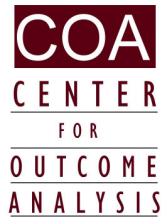


# **New Leash Participants See Their Lives Improving**



*Center for Outcome Analysis*

*Longitudinal Study of Outcomes and Costs of  
New Leash On Life USA*

*Outcomes Brief Report #3*

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## **Introduction**

This is a report of preliminary findings about the short term outcomes of a canine training program in an urban jail. Much of the literature on animal programs in prison has been qualitative and/or anecdotal (Furst. 2011). This is one of the first efforts to measure outcomes using a quantitative interview methodology. The sample is small (11 men), but because this kind of study is new, and the rapid spread of similar programs, the information is valuable.

## **Program Description**

New Leash on Life USA (<http://newleashonlife-usa.org/>) was founded in 2010 primarily as a way to save dogs, particularly pit bulls, from destruction. By the time the first cohort of participants began training, New Leash was also aimed strongly at benefiting the participating men, but teaching them concrete skills that might be useful post-release - According to the information on the group's website:

*New Leash on Life USA is a new generation prison dog-training program that saves the lives of shelter dogs by training and socializing them to enhance their adoptability while helping inmates learn to train and care for dogs.*

*With New Leash on Life USA, dogs live in the cells with their inmate trainers 24/7, making New Leash dogs highly desirable for adoption and ensuring the long-term success for both humans and dogs.*

*New Leash on Life USA provides:*

- *Weekly sessions with professional trainers, animal behaviorists and veterinary technicians.*
- *Job readiness and life skills courses to improve successful reentry and employability for inmates upon parole.*
- *Scholarships for paroled inmates for additional training and education in the animal care field.*

The program is located in the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Center in Philadelphia. This city jail houses about 8,000 men, down from 10,000 two years in

2010. The data were collected from the stakeholders of the program including the city correctional employees.

The program pairs offenders with canines rescued from destruction who are socialized for placement as pets in homes in the community. NLOL is a community service program, one of the most common types in the nation. The question of the effects associated with the programs was informed primarily by interviews with program participants. The correction officers posted in the unit where the program is housed were interviewed as well. The first cohort consisted of eight primary handlers responsible for four dogs. Two of the participant handlers were cut from the program in the first cohort because of a rule infraction. Interviews took place in the prison facilities where the programs are located.

Participants are screened for the program by an ad hoc committee of stakeholders, including prosecutorial, advocacy, defense and correctional representatives. They looked to the Outcome Evaluators for guidance in selection from the beginning. However, when the Evaluator urged random assignment, the usual process took hold in which the stakeholders attempted to include those they believed “most likely to succeed.” This interfered with the scientific design of the studies, but was recognized as inevitable in the real world. In addition, participants can not have been convicted of a sex offense or a crime involving human or animal abuse.

## ***Procedures***

We conducted a post-only analysis of quality of prison life perceptions among participants in a recently initiated canine training program. The program was a 10 week “live-in” design, in which five dogs rescued from imminent euthanasia were placed with

11 inmates of the Philadelphia city jail's Alternative Sentencing and Detention Unit for 10 weeks.

The participating inmates were trained in animal care generally, and training techniques specifically. Each dog was tested for Canine Good Citizenship at the end, and each participant inmate received a certificate of completion of the animal training curriculum.

At the end of the 10 weeks, we asked each participant to rate his qualities of life in the jail both "Then" (just before the program began) and "Now" (at the moment of the interview).<sup>1</sup> This approach is called the "memory of change" method, and it is different from the "before and after" method. The results were consistent, and their statistical significance fairly high.<sup>2</sup>

## **Results**

The results of this outcome study were analyzed and graphed.<sup>3</sup> Survey questions were grouped into five general categories: Feelings About Self, Emotions, Relationships with Staff, Prison Conditions, and Relationships with Other Inmates. The numeric results are shown graphically below.

