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Rescued Pit Bulls Help Military Vets With PTSD

Many veterans suffer from PTSD. A new organization has found a way to help them while saving the lives of orphaned pit bulls — many from Hillsborough County.

By [Dale Hutchings](#) | [Email the author](#) | August 9, 2011

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A small, start-up non-profit called, "[Pit Bulls 4 Patriots](#)," based in Gulfport, is having a significant impact on the lives of discarded pit bull veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder ([PTSD](#)).

Focused on a mission of matching this particular breed of orphaned canines with military service members facing difficult challenges associated with PTSD, this program is proving to be a life-changing event that results in a loving home for the dogs, while helping vets overcome the psychological symptoms common with PTSD.

The organization currently gets plenty of homeless pit bulls from the [Hillsborough County Department of Animal Services](#), where 70 pit bulls are sheltered there.

As noted by organization co-founder, **Paul Manners**, nearly 20 percent of military service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from PTSD or major depression, many of whom never receive treatment. At present, Manners said all of the vets they are working with were referred to the organization by [Bay Pines VA Hospital](#).

Common symptoms associated with this disorder include: anger and irritability, startled responses to sudden noises or movements, anxiety attacks, depression, nightmares and sleep disturbance, social withdrawal and self-isolation, suicidal impulses and more.

Where do the dogs come in? Pit Bulls 4 Patriots is one of many veteran support groups emerging around the country who have seen the power dogs can provide to people with psychiatric disorders developed through their military service.

The initial bonding takes place he noted when vets like him come together with the dogs at training classes twice a week. It is during this time is matched with a vet in class and will at some point go home with him or her. This begins what is known as the "stage seven" process which lasts for six months: a period in which full bonding takes place between the dog and vet, as the canine learns how to serve his or her human partner.



Woody is looking to Lacey to be the antidote he needs in the battle he has fought for 40-plus years with PTSD, which has included for him everything from anxiety attacks to bouts with depression. Although without a dog at the moment, he says having a dog or simply being around dogs has been a "calming" experience for him. Thus, he says, having a dog at his side, particularly one trained to help people with PTSD, will make going to training much easier for him.

At the moment, for Woody going to a sporting event, a music concert, or simply to Tyrone Square Mall is an uncomfortable, to say the least, for him. Just too many people in a confined environment.

Paul says he has already seen positive changes for Woody – the kind of changes he has also personally witnessed with his own wife, Margie. Margie has suffered from an anxiety disorder. But what seemed to help her a lot in coping with this malady was having the company of the dogs with her. In fact, it was because of the emotional comfort Layla provided Margie -- helping her to cope far better with her anxiety -- that led Margie to launch Pit Bulls 4 Patriots earlier this year.

What the organization needs is an air-conditioned venue for dog training, as presently the dog training is done at local parks. Hence, heat is a major factor for both the dogs and their human partners. Secondly, there is a great need for financial support. Although the dogs are provided free of charge to veterans in the program, there are still major expenses that need to be covered. These include medical costs and adoption fees for the dogs as well as payments to professional dog trainers.

To find out more about this organization, including how you can help in its efforts to reach even more veterans with PTSD and at the same time find homes for discarded pit bulls as service dogs, please visit pitbulls4patriots.com.

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