



Wags4Patriots™

**Guide to
Getting
a PTS
Service Dog**

SCHULTZ
FAMILY
FOUNDATION



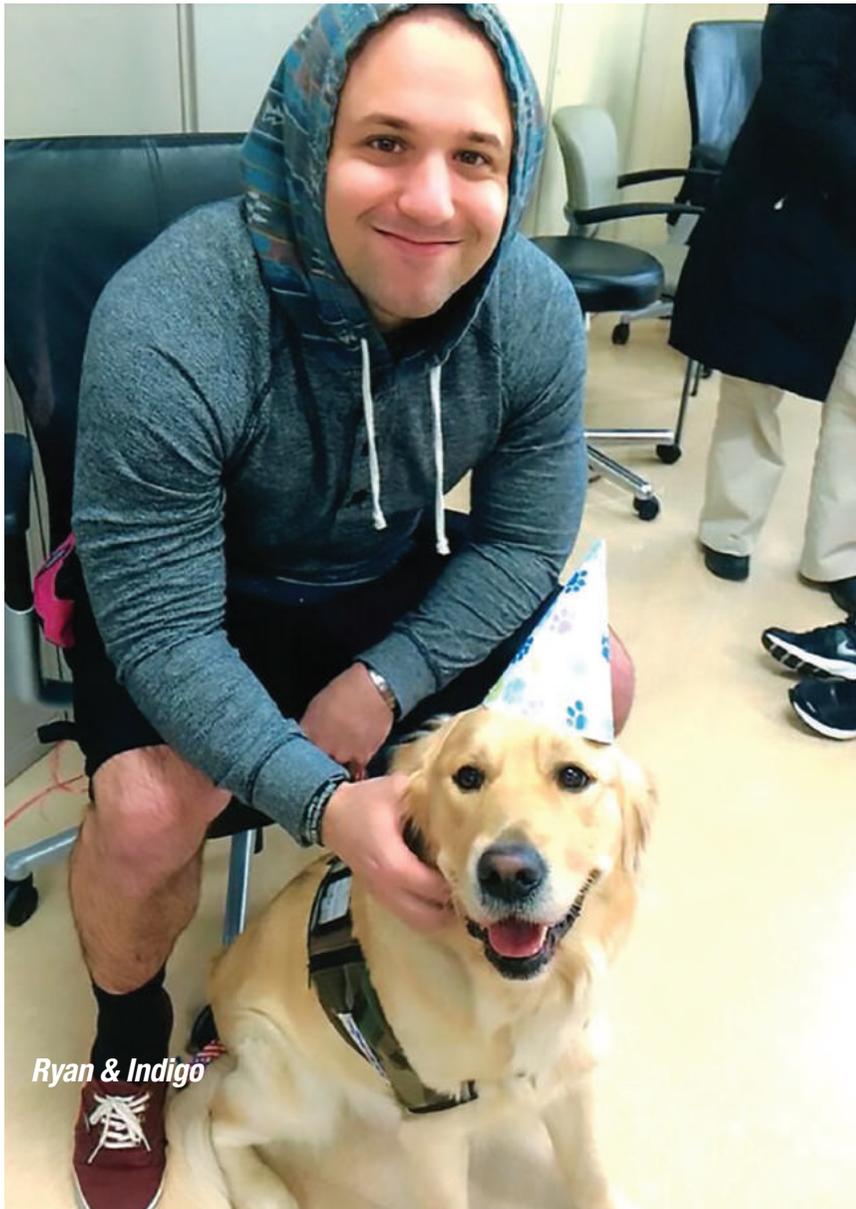
FOUNDATION

Could a Service Dog help you overcome your Post-Traumatic Stress?

You've come back home from heroically serving your country, but you still don't feel like yourself. You want to move past the symptoms of your post-traumatic stress (PTS), but you don't know how. We know PTS can be debilitating, and, in some ways, just as challenging as what you faced during active duty.

Recent studies – and first-hand accounts – have shown that service dogs can help considerably in addressing the psychological needs of military veterans living with PTS.

That's why we've put together some information to help you determine whether a service dog is right for you – and find a qualified service dog for yourself or a loved one.



