



Canine Counseling

Man's Best Friend Aides War Veterans in Recovery

BY KYRIA HENRY

"THIS PROGRAM has quite literally saved my son's life," says USMC Sgt. Paul Martin's mother, Marion Lattimore.

In April 2009, we met Sgt. Paul Martin. During the hour-long application interview for paws4vets, we learned that he had been at the VA hospital in Martinsburg, West Virginia for three months. He had not progressed as hoped during his first three months in the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) therapy counseling program and was forced to take the course again. Martin was 19 when he enlisted in the Marines in 2003. He served three combat tours between 2004 and 2007. During his first deployment, his squad leader, Sgt. J.D. Patterson, was killed.

Martin's PTSD began after he returned from his first deployment by showing symptoms of flashbacks, nightmares, auditory hallucinations, environmentally-induced anxiety, anxiety/panic attacks, depression, agoraphobia and extreme survivor guilt, and the disorder continued to worsen. He attempted suicide twice. He also had trouble with making and keeping friends, and he experienced a lot of stress in both

family and personal relationships. Martin was on a cocktail of seven different medications, spent most of his time thinking about his combat experiences and having hallucinations, was extremely depressed and didn't like his counseling sessions. During sessions, he avoided eye contact and gave one-word responses. I remember walking away from that experience, saying, "I don't know if he is ready to take care of a dog. I don't know how much it will help," to which Terry Henry, executive director of paws4vets, said back to me, "That's exactly what Paul needs."

paws4vets is a program within the paws4people foundation, a organization that privately places trained, certified and insured assistance dogs with individuals who have physical, neurological, psychological and/or emotional disabilities. These private placements are accomplished through two different programs: the paws4people Assistance Dog Placement Program, which places assistance dogs with civilians (generally adolescents under the age of 14) and the paws4vets Assistance Dog Placement Program, which places assistance dogs with Veterans, Active-Duty Service Members (ADSM) or their dependents. paws4people is also a member of the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program's Community Support Network.

The paws4vets program includes a very unique and

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ExEdge

Women are two to three times more susceptible to PTSD than men.

Source: http://post-traumatic-stress-disorder.suite101.com/article.cfm/ptsd_statistics_and_research

revolutionary PTSD Recovery/Intervention Program. This component of the program is designed to use the motivational ability of the Human-Animal Bond / Dog (HAB/D) as a method of treating PTSD, Complex-PTSD (C-PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). The application of the HAB/D within a structured training environment, coupled with a training mission that is focused on helping others, provides the program participants with the ability to recover from, or at the very least better cope with, their PTSD, C-PTSD, TBI and their symptoms simply by utilizing the special therapeutic benefits of a dog.

The most critical factor within the paws4vets PTSD Recovery/Intervention Program is the role played by the paws4vets Medical Evaluation Team (pMET) which is comprised of volunteer nurses, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, K-9 trainers and client advocates (individuals who are veterans or ADSMs and have obtained a paws4vets assistance dog). The pMET links with each program participant's medical and psychological treatment teams. Allison Kaminsky, R.N., the director of the Medical Evaluation Team for paws4vets, explains, "This unique capability allows paws4vets to more completely understand our clients' needs and limitations. It allows us the ability to customize not only their transfer training required to master the skills to effectively utilize their new service dog but also the ability to leverage that dog's motivational capabilities to the benefit of the client and their interaction(s) with their VA or military medical and/or psychological treatment teams." Through this collaborative effort, Martin's medical and psychological treatment protocols and methodologies at Camp Lejeune were modified such that his compliance and participation earned him the ability to visit LIA, his new assistance dog, in West Virginia.

