



Battle Buddies — A Rescue Mission

Vision

Our vision is to help veterans re-focus their sense of purpose by working with homeless dogs.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to help veterans heal, re-connect and transition to civilian life by working with shelter dogs. Through our Battle Buddies program, veterans and dogs work together and provide each other with mutual support and companionship to help their new 'Battle Buddy' re-engage and re-connect with others. Our Good Dog Workshop team coaches veterans through a series of hands-on instructional workshops with selected shelter dogs, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of dogs, their behavior, and our relationships with them.



Just because you're no longer wearing the uniform, doesn't mean you're not still fighting a battle. We know that many veterans and active duty military members are hurting when they return home from serving our country. Some have visible injuries, some have invisible injuries. Some feel unwanted or unappreciated. Some are having difficulty transitioning to civilian life. Many feel they've lost their sense of purpose or direction. This program was created for those veterans, active duty and transitioning military members who need help, be it help finding a purpose, a new career path, a companion, or a reason to live. And this help comes in the form of dogs. Working with shelter dogs, to be precise.

How can dogs help veterans? Simply put: Safety and companionship. For thousands—possibly hundreds of thousands—of years dogs have played an important role in our lives. Dogs originally came to humans to get an easy meal without having to expend energy by hunting fast and potentially dangerous prey. At the same time, we humans benefited from the dogs' presence by their alerting us to danger as well as their providing us with companionship. This mutually beneficial relationship of safety and companionship has essentially remained unchanged to this day. Our Battle Buddies program was designed to utilize that mutually beneficial relationship by helping veterans together with homeless dogs. Recent statistics show that approximately 670,000 shelter dogs are euthanized each year. Animal shelters have very limited space to house and care for homeless dogs and there is a constant shortage of people willing to care for these homeless dogs and find them good homes. By actively helping and working with these shelter dogs, veterans are performing another great service for their community, their country and these animals in need. In return, veterans receive the support and companionship that dogs naturally provide.



Our Process

The Battle Buddies program begins with a two-part meet-and-greet with each veteran or group of veterans. We start by simply getting to know each veteran and have them know us as well. We want each veteran to feel comfortable working with us as this program can become a very personal and impactful journey for the veteran as we guide them through their individual experiences. We'll ask their reasons for signing up for Battle Buddies, what they would like to achieve from the program (both short-term and long-term goals), and about their experiences with dogs. Next, we introduce the

veterans to our dog pack: VIVIAN, our rescued senior Beagle who is as calm as can be; TANK & AERIAL, our brother and sister chocolate Labrador Retrievers who are happy, vivacious and love everyone...especially those who throw a ball for them; and RED, our outgoing Australian Cattle Dog who loves being a herder and trots around with a perpetual grin. Our pack gives the veterans a sample of the different sizes, shapes, breeds, energy levels and—most importantly—temperaments of dogs. During this part of the meet-and-greet, Josh and I are not only educating the veterans about our dogs and dog behavior in general, but we're also observing the dynamics between each dog and each person. This gives us the roadmap to help guide each veteran toward the type of dog that is likely to be the best match for him/her. This process generally takes about 90 minutes.

The next step in the process is to introduce veterans to shelter dogs. We have partnered specifically with the Fauquier SPCA for this program and we meet at their facility in Casanova, Virginia. We walk through the kennels of available and adoptable dogs to educate the veterans on the various behaviors and temperaments of each dog and to help the veterans get a sense of which dogs might be a good fit for which veterans. Next, we'll select one or two dogs at a time for a leashed walk and off-leash socialization in the fenced-in paddocks at the Fauquier SPCA. The walk shows us how each dog behaves on-leash, how each veteran handles leash-walking a dog and, likewise, how each dog responds to his veteran handler. The off-leash socialization shows very clearly each dog's temperament, energy level, what each dog prefers to do when in a group outdoors, and which dogs are drawn to which veterans (and vice versa). This process typically takes two hours or more, depending upon the size of the group. All dog activities are supervised by a Good Dog Workshop staff member.

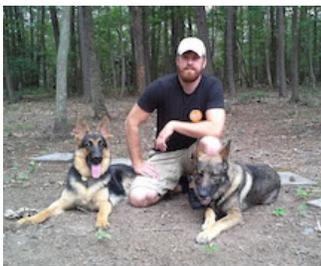
Some veterans will come to us for help finding the right dog for their family to adopt. Some will want to learn about dog behavior as a stepping stone to launch a career in dog training. Some will want to volunteer their time to help dogs in need. Others will come simply to get away from their own daily stresses and just spend time engaging with dogs—a mental vacation, if you will. And as you have probably already figured out: The dogs help the veterans as much as the veterans help the dogs. We facilitate that connection through our Battle Buddies program.



The Battle Buddies Team

Brian Kerchner, owner, Good Dog Workshop, LLC

I established Good Dog Workshop in 2007 to teach people how to solve their dogs' behavior problems by helping them understand their dogs better and to improve their relationships with their dogs. I did not go to an animal behavioral school, I don't have any letters or acronyms after my name, nor have I taken any courses about dog behavior. I learned about dogs simply by observing, owning, fostering, and working with dogs. And I teach my clients to do the same with their own dogs.



Josh Sowers, Chief Behaviorist

Josh Sowers has worked for Good Dog Workshop since 2011 helping clients resolve their dogs' behavior issues. Josh is not only an expert at reading dogs and dog-human relationships, he is also a top-notch problem solver. As a combat veteran who served in Iraq (0311 USMC), Josh has experienced first-hand what many veterans have seen and experienced so Josh can relate to the challenges faced by so many returning military members.

As dog behaviorists, Josh and I spend as much time working with our clients themselves as we do working with the clients' dogs. We oftentimes help people realize things about themselves and their own behavior that they were completely unaware of and which has impacted their relationships with their dogs. Our Battle Buddies program was in part designed to do the same for veterans: to help them learn something new—about themselves and dogs—and to help them figure out their next step in life.



Is Battle Buddies Right for You?

While there are some excellent programs already in place for veterans, the Battle Buddies program is available to all veterans, not just those with visible or invisible injuries. Battle Buddies may be ideal to help those who wish to:

- Help shelter dogs become more adoptable through training and socializing them with other dogs;
- Serve their community by volunteering with a local shelter or an animal rescue group;
- Learn how to work with dogs professionally or to increase their knowledge and understanding of dogs;
- Adopt or foster a shelter dog; or
- Take a break from the stresses of their everyday lives by enjoying the companionship of a dog.

Any veteran, active duty or transitioning or military member who enjoys the company of dogs is welcome to register. We simply require three things from participants:

1. A love of dogs,
2. A desire to help fellow veterans, and
3. A positive attitude.

There is NO COST to veterans for participating in our program.

Thank you for joining us in our mission to help veterans and homeless dogs!



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Creating happy, well-balanced dogs