

PROFILE

Lifeline to the Outside World

VICD Service Dogs, a Division of BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, endeavours to help Veterans and First Responders with operational stress injuries, such as post-traumatic stress (PTSD).

Too often the trauma of service or the workplace leaves Veterans and First Responders with deep scars that make life challenging, if not impossible. At VICD, recipients are matched with PTSD Service Dogs that meet all of the Assistance Dogs International standards and that have specific additional traits that demonstrate suitability for the work. Together, client and dog embark on a unique *52-Week Healthy Community Living Program* that helps transition the recipients back into their communities, providing them with renewed purpose, confidence and unconditional support.

Dave has been with his PTSD Service Dog, Storm, for just over a year and the changes that he has experienced have been phenomenal. He would like to share some of his story and the impact that Storm has had in his life and with his family:

"I am a Veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, and my life has been in shambles for many years due to PTSD and MDD. I found myself locked in the house not wanting to do anything or go anywhere. I applied for a Service Dog several years ago from VICD Service Dogs, and received an amazing, beautiful, energetic Lab named Storm.

He has changed my life in so many ways, that I find it hard to explain how wonderful it has been for me. I now get up every morning to feed and walk him; I play with him and train him. It's truly incredible how one dog can change the life of a Veteran in such a positive way.

Storm has also influenced my spouse, grandson, as well as everyone who visits our property. We live on an acreage, so Storm has lots of room to run and play and that's exactly what we do together. Storm does not permit me to go into those deep dark places because of the bonding we have done. I absolutely 100% love this dog."

Living, breathing connection to community

PTSD Service Dogs from VICD provide a living, breathing lifeline to the outside world. While each bond is unique, the objective remains the same: to empower Veterans and First Responders with the tools to reclaim their place in their communities and rebuild their lives.

Clients enter into the 52-Week Healthy Community Living program with a fully qualified service dog, and together they train as one unified team. This process creates a powerful bond based on trust and mutual service. They attend twice-weekly sessions together, guided by professional instructors and a mental health clinical practitioner. The dogs learn to be emotionally tuned to their person and their unique triggers. They're able to wake clients from night-



Dave with his PTSD Service Dog, Storm

mares, ground them during a hyper-aroused state, and support them unconditionally through the stresses and trauma of everyday life. This training culminates in the successful graduation of a fully certified PTSD Service Dog Team under Assistance Dogs International and the Guide and Service Dog Acts of British Columbia and Alberta.

Consistent connection is at the heart of the program, which is why once clients graduate from the program, they enter into continued aftercare for the life of their certification. They are also encouraged to consider sharing their experience with new teams.

Graduates express that their PTSD Service Dogs give them confidence to reintegrate into society, and more importantly, to interact in healthy ways with their family, friends, and the communities where they live.

Life-changing dogs for those in need

BC & Alberta Guide Dogs is a registered charity that breeds, raises and professionally trains Guide Dogs for individuals who are blind or visually-impaired, Autism Service Dogs for children ages 3-10 with autism and their families, and PTSD Service Dogs for Veterans and First Responders living with operational stress injuries. These certified Guide and Service Dogs are provided, along with aftercare support, at no cost to families for the working life of the dog. With each dog costing \$35,000, this means that the organization relies on

donations to provide these essential services.

When you donate to BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, you help transform someone's life

for years to come with the gift of safety, independence and support. From one-time gifts to monthly and legacy giving, your donation to BC & Alberta Guide Dogs helps place life-changing dogs for those in need. To learn more about how

you can help, or to read more stories like Dave's, please visit the BC & Alberta Guide Dogs website at www.bcandalbertaguidedogs.com.

Submitted by BC & Alberta Guide Dogs