged her tail, and tried to get the dog that just attacked her to play.



Without any distractions, Haley was much better on our second visit.

That sealed the deal for me. Before we started looking for another dog, we decided the most important thing it had to have was a laid back personality and go-with-the-flow temperament because Miguel has a more dominant personality. After reluctantly leaving Haley and getting in the car for our trip home, we both immediately agreed that we wanted to adopt her.

Of course we won't know for sure how Haley will fit into our family until we bring her home, but because we did our homework regarding what kind of dog we wanted and didn't hesitate to make another 5-hour round trip to spend more time with her, the chances are good that she'll fit right in. Tomorrow we go to Stafford Creek to attend her graduation ceremony from Freedom Tails and bring her home. I can hardly wait.

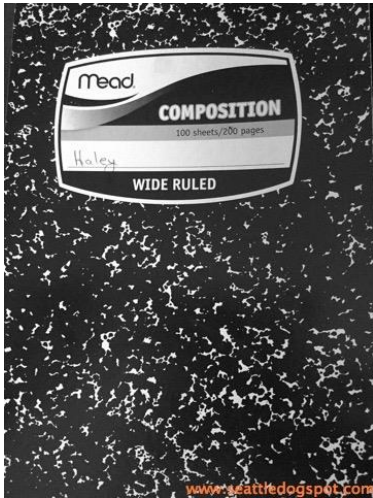
Our dog graduates from the Freedom Tails program

June 30, 2015 - Our new dog Haley has been with us for almost a week. She's a 2-3 year old yellow Labrador Retriever we decided to adopt last month. We couldn't have hoped for a better dog to add to our family, and her transition into our home has been virtually seamless. We drove to Aberdeen last Wednesday to watch Haley's graduation from HAVA Heart rescue's Freedom Tails program at the Stafford Creek Correctional Center. So far the program has saved about 275 dogs. Haley's "class" has 11 dogs in it.

The graduation ceremony for Haley's class was held in a large day room inside the prison. All of us adopters who came to pick up our dogs sat in a few rows of chairs set off to the side of large, open area in the middle of the room. We all fidgeted nervously as we waited for the trainers to bring in our dogs. The trainers and their dogs walked into the room single file and made several different formations while having the dogs change directions several times. They finished their entrance by forming a circle, asking their dogs to sit and stay, and walking around the circle until they came to their dogs again.

To show how well they trained the dogs, the trainers then used a series of hand signals to show the dogs would sit, stay, and heel without verbal commands. They ended the training demonstration by having the dogs run through a makeshift obstacle course. While the trainers put the dogs through their paces all us adopters in the audience craned our necks to find our dogs. I don't have kids, but once I saw Haley I felt like a proud parent watching his/her kid graduate high school.

Below: This is Haley's diary. James wrote in it every day to document her progress during training.

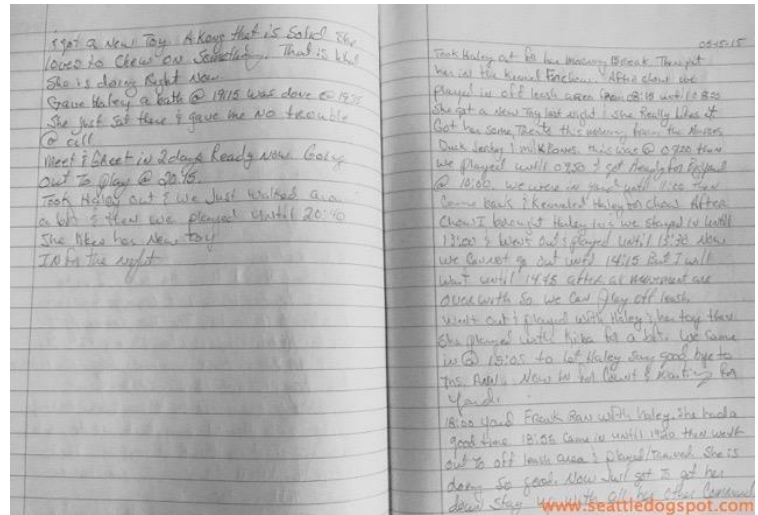


After the procession each trainer brought his dog to the center of the room, faced the adopters, and told us a little bit about the dog they trained over the past 10 weeks. Some of them only spoke briefly. Others went on for several minutes. But regardless of how well or how long the trainers spoke, the dedication, commitment, and love they had for their dogs was apparent. For some of the men, their relationship with their dog was the most significant connection with anyone or anything they have ever had. After the trainers spoke about their dogs, each of the adopters sat down at a table with his/her dog and its trainers to ask them questions we had about our dogs. Each table had a note card with the dog's name and picture.

James and Frank trained Haley. James was the lead trainer, and I think Haley was the fourth dog he had trained. I sat with them for about 45 minutes while James proudly told me everything he taught Haley, provided an in depth

explanation of her habits and idiosyncrasies, made sure I knew her favorite snacks (popcorn and peanut butter), and told me her nickname (Wiggleworm). He also gave me Haley's "diary" which contained detailed entries describing what Haley learned each day.

While we spoke, Haley laid obediently between us. James gave me her leash to hold, but all her attention was focused on him. I doubt she recognized me from my earlier visits. Eventually the adopters began to leave with their dogs. I could have spoken with James for another couple of hours, not just because I wanted to hear more about Haley, but also to avoid taking Haley away which I knew devastate both him and Frank.



Above: James kept extensive, specific notes regarding Haley's training.

Unfortunately, the schedule for the offenders at Stafford Creek was not flexible or negotiable, so I couldn't extend our visit any longer, and the moment arrived for me to leave with Haley. Until then, James and Frank had maintained a stoic facade, but when they realized Haley was leaving with me and they would probably not see her again, their eyes reddened and filled with tears. As I prepared to leave with Haley, James gave me the notecard with Haley's name and picture on it, but I didn't need it since I would be taking hundreds of pictures of Haley, so I said he could keep it. He gently took the card from me and looked at it lovingly before putting it in his pocket. I imagine he kept the note cards for all the dogs he trained in Freedom Tails and posted them in his cell. After I gave James the notecard I shook hands with him and Frank. We then went our separate, vastly different ways. Thank you for training Haley, James. You did a fantastic job. *(I'll write about Haley's arrival at our house and how she is doing later this week.)*

When you access the HAVA website, slowly drop under the Freedom Tails tab...magically an application link appears!



HAVA House - 431 2nd Street – PO Box 243
Raymond, WA 98577 – 360.942.4716

For an adoption application see the website or contact:

Christine Balcom at beesnblossoms@live.com

<http://www.hava-heart.org/freedom-tails>