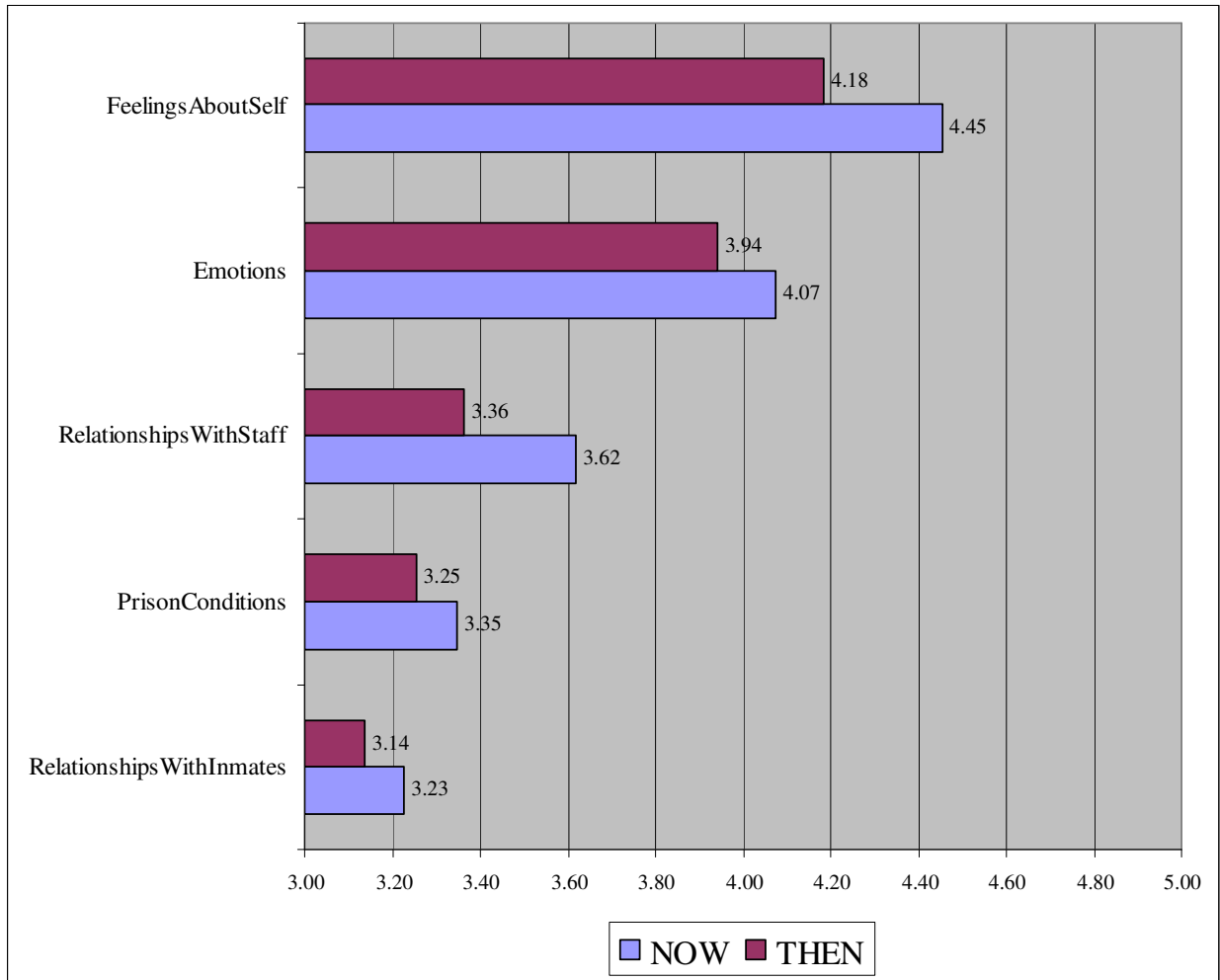
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<sup>1</sup> This memory-based approach was utilized because of a delay in the approval process by the City's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. This study was considered preliminary to a planned true pre and post design

<sup>2</sup> The survey instrument is available from the authors. It is composed of 38 simple questions about qualities of prison life, each rated on a five point scale from "Very Bad" to "Very Good."

<sup>3</sup> As a formality, they were also tested for statistical significance at the  $p < .10$  level.

**Figure 1: Participant Ratings of Their Lives – Memory Method**



In the graph, the darker red colored bars on top show the “Then” ratings (the men’s memories of how things were before their dogs arrived), and the lighter colored blue bars at the bottom show the “Now” ratings, while near the end of their time working with the dogs.

The top two bars of the graph show that the participants in the second New Leash cohort had strong positive feelings about themselves. But this went up, according to the memories of the men, from an average of 4.18 out of 5 points to 4.45. In fact, each of the

“Now” lighter bars is larger than the “Then” darker bars – showing that the participants’ ratings about their lives went up in every one of the five dimensions.<sup>4</sup>

Statistical analysis with such small samples is challenged by the fact that it is very hard to achieve statistical significance with very small samples. We used both kinds of statistical tests for this situation, parametric and non-parametric. Both statistics showed that all five of the perceived changes reached significance at the conservative  $p < .10$  level.

We also combined all 38 items into one single overall scale reflecting the prison experience before, and then with, the dogs. The average overall scale score went up from 3.65 to 3.83.<sup>5</sup> This change was highly statistically significant ( $p < .004$ ).

## ***Discussion***

These early outcome findings from the studies of the New Leash On Life USA program showed that the participants reported themselves to be in better situations with the dogs. All five outcome areas improved.<sup>6</sup>

This study relied on the men’s memory, which can be shaped by feelings and biases that develop during the program; the next test will include the “before and after” interview method. That method will give us the next level of scientific confidence.