Ryan & Indigo



Jason & Axel

Captain Haag and Axel: Two Lives Saved

Five years ago, now-retired USMC Captain Jason Haag was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury after returning from two combat tours in the Middle East. When he finally made it home, he was in a constant state of severe depression and mental agony. He struggled with alcohol abuse and took more than 30 medications to deal with his debilitating symptoms. In 2012, his wife urged him to reach out to an organization that provides veterans with service dogs, which is how he met the dog he calls his “lifesaver,” a German Shepherd named Axel.

Day in and day out, Axel is by Captain Haag's side, ensuring that he is in a constant state of peace rather than fear. Sometimes all it takes is a little nudge from Axel to remind him that he is out of the combat zone. At other times, Axel goes into full activation mode, using his training to remove Captain Haag from an environment when a severe panic attack has begun. When he met Axel, the dog was one week away from being euthanized, sleeping on a shelter floor while Captain Haag was sleeping in his basement with a gun under his pillow. Now Captain Haag shares a bed with his “big, furry security blanket” and works as American Humane Association's National Director of Military Affairs to help more veterans suffering from the hidden wounds of war get the service dogs they need.

For Trent, a Sergeant who served in Afghanistan, the battle wasn't over when he came home. Sometimes just leaving the house caused him debilitating anxiety and panic attacks. He couldn't sleep. And he wasn't alone – two soldiers he served with had committed suicide since their return. In addition, Trent has a baby boy. He didn't know how he would take care of his son when he could barely take care of himself. And he was determined to be a good father so he knew he needed help. After being diagnosed with PTSD, Trent applied for a service dog.

Thanks in part to American Humane Association's **Wags4Patriots™** grant program, he now has Tracer, a friendly, spirited pup who is always by his side. Trent says that Tracer's company gives him strength and allows him to participate fully in life again, including going out with his wife and little boy. Our Wags4Patriots program is connecting veterans in need with loving dogs who can help them cope with PTSD.



Trent & Tracer

“Because of PTSD, I am not able to participate in family events like I want. I have a difficult time trying to attend my son's activities, going out in public, or even leaving the house. It is really hard to have a strong bond with your wife and children when you are struggling with anxiety all the time.”

Service Dog, Therapy Dog, and Emotional Support Dog: What's the Difference?

Service Dogs

A service dog – like Axel or Tracer – is trained to perform specific, quantifiable tasks to help its human companion meet the challenges associated with a particular physical, psychological, or other disability. Legally, according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, service dogs can be provided to help individuals who have visual impairments, hearing impairments, physical mobility issues, diabetes, epilepsy, autism, and PTSD.

Right now, there are no nationally or legally recognized standards for training, certifying, or identifying a service dog. You will find professional organizations and individuals offering to train or provide a service dog. In both cases, the service dog should be trained in basic obedience, as well as the essential functions the dog needs to perform to help you in your everyday life. Service dogs should be well-behaved and under control in public situations, as specified in canine behavior evaluation standards like the Public Access Test (Assistance Dogs International, 2016) and the American Kennel Club's 2015 Canine Good Citizen Test.



Coleen & Uriah

According to the ADA, if you have a service dog, you have the legal and protected right to bring your service dog with you to most public places – restaurants, stores, hotels, government offices, nonprofit organizations, and more. Service dogs enjoy special exceptions on airlines, according to the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) of 1986, where they can travel with their owners, as well as in any housing environment, even those with a “no pets policy.” In some cases, you may have to provide documentation that states your service dog is needed because of a disability, as well as what tasks the dog is trained to perform. However, businesses, airlines and landlords cannot inquire about the specifics or the extent of your disability, nor may they ask for the dog's official certification or performance of tasks.

Therapy Dogs

You may hear people mistakenly use the term “service dog” when they mean “therapy dog,” or vice versa. The truth is, both types of dogs are

important, but perform very different roles. A therapy dog is someone's personal pet who has been certified or registered to go on brief visits to people in need—those in hospitals or nursing homes, or even victims of natural disasters. Unlike service dogs, a therapy dog does not have the legal right to enter all facilities, and must get permission before going inside a business, restaurant, hospital, or other public place. Therapy dogs are trained in basic obedience skills, but do not necessarily perform functions for their humans or specialize in any particular tasks.

Emotional Support Dogs

Emotional support dogs are companion animals who help their owner cope with the challenges associated with emotional and mental health conditions, such as depression, by providing needed comfort, increased socialization, and distraction from pain, anguish and/or worry. Unlike service dogs, emotional support dogs are not expected to perform specific tasks related to their owner's condition or follow any guidelines or standards. Their presence alone is what provides their owner with solace and therapeutic benefit. Under the ADA, emotional support dogs do not have legal access to be allowed in public places, however, the Fair Housing Act requires that most housing units accommodate them as long as the owner provides the appropriate documentation (usually in the form of a note from a physician or other mental health professional). They are also legally allowed to fly with their owners with similar documentation provided at least 48 hours prior to traveling.



