



Companion Dog Program

Collaborative Project Provides Support to Vets

The VA Trained Companion Dog Pilot Program through the Daytona Beach Outpatient Clinic is underway. The program will partner Veterans who have been diagnosed with PTSD and companion dogs through a collaborative community effort. The companion dogs will receive their initial training at the Prison Pups N Pals Program located at Tomoka Correctional Institution Work Camp with oversight by West Volusia Kennel Club trainers. The dogs are transitioned from Halifax Humane Society to the prison program where they learn basic obedience skills for seven weeks. Dogs who complete the initial obedience training and are identified as highly trainable will go on to receive additional instruction for PTSD related tasks such as providing comfort, turning on a light switch and picking up objects. Upon completion of the PTSD support training, the dog will be paired with a Veteran and a Veteran Mentor. The Veteran Mentor is a Veteran volunteer who has experience in the care and training of dogs. The Mentor will provide additional weekly training in the home specific to the needs of the Veteran. The goal of the program is to promote recovery from PTSD. These services will be provided to the Veterans at no cost. Additionally, Veterans will receive health insurance for the dog for a period of one year and a care package including a dog crate, bed, toys and other items.



Allyn Weigel and Marj Blomquist, West Volusia Kennel Club; Officer Gail Irwin, Tomoka Correctional Facility; Buster, First Veteran Dog currently in training at Prison Pups N Pals

The Newcomers

Currently in basic obedience training, Danica and Bush will be evaluated for suitability to be trained as companion dogs to support Veterans through their recovery process.



Danica



Bush

Veteran Mentor Volunteers Needed

VA Trained Companion Dog Pilot Program is currently seeking Veterans with dog training experience who are willing to volunteer time working with trained companion dogs. The volunteer would be involved with the training process as well as peer-to-peer mentorship requiring 1-2 hours/M-F. If you are interested in assisting in this important project, have questions or need more information, please contact Jennifer Muni-Sathoff, LCSW at (386) 323-7500 x30091.

Getting to Know Buster

Buster is a young adult male Labrador mix surrendered to Halifax Humane Society. During his seven week basic obedience training, Buster has mastered commands such as sit, stay, wait and ultimately earned the Canine Good Citizen Certificate. Buster remains in training at Tomoka Correctional Institution where he is studying advanced tasks including turning on a light switch which may be helpful if his handler awakens abruptly from a nightmare.



Questions:

Q: How does a Veteran apply to receive a dog through the pilot program?

A: Veterans are referred to the program through the VA Daytona Beach Outpatient Mental Health Clinic.

Q: What type of dogs are allowed at the VA Medical Facilities and Clinics?

A: Only Certified Service Animals are permitted on site. Reference VA Service Animal policy.