The interviews with program stakeholders regarding program effects revealed further confirmation for many of the findings regarding psycho-social benefits previously

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<sup>4</sup> Every one of these changes was statistically significant, using both the standard Student’s t-test, and the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. The latter is designed for use with small numbers of cases in samples. However, these 11 men were a population, not a sample. Inferential statistics are intended to tell us whether what we see in a sample is likely to be true for the entire population. Here, we have the entire population, and we do not claim to be generalizing to a larger group. In that sense, what is seen in the graph are the results, and no statistics are strictly necessary.

<sup>5</sup> This change was significant such that a change this large could happen by chance only about 4 times out of 1000.

<sup>6</sup> And they were all statistically significant.

reported. Supporting the work of Arkow (1998), most participants of both programs reported learning to get along with and trust each other as they worked together with shared responsibilities aimed at common goals. Similar to Moneymaker and Strimple (1991), most participants in the program reported having a more positive outlook on life since they began the program. These researchers and others, including Cushing and Williams (1995), also found evidence of participants experiencing improved self-worth and increased self-esteem. The majority of participants in the current study reported feeling more positive about themselves and feeling more worthwhile as a result of their work with the dogs. Increased self- confidence and patience, found in an evaluation of a wild mustang program (Lai, 1998), was also reported in the current study. The results are also consistent with the findings of Cushing and Williams (1995). As in their work, many of the current sample of participants noted that being entrusted with the dogs was significant or meaningful and contributed to their sense of accomplishment and of being able to take pride in their hard work.

The data collected for the current study indicate support for the findings from a review of Scottish PAPs. According to Graham (2000) the programs were found to increase communication among inmates and between inmates and staff members. While a number of participants from both sites of the present study reported increased interactions with their fellow inmates, a nearly even number did not. Many did report more positive interactions with some staff members. The Scottish study found visitors stayed longer and many participants in the current study told of including the dogs on visits and in discussions during phone calls with family members. Also in concordance with Graham (2000) is the finding that the animals were associated with reduced levels of staff stress. Staff and administrators at both program sites reported the overall support of and enjoyment from the dogs.

The data support findings reported by Harbolt and Ward (1991) who examined a community service program with incarcerated older teenagers. Those researchers found

that the youth demonstrated compassion, were dedicated to their responsibilities, and had gained experience giving and receiving positive regard. The participants in the current sample also consistently demonstrated compassion and dedication to their work. They also noted the therapeutic effects of having a dog with them inside prison.

The effect on vocational skills noted by Harkrader et al. (2004) and Lai (1998) was supported by the current research. Participants and stakeholders alike reported that the programs instilled a sense of responsibility in participants. Responsibility was also commonly reported in the national survey included in the present project. At the female facility, participants with at least a GED and 18 months left on their sentence are able to take a correspondent course in Veterinary Assistant paid for by the non-profit that administers the program. Administrators reported that five participants have taken advantage of the offer. Two participants reported currently pursuing the certification.

The sociological and more large-scale effects of PAPs reported in the literature (see Harkrader et al., 2004; Lai, 1998) were found in the present examination. Positive community relations and positive press was reported as a benefit by administrators of both facilities. The sense of engaging in positive work and of serving the community was also raised by administrators from both facilities. New Leash also reflected an independent and different social issue, the demand for the rescue of dogs that would have otherwise been destroyed at the male facility.

The academic literature lacks discussion of challenges to implementing PAPs. Administrators and staff members at both facilities acknowledged facing challenges to implementation. Concerns from union members, those allergic and fearful of dogs, and those who argued that “dogs just don’t belong in prison” had to be addressed. Administrators and supportive staff members helped spread a positive message about the programs. Interviews from both sites indicated that today most staff members support the programs even while some refuse to be impressed by the lack of problems and relative



success of the program. No one interviewed expressed concern that the programs might be in jeopardy because of these non-supporters.

Prior research has not considered the effects of these programs on non-participants nor how non-participants treat or regard those in PAPs. Participants at the facility occasionally mentioned being made fun of or harassed by inmates not in the program. During interviews participants told of being taunted by those who see them as weak and needing a dog for protection. Some participants indicated that others see them as privileged.

Some of the findings from previously reported research were not supported by the present investigation. Since the current study did not ask about illegal drug use prior to program participation, it is not known if participation positively impacted, or reduced, drug use. Hines (n.d.) reported that there was evidence of decreased suicide among PAP participants. The present study did ask about suicide ideation but respondents overwhelmingly reported the positive effect the dogs had on their mood.

Ultimately, our outcome studies will need to reveal how much impact the New Leash work will have on the lives of the man after their release. At this stage, it is safe to say that the men who trained dogs in the Philadelphia prison found the experience very positive. The two largest changes they reported were in their feelings about themselves, including hope for their future, and their relationships with the corrections officers. These areas may be critical for successful completion of their sentence and later reintegration into society.