How does a PTS Service Dog help?

PTS Service Dogs recognize and respond to the symptoms of PTS. The dog can intervene if someone is experiencing flashbacks or nightmares, has an aversion to things or situations that remind them of the traumatic events of the past, has difficulty participating in activities, experiences heightened emotions or anxiety, or is otherwise irritable or in distress.



“When I was able to take Bear home with me, things changed. I thought I was only a little better, but then my wife told me she was seeing a drastic change in me. I was happier; I didn’t have as many issues if we went out, and the thing that made her the happiest was I didn’t snap at her or my son. I know I haven’t had Bear with me for very long, but I can see the changes in me now. I forgot what it was like not to be in pain mentally. It has been so long. I still have my moments, but Bear has helped me in ways I could not have imagined.”

A PTS Service Dog can be specially trained to perform tasks such as:

- Blocking the handler from the front or behind to create a secure space
- Guiding the handler back to a familiar place if he/she becomes disoriented or lost during a flashback or dissociative episode
- Locating an exit strategy if the handler experiences a panic attack
- Sweeping a room for potential danger and turning on the lights before the handler enters
- Waking the handler from a nightmare, flashback, or dissociative episode
- Retrieving medication for the handler, especially in emergency situations



Tylor & Buddha

“Tylor served in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan and suffers from PTSD, anxiety, agoraphobia, major depression, nightmares. Tylor’s service dog is Buddha, who will do things like interrupt any of the above concerns and keep them from escalating. Buddha will also do ‘blocking and posting,’ keeping people/crowds from getting too close, which would trigger episodes of anxiety.” – comment from Tylor’s service dog provider

Finding a PTSD Service Dog for yourself

What to expect

- It takes time to obtain a qualified service dog. Reputable service dog agencies have extensive application processes so they can gather all the information about you and your needs in order to match you with the best dog to help you. Training a service dog takes a minimum of six months, and many dogs may need a year or more of training.
- A service dog is not a quick fix for your PTSD and/or other disabilities. It will take time for you to bond with your service dog and build trust with each other. Your symptoms will likely improve gradually as you build your relationship together.
- A service dog is not a pet. While a pet may provide you with valuable comfort, the role of a service dog is drastically different than that of a family dog. These highly trained dogs help mitigate your disability and, when working, their behavior must be calm and focused on their handler.

Are you ready?

As you consider whether you would like to move forward in procuring a service dog, you’ll want to consider the following things, including . . .

Your Needs and Current Capabilities:

- As a result of their service, many veterans have physical or mobility issues in addition to PTSD. As you talk to service dog agencies, it’s important to share with them any and all of your health concerns, so that your dog may help you to the fullest extent. For example, you may not only experience nightmares, but may also have difficulty bending at the waist to pick up items on the floor.
- What other treatments have you undergone for PTSD? Have you been compliant with prescribed counseling and medication? You and your healthcare professional will want to assess whether a service dog is the next best course of treatment, or if you should complete other additional treatment that has been prescribed.
- Reputable service dog providers require in-person training once they match a veteran with a service dog. Are you at a place where you can travel (potentially across the country, depending upon the service dog agency’s location) to do the training? Will you be able to cover your travel costs and miss work for a few weeks to do so?



Roland & Matthais

“The service dog will aid me with better coping with my hyper-vigilance and subsequent anxiety in public areas. I will also be better able to continue to work. My anxiety levels fluctuate – creating stress and making me often feel useless.”



Jeremiah & Ida Mae

“So far, she’s been changing my life for the better, even during the first bit of training we have been working with each other. She’s been interrupting fits that I haven’t been able to notice coming on. She also blocks and is a great reminder that I am not alone.”

