



## **Welcome to the E-Newsletter of the Prison Ministry Advisory Board of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester**

We offer this newsletter to readers on a periodic basis to highlight recent developments among the various ministries and agencies working with and through our members which relate to care of prisoners and their families, and of the many other issues of relevance to this community.

In the late summer of 2017, two new programs were begun in the Monroe County Correctional Facility (MCF) involving interactions between inmates and canines for the purpose of therapy and job readiness development for the participants. These programs have been found to improve inmate morale and complement the many educational and therapy programs offered at MCF. The first program, "New Leash on Life" was introduced by Captain James McGowan, Commanding Officer at MCF, with direct support from Dr. Tisha Smith, head of Inmate Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program at MCF, and with support from Josh Lynd, Director of Vocational Programs. "New Leash on Life" involves inmates in the rehabilitation and training of un-adoptable dogs, to make them suitable for adoption into caring homes as pets.

With the second program, a therapy dog interacts with small groups of men and women by the dog's handler, Ms. Barbara Kowulich. Through these interactions with her dog "Faith, participants have a chance to connect with their feelings and brighten their mood. These new rehabilitative opportunities are described below.

### **Therapy and Training Using Canines at the Monroe County Correctional Facility Program Summaries Written by Shayna Munyon**

#### **"New Leash on Life" Rehabilitation for Inmates and for Dogs at MCF**

Recently, a program to rehabilitate both inmates and un-adoptable dogs while teaching job readiness skills, was begun at the Monroe Correctional Facility. The program called "New Leash on Life" matches un-adoptable and untrained dogs with jail inmates<sup>1</sup>. These dogs reside in the Monroe Correctional Facility with the inmates for six to eight weeks. After the time period is up, the dogs are sent back to the Lollypop Farm in Perinton where they are put up for adoption.

Dr. Tisha Smith is the Director of the Inmate Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program at the Monroe County Correctional Facility. She also oversees the dog programs at the facility. "New Leash on Life" is one of many rehabilitation programs at the facility. In order to participate, the inmates have to attend dog training classes. After they complete the entire portion of classes, the handlers are then selected from that group.

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<sup>1</sup> See "Need More Information?" listed below; (Democrat and Chronicle, Oct. 18, 2017; first URL in listing).

### **Rugby**

The facility's first dog was a two year old pit-bull named Rugby. Rugby was seized by law enforcement as an abandonment case. Rugby arrived at MCF unable to follow voice commands and was not "housebroken." Staff and inmates quickly became fond of Rugby. As Dr. Smith stated, "he was enveloped with love since the moment he arrived". The handlers organized their work and personal visiting schedules around Rugby. Dr. Smith stated there was no hierarchy over who cared for Rugby. All of the handlers involved shared responsibility for taking care of and training him. Those involved in this program have been helped to prepare for life after they return to the community. Responsibility and hard work ethic are just some traits that are being acquired through the "New Leash on Life" program. Indeed, Dr. Smith stated there was a difference in the overall emotional environment of the facility after Rugby arrived. She said that the atmosphere in the facility became more "mellow".

### **New Information!**

Recently, we learned that Rugby was adopted by one of his incarcerated handlers now released from MCF. This is truly a "win-win" situation, as Rugby has a loving owner to take care of him and Rugby's owner has a devoted canine friend! Another dog in need of rehabilitation will be arriving soon, so this wonderful program will continue.

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### **Therapy Dog "Faith" Gives Comfort to Incarcerated Men and Women**

Barbara Kowulich is a retired Physician Assistant having been in practice for 28 years. She got her first dog in her second year of college, and has been surrounded by dogs ever since. Several years ago she was at the New York State Fair and noticed a booth recruiting volunteer puppy raisers for "Guiding Eyes for the Blind". This sparked her interest in service and therapy work using animals. She went on to raise four dogs for Guiding Eyes. When her dog, Faith, who was a brood for the "Guiding Eyes" program was retired, she was able to adopt her back. She decided Faith would make an excellent "therapy" dog since she was the best behaved! Faith, now eight years old, enrolled in the eight week course, passed the exam, and was certified as a "therapy" dog.



