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Dogs Help Veterans Cope With PTSD

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Dogs Help Veterans Cope With PTSD

by Allison Loy

Approximately 300,000 Post-9/11 veterans are identified as having post-traumatic stress disorder in this country but it's estimated that only 1 in 3 asks for help. For those who do, different kinds of therapy can help to manage the after effects of trauma. As Veteran Voices reporter and Wright State student veteran Allison Loy has found, many veterans find comfort and support from pets.

Dogs and veterans have been a mutually beneficial combination for a long time. The dog gets the love of a person, and the vet gets a best friend that can help calm him or her down in times of high anxiety. This can be even more important when the veteran lives with post-traumatic stress disorder, when anxiety and other mood swings can hit for what seem to be no immediate reason. Last fall, I was diagnosed with PTSD and have recently started my treatment at the Dayton VA. Fellow Air Force veteran, Jennifer Queen, also being treated for PTSD there, relies on her Chihuahuas, P-Nut, Carmen and Annie to help calm her during stressful situations. While I have only just started, Jenn has been in treatment since 2000.

"We've done nightmare therapy, because I have a lot of bad nightmares and flashbacks and stuff. Trauma processing, where I have to write about the event or talk about it and listen to it over and over or read it over and over a million times and it does work but I didn't like doing it," she said.

Through Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) treatment, individuals with PTSD learn what beliefs or thoughts they get stuck on and how to handle the trauma related stressors. I told Jenn what I go through.

"To me, the feelings, they come and I don't know how to control them or make them stop," I said. "Usually I'm sitting in my room bawling my eyes out for a couple hours and then, you know, any other time I'm not feeling. For whatever reason I can't control connecting back. It's like that can get to me but I can't reach it."

Jenn told me she knew exactly what I was talking about and went on to tell me how her dogs help her when she's having a bad day. "P-Nut and, well all of them, they cuddle on you, they're right up in your face, they do everything that they can to not leave you alone that day and everything they can to interact with you. They just don't want to leave you alone." While we talked, P-Nut was sprawled across Jenn's lap, which is the twelve year old Chihuahua's number one job, after all.

"I've taken him on some of the hard parts with me," Jenn said. "If it calmed me down, my therapist was cool with it. So cause he did exactly what he's been doing this whole time. I would

switch out who I brought with me and my therapist was like, 'If it calms you down, I'm good with it.' I didn't do it all the time depending on what we were working on that day."

Last weekend, my family brought home Marlee, a German Shepherd, from the Montgomery County Animal Resource Center. We've done a lot of research and knew it was finally the right time to get a dog. And since I've seen the effect dogs have on other friends with PTSD, I'm fairly certain Marlee won't let me just sit, depressed, in my room, but my biggest worry isn't how he's going to be for us, it's are we going to be good for him.

"There will probably be trial and error on everyone's part but I think you'll be awesome," Jenn assured me.

For more information on services available to veterans, [visit the resource page at the Wright State University Veteran and Military Center website.](#)

Veterans Voices is part of [Veterans Coming Home](#), a public media effort to support veterans, made possible by the [Corporation for Public Broadcasting](#).

Photos:

2015.02.04_AllisonLoy_DogsAndPTSD1.jpg

caption: Air Force veteran Jennifer Queen with her dogs P-Nut, Carmen and Annie

credit: Allison Loy

2015.02.04_AllisonLoy_DogsAndPTSD2.jpg

caption: P-Nut

credit: Allison Loy