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National PTSD Service Association: Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Who are the founders of the National PTSD Service Association?

Sandra LaFlamme and Mark LaFlamme are the founders of the National PTSD Service Association. Sandra LaFlamme is president of the organization and is a successful realtor. Mark LaFlamme served as Flight Commander, Executive Officer, and Chief Scheduling during Operations Desert Storm, Enduring, and Iraqi Freedom. His decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, 4 Air medals, and the Meritorious Service Medal. Mark retired from the US Air Force at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

2. When was the National PTSD Service Association formed?

The National PTSD Service Association was established as a 501(C)(3) Sarasota, Florida based nonprofit in 2014.

3. What is the mission of your organization?

We formed our nonprofit to provide service dogs to qualified veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

4. Where do the veterans you serve live?

We serve veterans from Charlotte County to Hillsborough County in southwest Florida.

5. What are the effects of PTSD?

Veterans returning from combat may struggle with PTSD and experience depression and anger, leaving them at greater risk for divorce, substance abuse, homelessness, and suicide.

6. May I train my pet dog to be my service dog?

Your service dog cannot be your family pet; however, they will be with you for a very long time. Your service dog is trained to do tasks that help with disabilities, such

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as those that are invisible like PTSD. Our highly trained service dogs' main purpose is to help comfort veterans when they are experiencing PTSD symptoms.

7. How many people work for your organization?

Even though we're the owners, we take an active role in our organization. We manage and operate our organization as well as hire dog trainers and experts on a contractual basis to train the service dogs and veterans with PTSD.

8. Do you offer service dogs for free?

No, we do not provide service dogs for free. Instead, we provide grants and financial assistance to qualified veterans that have documentation from a doctor or the veterans administration that states he or she suffers from PTSD.

9. Does your organization support the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) Act of 2019?

Yes, our organization supports the PAWS Act of 2019.

10. What is the PAWS Act of 2019?

The PAWS Act of 2019 was introduced to Congress on June 5, 2019 by Florida Congressman, John Rutherford. The bill allows veterans with mental illnesses access to service dogs. The bill is currently awaiting further approval.

11. There are those in the medical community that believe there is no evidence-based therapy that service dogs help veterans with PTSD. Why do you think a service dog is better than proven pharmaceuticals in the treatment of PTSD in veterans?

Many case studies have shown service dogs aid in the recovery of veterans facing PTSD issues daily. According to the *AMA Journal of Ethics*, "Veterans paired with service dogs reported lower symptoms of PTSD, lower symptoms of depression, better interpersonal relationships, less substance abuse, and few psychiatric symptoms than veterans without dogs (Weinmeyer, 2015)."

- 12. Southeastern Guide Dogs, your local competitor, serves veterans in the area and have been established for over 30 years. Why do you think you are better than the established, highly successful Southeastern Guide Dogs?**

We are 100% dedicated to providing highly skilled service dogs to qualified veterans with PTSD. Southeastern Guide Dogs does not dedicate 100% of their time to matching a service dog with a veteran with PTSD.

- 13. Your organization offers virtual dog training, which doesn't allow the dog and veteran to have a beneficial, hands-on experience with the trainer or training facility. What are the benefits of providing this service?**

Currently due to COVID 19, we follow strict CDC recommended guidelines. By providing virtual training, our veterans, service dogs, and trainers are able to maintain their relationships, and it allows veterans to build upon their skills during this difficult time.

- 14. It appears your geographic reach is limiting, only helping veterans from Charlotte to Hillsborough counties. Is there a reason why you aren't serving all veterans with PTSD in the state of Florida?**

By focusing on Charlotte and Hillsborough counties in Florida, we are able to ensure the needs of each veteran are met. We do have plans to service the entire state of Florida once we have helped those in need within those counties.

- 15. Having multiple training facilities portrays a fragmented organization. Why do you have multiple locations?**

Multiple training facility locations offer our clients different environments to train with their service dog. These environments are meant to replicate experiences veterans might encounter in their daily lives. Having a variety of training locations allows veterans and their service dogs to practice their skills, so they are ready to face daily stressors.

- 16. The PAWS Act of 2019 is still stuck in the House of Representatives, awaiting final approval. We can only assume there is something wrong with the PAWS Act of 2019 since we are almost 2 years waiting for it to pass. So, then why do you still follow these guidelines?**

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We stand committed to our mission to help qualified veterans with PTSD. We will do everything in our power to find financial assistance and grants for veterans struggling with PTSD and need a highly trained service dog.

- 17. Service dogs are expensive to maintain with veterinary visits, food, training, etc. As the median income for a veteran living in Sarasota County is \$35,783 (Livestories, 2018), how are veterans able to cover the costs of having a service dog?**

We work with our veterans and their service dogs by finding financial assistance and grants for the needs of their service dogs.

- 18. Your organization has been operating since 2014. Why do your marketing communications materials showcase primarily Mark LaFlamme, National PTSD Service Association co-founder, as a veteran benefitting from a service dog?**

We respect the privacy of our veterans and their service dogs. Veterans can volunteer to be showcased. Otherwise, their privacy is maintained.

- 19. The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented many small nonprofits from receiving financial donations. How do you expect to keep your doors open as COVID-19 continues to have a destructive effect on our economy?**

Our organization is self-funded by us (Sandra and Mark LaFlamme) along with small donations from Wal-Mart and Home Depot. We believe we will continue operating and look forward to a post COVID-19 future.

- 20. Are you concerned there will be another organization like yours that caters to veterans with PTSD that will persuade your target market to seek their services?**

We are not concerned at all if another similar organization is formed and seeks our target market. We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate if such an organization were to reach our target market and join together in the mission of helping veterans with PTSD.

References

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