



AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA
Department President's Special Project



MY SPECIAL PROJECT IS **VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

Recreation Therapy Service - Canine Programs

The Service Dog Training Intervention, *Paws for Purple Hearts*, began in July of 2008. In partnership with Sandra Carson of The Assistance Dog Institute, now Bergin University of Canine Studies, the VA implemented *Paws for Purple Hearts (PPH)* in the Men's and Women's Trauma Recovery Programs.

This pilot program was the first collaboration of this type in the VA. The intervention consists of Veterans and Active Duty Service Members who are diagnosed with PTSD to train service dogs - under the guidance of a service dog trainer and a VA Staff member - for fellow Veterans who have mobility impairments. It is a mission-based focus for the Veterans who train the service dogs as they are training the dogs for another Veteran with a physical disability. At the same time, the Veterans training the service dogs work on specific treatment goals and report increased socialization, emotion regulation, increased patience, decreased emotional numbing, and increased feelings of self-worth, to name a few. *Paws for Purple Hearts* service dog training intervention continues today with four dogs: two black labs and two golden retrievers

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