From left to right, Sabra ("Twig") Hickam, Director of Education at MCF, Capt. James McGowan, Facility Director, Barbara Kowulich, and of course. Faith.

"Service" dogs differ from "therapy" dogs in that they work with disabled and handicapped persons, and are allowed to go everywhere with their assigned person. On the other hand, "therapy" dogs are limited to giving only emotional support to those with whom they interact. Now, as a certified "therapy" dog, Faith has begun traveling around the area attending different venues to offer her support to whoever needs or wants emotional support.

Barbara got her start at the Monroe County Correctional Facility through her church as a volunteer for the

Rochester Storybook Project - a program which records inmates reading stories to their children via CD's. It was here that she got the idea to bring Faith into the facility to give comfort to the residents. Barb proposed her idea to Capt. James McGowan, Commanding Officer for the Monroe County Correctional Facility. Captain McGowan was very enthusiastic about her proposal. Once our then Monroe County Sheriff Patrick O'Flynn approved of the program, Faith was welcomed into the facility as a therapy dog. Now, Barbara and Faith, with support from Sabra ("Twig") Hickam, Director of Education at MCF, come to the facility every two weeks. On these visits, Faith interacts with both men and women inmates for a half hour each.

### **How does the program work?**

Barbara and Faith have a classroom assigned to them each time they come in. The ladies arrive first. They all sit in a big circle and Faith makes her way around the circle, greeting every person. From petting and hugging, and licking, there is no shortage of affection between Faith and her friends. After the first half hour, the ladies leave, and the men come in, and once again, Faith holds court. Barb's groups

are becoming so popular that the sign-up lists are quickly filling up.

Many of the men and women have dogs of their own which makes Faith's visits even more enjoyable and therapeutic for them. Within this intimate setting, a catharsis takes place as the participants are able to talk about their own beloved animals. In some cases, after having given the program a "try", inmates who were initially afraid of dogs have become emotionally attached to Faith. Barb has noticed that when people first join the program, they are not sure what to expect, but Faith quickly wins them over as they become accustomed and comfortable with her. The mood of each group quickly becomes calm and relaxed with the men and women smiling and happy during the program. This is certainly a "stress-free" zone.

### **Unconditional Emotional Support and More, Offered by these Programs**

Both "New Leash on Life" and the therapy dog visits, each in their own way, offer participants the unconditional emotional support that interacting with animals can provide. Furthermore, "New Leash on Life" helps inmates gain job readiness skills as they rehabilitate their dog with behavior modification training. Barb's work with her therapy dog, Faith, helps participants connect with their feelings in loving non-judgmental group settings. Together, they complement the many other services offered in the Monroe Correctional Facility to the inmates for their therapeutic and educational needs.

Special acknowledgement goes to Dr. Tisha Smith and Captain James McGowan, for their enthusiastic support and supervision of these programs, and to Barbara Kowulich for her therapy dog program. We also wish to thank Josh Lynd, Director of the Vocational Programs at the facility for his support of the "New Leash on Life" program, and Sabra ("Twig") Hickam, Director of Education at the facility, for her support of the therapy dog program. Finally, we offer special thanks to former Sheriff Patrick O'Flynn for his support and approval of these programs.

### **Want More Information?**

**For more information on "New Leash on Life" offered at MCF**, see "Inmates, Dogs Get a New 'Leash' on Life" by Victoria E. Freile, Democrat and Chronicle, Oct. 18, 2017 or click on the URL:

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2017/10/18/inmates-train-care-dogs-humane-society/768496001/>

**For more information on Dog Rehabilitation Programs in Jails and Prisons**, see "Prison Pup Programs, a Proven Rehabilitative Tool" by Christopher Zoukis, Huffington Post, Aug. 15, 2017, or click on the URL:

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/prison-pup-programs-a-promising-rehabilitative-tool\\_us\\_5993577de4b0afd94eb3f58b](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/prison-pup-programs-a-promising-rehabilitative-tool_us_5993577de4b0afd94eb3f58b)

**For more information about the Prison Ministry Advisory Board of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester** and its many related ministries, visit our website, [www.prisonministry-edr.org](http://www.prisonministry-edr.org).

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