Your Financial/Home Situation

- It is estimated that the cost of owning a service dog once s/he is adopted is \$1,200-1,600 per year for food, supplies, and veterinary visits (<http://www.anythingpawsable.com/before-partnering-with-a-service-dog/#.VrkbUfkrLIV>). Are you in a position where you are able to financially support the care of a service dog over the course of its lifetime?
- Reputable service dog agencies will assess your living quarters and your pets. For example, do you currently have a pet dog that is aggressive to other dogs? If so, agencies may not feel your home is a safe place for a service dog.
- It is important that a service dog be welcome among all members of your family. How does your partner, as well as your children, or other live-in relatives feel about having a new animal in the home? Do they understand that the service dog’s primary role is to serve you, as opposed to being a typical family pet?

“I get anxious in crowds, and feel very unsafe when I see others around me. I get extremely depressed because I am too afraid to go anywhere by myself and stay in my apartment. A service dog would be a good companion for me. The dog would not judge me for having problems and will go places with me outdoors and into public places.”



Cagla & Whitty

Derick & Tucker



"It scares me to take off alone, so a lot of times, I just don't go places. Tucker will give me the support I need to do more than just exist as a disabled vet. Tucker will help me thrive to live a full life and when my issues happen, I won't be scared of having a spell because Tucker will know what to do."

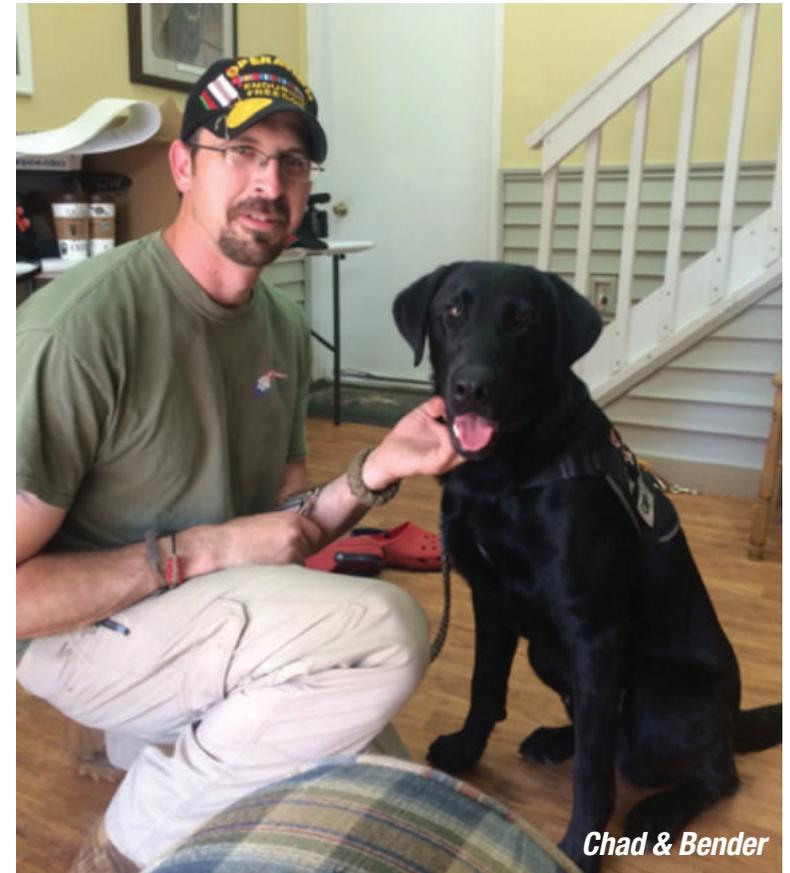
Level of Commitment

- The most time-consuming part of obtaining a service dog can be gathering the necessary paperwork. Reputable agencies have an extensive application process and many require a video of you and your home. The better an agency understands your needs, the better they can match you with the best service dog to aid you with your disability.
- It is crucial that you are committed to learning how to care for your dog and ensure their health and well-being. You will need to engage in, and follow, the dog's training process during the in-person training period, as well as maintain the dog's skills on an ongoing basis. This ensures you will receive the maximum benefit from being partnered with a service dog.

How Do I find a Service Dog?

Many veterans have found success by contacting a service dog agency that is accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI) (www.assistedogsinternational.org). The member section of their website is organized regionally, but many of the agencies serve veterans nationally. You'll want to contact multiple agencies to find the best fit for you. They will likely have a waiting list, but don't let this discourage you. You may also consult your local VA for resources and ask other veterans who have a service dog for a recommended agency.

If you're considering buying a puppy to be trained, you'll want to contact potential service dog training organizations first. Many agencies will not train a dog that they have not been able to screen for health and temperament. It is also extremely challenging to convert a pet dog into a service dog because of the specialized training required. Again, work with an agency that can help guide you before you purchase a puppy in hopes that s/he can be your service dog.