# Appendix A: Prison Quality of Life Scale (PQOLS)<sup>7</sup>

## New Leash on Life Outcome Analysis

### Instructions - Give this page to participants

The survey is made up of a bunch of statements about your life here. We'll ask you to say **how true** each one was for you, two months ago before New Leash got started, and **how true** they are now.

The survey takes around 20 minutes.

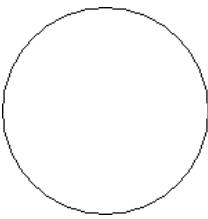
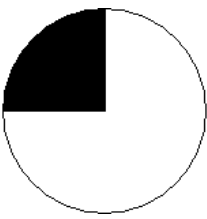
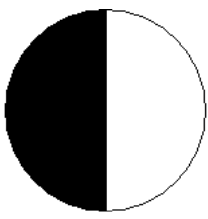
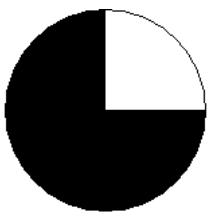
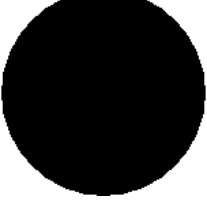
The survey gives you a chance to talk about your experiences in this prison. The consent form already told you that you don't have to do this, and you can stop at any time. Nothing bad will happen if you refuse to do this survey.

The surveys will be stored securely. Access to the data will be restricted to the project team members. The findings will be used to figure out how well this program is doing, and in research reports. No names will ever be used.

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The numbers go from 1 which means "Never True" to 5 which means "Always True."

Example: The sun comes up in the morning. *Is that true or not true?*

				
<b>1</b> <b>Never True</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Sometimes True</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Half the Time</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Usually True</b>	<b>5</b> <b>Always True</b>

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<sup>7</sup> The items in this survey were derived by the Center for Outcome Analysis directly from items used in the following questionnaires: the Cambridge University Prisons Research Centre "Measuring the Quality of Prison Life Questionnaire," the Multidimensional Anger Inventory (MAI), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the K10 Anxiety and Depression Test, and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire

	Now (1-5)	Then (1-5)
<b>A. Institutional Structure and Administration</b>		
1) You get help from staff here when you need it.		
2) Overall, you are treated fairly by staff here.		
3) You are encouraged to work towards goals here.		
<b>B. Relationships with Staff</b>		
4) Relationships between staff and prisoners here are good.		
5) You trust the staff here.		
6) Staff here understand you.		
7) You relax around staff here.		
<b>C. Relationships with Inmates</b>		
8) You laugh with other inmates here.		
9) You relax around other inmates here.		
10) You try to get even when you're angry with someone.		
11) Here, you have to be careful of inmates around you.		
<b>D. Dignity and Respect</b>		
12) You keep your dignity in here.		
13) Staff treat you with respect here.		
14) You have something to be proud of.		
<b>E. Autonomy</b>		
15) You can earn trust from the staff here if you want to.		
16) You have control over your day-to-day life here.		
17) You can act natural here.		
<b>F. Anger / Stress</b>		
18) It is stressful to be here.		
19) It is painful to be here.		
20) You think about suicide here.		
21) Something makes you angry almost every day.		
22) You get so angry, you feel like you might lose control.		
23) When you get angry, you stay angry for hours.		
<b>G. Security</b>		
24) Prisoners feel safe from each other in here.		
25) Prisoners feel safe from staff here.		
<b>H. Clothes and Grooming</b>		
26) You can keep clean and decent here if you want to.		
<b>I. Sleep and Waking</b>		
27) You sleep well at night.		
<b>J. Living Conditions</b>		
28) Your living conditions are good here.		
<b>K. Privacy</b>		
29) There is privacy here.		
<b>L. Hope</b>		
30) Your life is worthwhile.		

<b>M. Recent Emotions</b>		
Over the past 30 days you have been feeling...	<b>Now (1-5)</b>	<b>Then (1-5)</b>
31) ...so nervous that nothing could calm you down?		
32) ...hopeless?		
33) ...so restless you could not sit still?		
34) ...depressed?		
35) ...so sad that nothing could cheer you up?		
36) ...worthless?		
37) ...hopeful about the future?		
38) ...proud of what you're doing?		

### **About You**

This information will be kept secret.

39) *What age are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years*

40) *How long have you been in this prison? \_\_\_\_\_ months*

41) *Is this your first time in prison?*

Yes	No
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42) *How long is your sentence? \_\_\_\_\_  
months*

43) *What do you tell people your race is? (Select all that apply)*

Hispanic or Latino	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African-American	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White
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44) *Any other comments? (What is important to you that we didn't ask about?)*

45) Name \_\_\_\_\_ (This will be kept secret.)

## References

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