

## Service Dog Training Update

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Today, we have invited Dalles J. a disabled Iraq and Afghan war veteran diagnosed PTSD. He and his service dog Hayden will demonstrate how they work as a team. Dalles will share how having his service dog has improved his physical, emotional and social well-being. Dalles has included an introduction as well.

### **About the Organization**

Service Dogs for America (SDA) was established in 1989 and placed its very first service dog in 1990. We became a 501(c) 3 in 1992. SDA's mission is to train and certify service dogs for individuals with disabilities. Our vision is to see a society where disabled individuals are able to fully participate in social, educational and occupational opportunities.

SDA is an accredited member of Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and adheres to standards and ethics that define training standards for dogs, guide how clients and dogs are treated, how programs are developed and the type of expertise and professional behavior required of trainers. Currently, the VA only allows service dogs from ADI accredited service dog schools in their facilities.



*"Having a veteran accompany me during the public access was invaluable and we covered topics I had not even considered. Having a veteran near me during this very stressful outing that understood my triggers made the outing go smooth and I felt safe." - Eric F. (Iraq & Afghan veteran)*

## About the PTSD Service Dog Program

Currently SDA has 10 dogs in the PTSD training program. We have five dogs that are ready for immediate placement, and another dog that was recently placed with a veteran from Wisconsin. One of our dogs is being placed with a veteran in September who needs a service dog that is cross-trained for service connected PTSD, a seizure disorder and mobility assistance.

*"For the first time in several years, I was able to eat in the restaurant with my wife and not be constantly watching the doors, keeping track of who entered and exited, where they were sitting, etc. I actually was able to rely on my new PTSD service dog Lola to watch my back. She sat by me and was facing my back and watching all the traffic come and in go." – Eric F. (Iraq & Afghan veteran)*

SDA's executive director serves on the North American board of directors for Assistance Dogs International, and currently serves on the international advisory board for accreditation standards and a special international work group that is developing best practices for PTSD service dogs.

### PTSD Service Dog Program Update

The purpose of today's visit is to update the committee on our progress and where we are at with applicants, the training program and placements. Applications were slow and they are now picking up. We have six North Dakota veterans in the full application process. The four dogs in the bill will be placed in 2014. SDA has successfully fund

raised to assist other ND veterans who may not be eligible for the grant. ND's first lady has agreed to help us with a billboard campaign to get the word out to veterans throughout the state. We believe once we start placements word will travel like wildfire and we will not be able to keep up on the requests.

Currently, we are receiving numerous preliminary applications from around the country and referrals from the VA elsewhere. We are working to develop a stronger presence at the VA in Fargo and have been getting the word out to counselors at the vet centers.

SDA is using both rescue and dogs within our facility that have the right temperament and personality to be strong PTSD service dog candidates. SDA desires to give a dog a second chance at life, just like the veterans we are serving.

Research is showing that specially trained service dogs play an important role in a veteran's recovery and treatment protocols and help transition and support the adjustment back to normal, everyday activities. SDA Service dogs are trained to detect the onset of PTSD anxiety escalations or flashbacks— alerting the veteran (while awake or asleep) to their unrest and helping to quell their anxiety.

SDA will continue working to:

- have veterans who have received a service dog return and assist another veteran, either as mentor/coach pre and post placement or accompany a veteran during their public access trainings;
- fundraise to make up the difference between the state payment and the actual cost of the dog;

- recruit dog trainers and procure dogs to meet the growing demand of PTSD service dogs applications;
- recruit and train veteran volunteers;
- build education and awareness statewide on the benefits of PTSD service dogs;
- ensure PTSD training standards, guidelines, placement protocols and evaluative tools are in place that exceed the language of SB2344;
- create an evaluative study and report that will support the state setting aside funding for PTSD service dog;

We will begin with a baseline survey as an early element in the monitoring and evaluation plan to systematically assess the circumstances in which the project commences. It will provide the basis for subsequent assessment of how efficiently the activity is being implemented and the eventual results achieved

SDA will create credible case studies to substantiate need for and the benefits of a PTSD service dog. We will implement a monitoring and evaluation system that will include the veteran's therapy team, dog sponsor and veteran to gauge: whether change is occurring; has the veteran become more social, i.e. attending family events, shopping, traveling, etc.; has there been a decrease in the use of rescue medications; has the veteran been able to return to school or work? Is the team bonded? Is the training aftercare plan being followed?

If no change is indicated, are there suggestions on how to improve or follow-up?

And finally measure the extent of the desired results achieved and sustainability. At the end of year one, we will hire an evaluator to assess the data collected, the validity of the data and prepare a narrative of findings.