Chad & Bender

"[I hope my dog will] help me return back into society and help me with my flashbacks, anxiety, triggers, and night terrors."

What to look for in a service dog organization

The process of being matched with a service dog varies by organization, but things to look for in a provider are:

- The organization is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit and has experience in training PTS service dogs for veterans.
- They require an extensive application to understand your needs and your triggers.
- They provide you with in-person comprehensive training on how to work with your dog.
- They prepare you to interact with the public regarding questions about your dog, provide you with an identification badge, and help you understand your rights under the ADA.
- They require you and your dog to successfully pass a public access test before graduation, and provide re-certification annually as long as the dog is your working service dog.
- They provide you with ongoing support once you're home and check in with you regularly.

What to watch out for

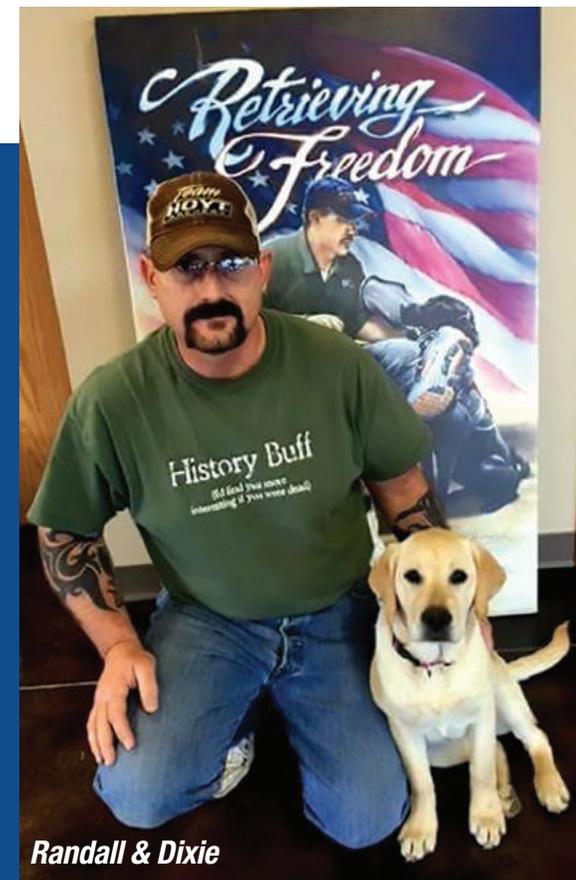
- Due to the investment in training hours, service dogs cost agencies upwards of \$20,000. However, reputable service dog providers do not charge military veterans for a service dog, outside of a nominal application or adoption fee. Beware of individuals or organizations that offer to ship you a trained service dog, especially for a large fee.
- Beware of anyone who recommends you buy a service dog vest online to put on your pet dog. Most states have a false representation law, and if your dog is not a legitimate service dog, you can be charged with a misdemeanor or felony.
- Avoid any providers who focus solely on training the dog and do not provide you with the proper long-term support for your needs, as well as the dog's needs.
- Avoid any providers that promise that a service dog is a quick fix for your PTS.

We hope you find this information helpful!

As our constant and loyal companions, dogs have an astounding ability to improve and even save our lives. American Humane Association, the Schultz Family Foundation and the NCR Foundation hope this guide illustrates the specialized roles and potential benefits of PTS service dogs, as well as helps you better understand the process and experience you should expect when considering the adoption of a PTS service dog.

We're here to help

American Humane Association's Lois Pope LIFE Center for Military Affairs features a number of programs that help our active-duty military, veterans, their families, and military dogs. For more information, please contact us at 1-800-227-4645 or email info@americanhumane.org.



Randall & Dixie

"It's literally a day-by-day struggle to not only get out of the house, but to pretend I'm like everyone else I'm around in public, which in itself is tiring when my mind is fighting to shut down. I have great difficulty explaining to my family or friends why I behave the way I do. I'll come up with excuses to not even go out and enjoy the outdoor activities that I really want to do. Instead I become absolutely grounded to my home and I isolate myself. Having a service dog would assist me immeasurably to have the confidence I need to leave my home and to participate in activities I have a deep passion for, be it hunting, fishing or riding horses. A service dog hopefully will encourage me to feel comfortable once I leave the house."



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