In July 2009, in the last days of his stay at VAMC Martinsburg, Martin met LIA during his first visit to the paws4prisons K-9 Training Facility at the Federal Prison Camp, U. S. Penitentiary (USP) Hazelton in Bruceton Mills. paws4prisons, like paws4vets, is a paws4people foundation program. All paws4people assistance dogs are trained by federal inmates within one of five federal prisons, four of which are located in West Virginia. Martin was completely under the influence of his many



Paul Martin and his assistance dog LIA.

medications but was able to spend about an hour meeting and interacting with LIA. "The first time I met LIA was only for a few minutes. I recall being asked if I liked LIA and I said, 'No, I love her!'" he recounts. "I felt a bond with LIA immediately." Martin returned to the Wounded Warrior Battalion-East at Camp Lejeune and within a week attempted suicide for the third time.

This, of course, landed him in the psychiatric ward at the Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune—precisely the place he did not want to be. During subsequent teleconference meetings between the pMET and Martin's Camp Lejeune medical and psychological treatment team, it was decided to try the following strategy with him: if he abided by all of their treatment requests and did not try to commit suicide again during the next three weeks, he would be allowed to go back to West Virginia to visit LIA. The pMET sent staff to Camp Lejeune who met with Martin and reinforced this strategy. Martin not only met the requirements of this treatment strategy but he exceeded the expectations of both treatment teams.

Martin's travel orders were issued, and, accompanied by his mother who drove him because he couldn't drive due to the medications he was taking, he arrived in Morgantown in late August 2009. Under

the tutelage of the paws4prisons staff, Martin was reintroduced to LIA and over the proceeding week was taught the art and skill of assistance dog handling. He began to learn LIA's language and her more than 100 commands. He learned to handle her in the seclusion of his hotel room and its parking lot and then watched staff members as they handled LIA in public venues such as restaurants, retail stores and a movie theater. "After spending a week with LIA and the staff of paws4vets, I have a new-found sense of purpose and something to look forward to being involved with," Martin said after the experience. "With someone like LIA to keep me moving and proactive, I know that my life and the quality of my life are going to be up and on the rise."

He returned to Camp Lejeune with very simple instructions: cooperate completely and enthusiastically with Camp Lejeune treatment team requests, try to decrease medications and do not attempt suicide during the next three to four weeks. He was told that if he accomplished those things, he could return to Morgantown for his second week of transfer training with LIA.

He once again surprised both treatment teams and exceeded expectations. Martin was once again issued travel orders and

From the *Front Lines*

AfghanDogZ are dogs rescued from the war zone in Afghanistan, provided rehabilitative training in a federal prison and placed with veterans or Active-Duty Service Members (ADSM) suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Complex-PTSD (C-PTSD) and/or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) as a tool to aid them in their PTSD intervention and/or recovery process. AfghanDogZ help war veterans learn how to reconnect within personal relationships and society and provide a unique, amazing and important psychological dimension for a veteran as they share a mutual war zone experience. Eventually each AfghanDog will be placed with a selected veteran or ADSM as a rehabilitative assistance dog.

Upon arrival in the United States from the Afghanistan war zone, the AfghanDog is placed into the paws4prison Assistance Dog Training Program at U.S. Penitentiary Hazelton, Secure Female Facility (SFF), in Bruceton Mills, WV. The paws4prisons program utilizes specifically selected and trained federal female inmates to train a wide variety of assistance dogs. Here the AfghanDog is provided with rehabilitative socialization and taught basic/advanced obedience skills as well as English as a second language. There are four AfghanDogZ currently undergoing training at the SFF: TAZIE, a two-year old Royal Afghan Hunting Hound; GOLDEN, an 18-month old retriever mix; SUR, a 10-month old lab mix and SPARKLE, an 8-month old lab mix.

In March 2010, these four dogs will be transferred to the paws4vets Warrior Transition Battalion (paws4vetsWTBTM), a PTSD Intervention and Recovery Program, at a major military base in the Southeastern U.S. Within this program, active-duty wounded warriors will participate in an assistance dog training program specifically designed to teach them how to train and socialize assistance dogs while at the same time, and in some cases totally unbeknownst to the warrior, teaching them how to recover from, or at least better learn how to live with, their PTSD and its symptoms.

