

Use of Retired Dogs of Police as Therapy Dogs

for Emotional Support to Children with Special Needs, Sick and Disabled Personnel

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Background

Therapy dogs are interactive dogs trained to provide service and comfort to people. These dogs are trained and accustomed to bringing joy to the lives of subjects (children or patients) in need of a little extra love. Research shows that children with mental disabilities like autism, cerebral palsy or other neurological disorders can benefit greatly from spending time with a therapy dog. Its calm presence, simple methods of communication, fondness can engage the child constructively, breaking the monotony, boredom and depression producing positive results in helping children on a wide range of mental disorders and help the child to relax and communicate.

Concept or Philosophy

Therapy dogs are interactive dogs trained to work for a Handler to provide service and comfort to people. The presence of a therapy dog can decrease anxiety and provide a level of comfort that enables children to work through a variety of challenging issues including their mental disabilities. Their responsibilities are to provide psychological or physiological therapy to individuals other than their Handlers. It is important to note that therapy

dogs are not service dogs. Service dogs are trained to perform tasks to ease their handlers' disabilities, helping them to attain safety and independence in an exclusive or dedicated manner.

Objective and Goals

Use of the retired (cast and boarded out) Police Service K9s (PSKs) of Police and Law Enforcement agencies to provide 'Dog Therapy for Emotional Support' for children with special needs of any age with mental and neurological disorders/disabilities in terms of providing them emotional support. Therapy dogs can also be used to give comfort and affection to people who are sick, disabled or in a crisis by visiting at hospitals or their locations.

Further, the goals of therapy dogs are as under :

- Improving motor skills and joint mobility.
- Improving gross motor and/or fine motor movement.
- Progress self-esteem by increasing verbal communication and developing social skills.
- Increasing eagerness to partake in activities.
- Improving the willingness to exercise.

Unique Advantages

Studies of animal therapy have shown repeatedly that exposure to animals helps improve morale and communication, bolster self-esteem, calm anxiety – even reduce blood pressure and heart rate. According to 2017 research from the University of Cambridge, children get more satisfaction from relationships with their pets than with their brothers or sisters. While some children with special needs suffer from an identifiable disorder like autism or cerebral palsy or seizure disorder or mobility issues, many of them have multiple issues, or a variety of mental health issues or uncommon neurological disorder, for example, Down's Syndrome, Fragile X, Apraxia, ADHD. They are extremely effective to ease anxiety in any environment including hospital settings, help children who are anxious about learning to read, and for several other calming and esteem-building therapies for special needs children and adults. Notwithstanding above, few unique benefits are listed as under :

Best Friend Effect

- While the needs of each child are unique, however, the common thing about them is that these children have few, if any, friends. Having a 'Therapy Dog' that

quickly bonds well with such children closely is an opportunity for the child to have a best friend effect who loves and accepts them unconditionally.

Calming and Preventing Meltdowns

- Such Therapy Dogs provide assistance to these children with meltdowns by providing calming and comforting interactions through their Dog Handler. For example, if the teacher or parent sees the child feeling overwhelmed, they can have the intervention of therapy dog by cuddling behaviour, snuggle with the child, kissing to meltdown the situation especially when the child is crying or performing repetitive behaviour. Often the therapy dog intervening will either reduce the length of the meltdown or even prevent it from occurring. The underlining significance lies that simple presence of such dogs provides comfort and emotional stability.

Social Bridge

- Through the therapy dogs, the children unite and it plays an important social bridge to facilitate interaction with similar or normal children.

Responsibility

- Many such children enjoy learning how to brush, feed, and take care of such therapy dogs. This allows them to be responsible for something and they can take pride in their efforts as they learn important life skills.

Communication

- For children who struggle with verbal skills, asking the dog



Groundbreaking Concept of providing Healing Therapy through the Army Dogs at Asha School, Delhi Cantt for Special Need Children by Col PK Chug (Retd) during the year 2012.

to perform a trick or other command can be an incentive to communicate. In society or public, the child gets the opportunity or reason to talk about their therapy dog with other people.

Assisting with Transitions

- Few children who would interact initially with a therapy dog under supervision may eventually achieve confidence and trust with dogs. Such children can move on to have an independent therapy dog who is living with the child to extend greater benefits in terms of trained skillset but also deescalate a situation on round the clock basis.

Improving Sleeping Pattern

- The interaction with therapy dog improves sleeping and such children display more sound sleep following interaction with a therapy dog. Further, if the dog is staying round the clock with the child, then it ensures that the child sleeps better at night because the therapy dog is

sleeping with them and providing that constant comfort.

Tracking

- Dogs are known to possess an amazing nose and if the retired dog is a tracker dog, then the task of tracking a lost child even brightens up from some of their belongings. Children suffering from autism, often get lost if not monitored and such dogs can assist in finding them quickly.

