

by Todd Chapman, Communications Manager

# PAWSITIVE Changes

*A Second Chance at  
Love — One Man,  
One Dog at a Time*



**L**ocked up for nearly half his life, doubting he could really care for anyone or anything again, an inmate at the Kinross Correctional Facility discovered he could care for something again. One day, a four-legged friend, locked out for most of its life, never knowing love, met this inmate. Together, they spent the next 12 weeks forming a bond that gave each a purpose for living and teaching both about unconditional love.

**Making Pawsitive Changes**, a program coordinated by the Chippewa County Animal Shelter, started with its first class of four dogs in January 2014 in Kinross. A small group of shelter dogs unlikely to be adopted, spent time with the inmate 'handlers' teaching the dogs basic commands and determining if the dog can be an adoptable house pet.

When first presented in the facility, 200 inmates applied—eight were chosen. Two inmates were assigned to each dog for 12 weeks. The dogs live with the men 24 hours a day. The deputy warden noted that the overall mood and attitude in the prison has changed since introducing the program. The custody staff concluded that assaults were down because the dogs have a calming effect on everyone in the facility. One inmate commented that it does people good when they can walk up on the yard and pet a dog. Gives them something nice to say.

Another inmate, age 52, in prison since age 17 and hadn't petted a dog in 30 years, became emotional when talking about Pepper, the 8-month-old dog he helped train. "She had a rough start to life. She was starving on the streets. I'm just glad I was able to help to whatever degree I was. This program was a Godsend to me and the dog. She's just a lovable,

super, super kind outgoing friendly spirit and just to be able to put her in a home to where she's going to enjoy life—it means the world to me."

Denise Peller is the program coordinator for the prison. "These guys would honestly give up their own life for the protection of their dogs. It's completely changed the whole facility." Holly Henderson, shelter director, says this program has provided her the most satisfaction of any she has been involved with.

One inmate says the program has saved his life. Being in prison 20 plus years, he could no longer feel any emotion. "All of a sudden I can love again. I can experience emotions that I have been holding down for twenty plus years. I sleep better at night. I'm more able to speak with people. All of this comes from having a dog."



*An inmate 'handler' spends 12 weeks with their dog, both learning to trust and love each other unconditionally.*

Two years later, the program has 'graduated' more than 20 dogs. Of those, 19 have been adopted to their 'forever' home. One recent graduate, named Flip, went straight from the graduation to his new owner's home, someone who worked at the prison that had fallen in love with Flip during the training. Another Cloverland member, Joy Butcher, had nothing but high praise for the program after adopting the loveable



*Denise Peller, Corrections Program Coordinator for the Kinross Correctional Facility (left) and Chippewa County Animal Shelter Director Holly Henderson (right), are actively involved with each group of dogs and inmate handlers.*

and spunky Pepper. "You can tell these dogs mean the world to their handlers during the time they spend working with them. Pepper absolutely loves doing the tricks her handlers taught her. We are very grateful to them."

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In November, six dogs were placed with their 'handlers.' If all goes well, the dogs should be ready for a loving home around mid-February. To check out which dog is ready for adoption and a second chance at love, go to the Chippewa County Animal Shelter website. To get more information about the Making Pawsitive Changes program and find out how you can help, go to [makingpawsitivechanges.org](http://makingpawsitivechanges.org).