The paws4prisons program, now in five federal prisons, has garnered so much success in rehabilitating inmates, many of whom also have PTSD, that the program has been adapted to fit into the military environment. This opportunity has emerged due to the enthusiastic, forward-thinking and out-of-the-box desire to provide a cutting-edge therapeutic program to the wounded warriors by the medical commanders at this base.

As the AfghanDogZ accomplish their mission within the paws4vetsWTBTM and as they voice their opinions as to who they would like to work with for the rest of their lives, they will be paired with program participants as their life-long personal companion therapy dog, thus closing the long cycle that began back in Afghanistan.

An AfghanDog costs approximately \$7,500 to rescue, transport, maintain/care for, train and place. Individual and corporate sponsors are especially welcome. For addition informational, please send inquiries to info@paws4people.org.

To make donations please visit, www.paws4vets.org/p4v_donate/. AfghanDogZ™, paws4prisons™, and paws4vetsWTBTM are trademarked programs of the paws4people™ foundation, a 501(c)(3), charitable foundation.

returned to Morgantown in early October for his second week of training. He was re-introduced to handling LIA under the watchful eyes of the paws4prisons staff. On the second day, Martin was told to take LIA to the local Wal-Mart by himself. Unknown to him, others were watching just in case. He and LIA proceeded to have a wonderful time walking up and down the aisles, and he reported that after a few minutes of indecision on LIA's part, he was able to refocus her attention and she worked perfectly for him the rest of his visit. Martin seemed quite pleased with himself and with LIA, and as he worked the rest of the week with her, taking her to stores, for walks on downtown streets and to parks, his confidence and

personality seemed to grow. At the end of the week, Martin received the same instructions as he had at the end of his previous training session with LIA: by cooperating, decreasing his medications and not attempting suicide, he would be permitted to return for a third week of training.

The next month at Camp Lejeune can only be described as incredible. Martin was like a new person and several members of his treatment team commented on the change. He significantly reduced his medications with his treatment team's guidance and approval and he was provided with travel orders this time for both Virginia and West Virginia. LIA was transferred from West Virginia to the paws4vets offices just

outside Leesburg, VA.

When Martin attended a public event in November 2009 at which he was the guest of honor, Kaminsky couldn't believe the change in him. "I simply could not believe my eyes," she says. "He was driving a car." Martin met her for a day of training which consisted of visiting an elementary school and a Cub Scout pack. "It simply warmed my heart when I saw Martin and LIA reunited. It was something quite special," she remembers.

"He's like a totally different person," says Heidi Livengood, chief trainer for paws4prisons at USP Hazelton. "If I hadn't witnessed his transformation over the past four months, there is no way I would have ever believed it possible."

"I am doing great," Martin recently said. "For the first time since I got back (from my last tour in Iraq) I have gone a week without any symptoms—it's wonderful and it's all because of her. If it wasn't for her, I'd still be back at the battalion eating all of those pills."

In early 2010, Martin and LIA will be permanently teamed together.

Martin's case study, which is just one of many similar cases, illustrates the success the paws4vets program is having with veterans and ADSMs. The paws4vets mission is to replicate Martin's success with other veterans and ADSMs because there are thousands who need the help that the paws4vets Canine Animal-Assisted Therapeutic Intervention program can provide for individuals with PTSD, C-PTSD and TBI.

To date, paws4people has more than 110 assistance dogs working within its various programs in nine states. These dogs have completed more than 15,000 visits to nursing homes, hospitals, hospices and schools, accomplishing more than 250,000 therapeutic contacts. There are more than 30 dogs in the paws4prisons Assistance Dog Training Programs preparing to enter service. In all, paws4people has more than 130 volunteers. There is no paid staff and paws4people does not charge any of its clients for any services.

For information on how you can help by means of sponsorship or volunteerism, visit www.paws4vets.org or www.paws4people.org or send an e-mail to info@paws4people.org. ■

Photography by Joan Brady