

The Warrior Canine Connection is a therapeutic service dog training program that aims to maximize the benefit of human-animal interaction. Drawing upon the warrior ethos, the Warrior Canine Connection program is specifically designed to reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in service members who train the future service dogs, allowing our patients to serve their fellow wounded warriors through a mutually beneficial program. At the conclusion of the training program, the specially-bred Golden and Labrador Retrievers are placed with veterans who have sustained mobility-limiting injuries.

### WCC serves four vital military missions:

1. Provide service members and veterans with PTSD and a traumatic brain injury (TBI) the opportunity to be a part of a critical military support mission helping fellow wounded warriors.
2. Offer a safe, effective and inexpensive non-pharmaceutical therapeutic intervention for the treatment of PTSD.
3. Train highly skilled service dogs that will provide years of mobility and social support to veterans with disabilities.
4. Strengthen the bonds and relieve stress in military families.

*"Serving humankind for 30,000 years..."*

Canine interaction is not a new concept. Throughout history, humans and dogs have evolved together. At the NICoE, the WCC has access to state-of-the-art medical technology to better understand that connection. In partnership with the NICoE, the WCC aims to create evidence-based best practices to shape policy, education and outreach to other sites across the country and guide the use of service dogs for psychological health conditions.

### NICoE Patient Involvement

Service members first interact with the WCC dogs during a tour on their first day at the NICoE. As part of an ongoing integrative health and wellness education track at the NICoE, WCC Director Rick Yount provides a presentation each week on the therapeutic use of service dogs and the WCC service dog training program. From there, the patients' involvement depends on their level of interest.

### Benefits of Involvement

- Exposing service dogs in training to sights, sounds and surfaces in the community encourages patients to leave their comfort zone, providing an opportunity to combat feelings of social anxiety or emotional numbness, to reintegrate into the community and to interact with strangers.
- Service members are instructed to use a positive tone in training the dogs, requiring them to display verbal cues and body language associated with happiness and excitement.
- Canine interaction is a natural way to increase oxytocin levels in both the person and the dog, causing a lingering, calming and connecting effect, the opposite of the service member's "fight or flight" reflex. Some NICoE patients with PTSD are able to better engage in their treatment as a result of their involvement in the WCC training program.

### Learn More

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