We want to thank North Dakota for being a leader in the country and tackling a problem head on that every state in the union is facing. North Dakota is setting an example for other states to follow. We are both honored and proud to be serving North Dakota veterans in this way.

Cc: Mr. Lonnie Wangen

Hello, my name is Dalles, I am a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. I am a North Dakota native, a student senate representative, sports athlete, and hunting and fishing were my favorite hobbies spent with my grandfather.

I joined the military on December 5, 2005, and wanted to fight for the freedom of the American people. I deployed for the first time in 2007, came back to the states in 2008, deployed again in 2009, came back to the states in 2010, the remainder of my service was spent in Stuttgart, Germany, and received my honorable discharge in 2011.

My transition from military to civilian life was very difficult. I became very irritable and discontent. I turned to a chemical solution to fix my problems until my downfall on January 5, 2013. I remember calling my mother to come and fix me because I was broken. She came and picked me up and took me to Prairie St. James in Fargo, ND. During my time at Prairie St. James, a recommendation was made for me to go to the VA. From the VA they made a recommendation for me to go to the VA Hospital in St. Cloud, MN. I spent five months in a high intensity hospitalization unit for substance abuse and PTSD. I suffer from high anxiety with severe depression. My coping mechanism up to this point in my life was a chemical solution.

I never felt part of any group OR organization. I had become isolated and withdrawn. During my time at St. Cloud, they made another recommendation and felt I would be a prime candidate for a service dog. I



applied and was able to secure a trained PTSD service dog, named Hayden.

My life has changed, as result of receiving help, working my program, continuing therapy and having a service dog. My life has become more happy, joyous and free since that time. I feel part of a group of veterans that understand my PTSD, my family and friends are understanding and willing to go the extra the distance for my needs.

When I began the strenuous training program with my service dog, I had to take a leap of faith, especially as I was required to do more and more public access training and go to places I had avoided. I wanted my life to change so much, and I knew I had to trust my dog to have my back and he has ever since. Our bond has grown so deep; my dog will not eat in the morning or evening, until he has seen me take my medication. My dog goes everywhere with me, he has made it possible for me to get up in front of large groups of people and speak. He knows when I am feeling stressed and pulls me back into here and now. He comforts me and helps me remain calm. He is my best friend.

I want to help other veterans, and I have helped train service dogs and will be working with veterans when they receive their service dog. This is what I am passionate about.

I want to thank North Dakota and all those behind this bill for taking the lead making this opportunity possible for other veterans struggling with PTSD to have a service dog. These trained dogs will change lives.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story and my service dog Hayden with you today.



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Frequently Asked Questions PTSD Service Dogs

#### Service Dogs for America History

Service Dogs for America (SDA) trained its first service dog in 1989 and placed it with SDA's first client in 1990.

In 1992, SDA was officially designated as a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization. SDA is an accredited service dog school member of Assistance Dogs International.

SDA trains and places service dogs to assist with mobility issues, diabetic and seizure disorders, and PTSD. We do not train or place dogs that would assist with any type of visual or hearing impairment.

The mission of SDA is to: *"train and certify service dogs for individuals with disabilities"*

#### PTSD Service Dog Trained Tasks

Training service dogs for individuals living with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) requires very specialized knowledge and skills - in both the trainer and the dog. These service dogs must possess a perceptive nature, a courteous, compliant temperament and an intuitive spirit in order to perform their duties independently when the individual is facing a crisis. SDA's training team works to identify and evaluate these unique dogs, and then train them to recognize and interrupt the behaviors associated with anxiety, panic attacks and nightmares. SDA's trainers evaluate both dogs and applicants in order to effectively pair a successful team.

Each dog is trained to a standard, and additional training is customized to the individual needs of the applicant. SDA is committed to working together with the applicant and their service dog as they learn to work as a team to increase physical, emotional and social self-sufficiency. The dogs are trained to perform many services including, but not limited to:

- Alleviate anxiety/distress and provide psycho-emotional grounding by nudging, pawing, and leaning.
- Assist a person in waking from night terrors and nightmares.
- Distract a person from an event or specific maladaptive behavior by nudging, pawing, and licking.
- Bring medication to a person on command or when alerted to do so by a timer/alarm.
- Stand in front of or circle an individual in crowded areas in order to create personal space in a non-aggressive manner.
- Lead an individual safely to a building exit when experiencing an anxiety or panic attack.
- Get help by alerting another person or activate an emergency button or alert system.

**They are not trained to be guard dogs or act aggressive**

A trained PTSD service dog is a tool and is not intended to substitute or replace current therapeutic or medication treatment plan. The dog is trained to mitigate and distract from possible stressors related to an individual's PTSD and contribute to their physical, emotional and social well-being.