Essential Requirements of Therapy Dogs for Emotional Support

A therapy dog can be just about any dog, but there are some fundamental requirements of therapy dogs. Since it is recommended to involve retired/veteran PSKs for the purpose, therefore not all dogs would be suitable for the purpose. Notwithstanding, most dogs may found to be suitable to meet the basic requirements of a therapy dog restricted to provide emotional support to children with special needs or sick and disabled persons



Healing Therapy by Army Dogs at Asha School, Delhi Cantt for Especially Abled Children.

at hospitals. The perfect therapy pet is well-trained, well-socialized and genuinely loves people, however, these veteran dogs need to be screened against the criteria listed below and those meeting the requirements or those which can be quickly modified to meet the requirements should only be employed for the purpose of dog therapy:

- **The temperament** of the dog is most critical and the dog should possess calm, friendly behaviour and happy to be handled by many different people.
- **Health** is another aspect and dog should be healthy with up-to-date with its vaccinations and deworming. Review by Veterinary Officer is essential.
- **Training:** The Handler must understand the requirements

and although dog therapy is restricted to provide emotional support through these veteran dogs however the handler needs to facilitate the interaction of subjects with the dog in a cordial, calm way to make it a pleasant experience with a lasting positive impression.

- **Age:** Age is no bar in dog therapy. Older dogs are generally more cool and calm and with maturity, they become more socialized and environmentally stable having served in a variety of operational settings hence it is easy to handle them.
- **Size & Breed** doesn't matter. The breed, size or type of dog is immaterial as far as emotional support is concerned. Any dog is which is friendly, forthcoming to interact with other people,

enjoy to fit into someone's lap, love to rest their soft head on the side of a bed or a knee are excellent in dog therapy. Labradors, Golden Retrievers, Cocker Spaniels, Beagles are particularly more suited although German Shepherds can also be used for the purpose. The more important aspect is that they are calm and gentle and can appreciate people's suffering.

Responsibilities of the Dog Handler

The Handler of such dogs also plays an important role in facilitating the dog therapy. The following are the responsibilities of the handler which needs to be ensured:

- Ensure the safety of the children apart from the therapy dog's physical and mental health.
- To prepare the retired/veteran CAPF dog for the task. Only most suited retired dogs be used for the purpose. Any dog still showing the signs of aggression, unsocial being or not comfortable with children must not be used for the purpose.
- The Handler and Dog both are vaccinated against 'Rabies'. The up-to-date vaccination record of the dog with regards to other diseases like distemper, parvovirus and adenovirus (hepatitis) would always be carried by the Handler in his bag as evidence of safety.
- At no time of the task, will the Handler and dog be alone with students and dog therapy be provided only in presence of the faculty/teacher/parents.

- The Handler would keep the safety of children as paramount at all times. The Handler's attention must be dedicated to the dog and their interactions with students and staff. The dog will always be under the direct control and supervision of the Handler. The handler will be aware of the dog's behaviour at all times. If any changes in behaviour occur that may affect the safety of the children,
- the Handler will immediately remove the dog from the school and notify the concerned officials.
- The therapy dog must wear its dog vest and the Handler will ensure that the dog is always on a 6-foot leash that is held by the Handler, with a flat buckle collar or approved harness, inside and outside the school for children with special needs.
- The Handler will ensure humane care of the therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising and clean, well-groomed, free of injury or illness, and of the temperament appropriate for working with children and others in the school.
- The Handler will take responsibility for educating staff and students, on the role of the dog in extending such therapy.

Conclusion

The retired CAPF Dogs may be unfit for the specialised trade due to their old age and limited mobility however cool and calm temperament and mature, environmental stable personality makes them perfect 'Therapy Dogs to extend Emotional Support' to children with special needs, sick and disabled persons. Their natural behaviour to cuddle, fabulous attitude to just sitting next to the subject and hearing about their troubles, resting chin in an individual's lap to check in with you and make sure that you are OK to have a tremendous comforting effect which should be used gainfully without wasting. Similarly, these veteran dogs would also get a comfort, love and purpose in return till they breathe their last.



Col (Dr) PK Chug (Retd) is the leading Military and Police K9 Trainer and Senior Administrator with Government of India. Before assuming the current assignment of bringing in transformational change in Police Service K9s with the Police Forces of the country, he had nearly 26 years' service experience in Army. He had commanded Dog Units on six occasions with Army and Special Forces including his last command of the most prestigious K9 Unit of NSG. He is known for introducing multiple innovative & inexpensive solutions to augment the performance of Military and Police Service K9s.

He has authored a large number of professional and technical articles for leading publications on technical subjects. He is an international speaker and master K9 trainer to educate on the subject of PSKs and has been conferred with honours and awards in almost every assignment held by him including 'Chief of Army Staff Commendation' thrice, United Nation's Force Commander Commendation and Citation by DoD, USA.



Therapy dogs bring cheer to patients in hospitals and nursing homes, helping them heal mentally and emotionally

