

The Difference of a Dog: Purina Dog Chow's Service Dog Salute Program Supports more PTSD Service Dogs for Veterans

For veterans living with PTSD, service dogs can provide a lifeline.

By Joe Toscano, Vice President, Trade & Industry Development at Purina

The statistics are sobering: up to 30% of military veterans live with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), yet only a fraction have access to the life-changing support of a trained service dog. With service dog training costs reaching upwards of \$25,000 per dog and wait times often exceeding 18 months, many of our veterans are left without this vital resource that could help them reclaim their lives.

That's why Purina Dog Chow created the Service Dog Salute program in 2018, which has contributed approximately \$1.4 million to veteran service dog training organizations since its founding, and more than 30 grants to 501c3 service dog organizations. Our initiative helps fund the intensive training required to prepare these exceptional animals to support veterans living with PTSD.

The impact of a service dog on a veteran's life cannot be overstated. These highly-trained companions can recognize signs of anxiety or distress, provide calming pressure during stressful situations, and help veterans navigate daily challenges with greater confidence. Many veterans report significant improvements in their quality of life, relationships, and ability to participate in community activities after being paired with a service dog.

"I started getting better," U.S. veteran Jonathan Lucas describes of his service dog, Savannah. "I'm no



longer hiding from society. I can go back to concerts. I can be around crowds. And [Savannah] brought me to this point, where I can be around all environments. She brought me back to the world."

Our commitment to this cause runs deep. Beyond our financial contributions, we've launched nationwide awareness campaigns, partnered with veteran advocacy groups, and worked closely with service dog training organizations to understand and address the challenges they face.

Jonathan and Savannah's story and more were recently featured in the 2024 New York Dog Film Festival, as part of the Dog Chow Service Dog Salute category's winning film, *A Dog Can Make a Difference*.

For retailers, supporting the Service Dog Salute program represents both a business opportunity and a chance to make a meaningful difference. Our dedicated merchandise units create compelling in-store displays that resonate with shoppers. More importantly, by featuring Service Dog Salute displays, retailers help raise awareness about the critical need for service dogs among our veteran community.

To learn more about how you can support the Service Dog Salute program, contact your Purina sales representative. Together, we can help provide more veterans with the life-changing support of a trained service dog while driving category growth in your pet food aisle.

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