



FREEDOM K₉ PROJECT

CASE STATEMENT

WWW.FREEDOMK9PROJECT.COM



INTRODUCTION

She sits at home, exhausted from a fitful night's sleep filled with memories of brutal abuse. There's no food in the fridge and the dishes in the sink are piled high; her anxiety gripping her in a near constant fluctuating state of panic and apathy. It's been 2 years since she narrowly escaped her abusive marriage, and yet it feels like she's still with him. The narrative of the abuse survivor is as diverse as humanity itself. Anyone can be abused, regardless of their gender, income, race, religion, sexual orientation or history. Though we like to believe that violence and exploitation are issues far from us, they happen in our own neighborhoods. Domestic violence and sex trafficking create wounds deeper than many of us can imagine and often cause chaos in the minds and bodies of survivors long after the abuse has ended. Unlike many other forms of trauma, these forms are inflicted by people who are supposed to love and care for you, thus tarnishing the meaning of love as a whole.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can happen in the aftermath of any traumatic experience, and it is for this reason that 7 out of 10 psychologically abused women develop PTSD. Veterans who return from war with PTSD suffer from the same disorder to the same severity as many victims abused in their own homes. However, the utilization of service dogs to serve those with PTSD has historically only been used for veterans, leaving others who suffer with fewer options. Even though the disorder is the same and the symptoms are often the same, different kinds of trauma cause different kinds of triggers. In other words, there is no "one size fits all" service dog trained for all kinds of trauma. It is for this reason that we not only specialize in training service dogs for abuse survivors, we train each dog specifically for one survivor.

Here at the Freedom Kg Project, we aim to provide freedom and a quality of life for survivors that have been subjected to the trauma of sexual slavery and domestic violence through service dogs trained to the highest caliber. We also strive to raise awareness in the community of PTSD and its many forms, especially those forms which are inflicted through violence against women. Many people don't know that the effects of PTSD are prevalent in their day-to-day interactions with civilians and not reserved only for veterans.

ASSESSMENT OF NEED

Domestic violence can occur between anyone in the home, whether that be parents abusing children, children abusing each other, intimate partners abusing intimate partners, etc. Susan Babbel Ph.D., M.F.T., published an article in Psychology Today about the connection between domestic violence and PTSD, where they stated, "After a period of time, it's not uncommon for victims of domestic violence (like victims of all types of abuse and trauma) to develop the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). And because studies have proven that those who suffer from PTSD can be inclined toward violence, the cycle of abuse repeats itself through generations and is hard to break. For victims for whom domestic violence leads to PTSD, they struggle with a long-term psychological disorder that can be challenging to diagnose and conquer.... Even those of who have managed to move on from crippling abusive relationships can suffer the aftershocks of abuse—in other words, PTSD—for many years. PTSD from abuse is characterized by symptoms such as flashbacks, intrusive imagery, nightmares, anxiety, emotional numbing, insomnia, hypervigilance, and avoidance of traumatic triggers."(1)

PTSD is often caused by either witnessing or being involved in a traumatic event, and it thrives in environments where there is secrecy or shame, making domestic violence and sex trafficking the perfect breeding ground for the disorder. Simplified, PTSD occurs when the body's natural shift from reactive to restorative never occurs after a traumatic event. When our fight or flight reactions are triggered it is in an effort to save us from a dangerous situation. However, if fight or flight is activated and you aren't saved, the trauma often gets, "stuck" thus holding the survivor in a near-constant state of emergency. In situations of domestic violence and sex trafficking, the trauma is rarely a one-time occurring event wherein you fight or flee and are rescued. On the contrary, you are rarely saved from fighting back and the traumas are often compounding and repeated, thus making the post-trauma more difficult to switch into a restorative state as opposed to the reactive emergency response. If one's intimate partner hit one once, and one was able to escape the situation without having any ties to the person that hit them, then PTSD would be very unlikely. But, as we know, that is rarely the case.(2)

In fact, according the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, between 54%-84% of battered women get PTSD.(3) Domestic violence thrives in secrecy, thus making it difficult to get a concrete percentage. However, even at the lowest estimates of 54%, that still makes PTSD as a result of domestic abuse very common. With an estimated 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men experiencing domestic abuse in their lifetime, the amount of people who get PTSD from domestic abuse is high, even at the lowest estimates.(4)



ASSESSMENT OF NEED CONT.

Sex trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery and involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of commercial sex act. It is often accompanied by great violence and repeated sexual assault, with people often using either physical means to keep victims from escaping (such as keeping them in locked rooms), or mental means (such as threatening to kill the victim's family if they don't cooperate). Sex trafficking, like anything else in the range of human experience, is on a wide spectrum. It is not uncommon for one's own family to sell them for sex, but it is also not uncommon for a victim to be groomed by someone to claim to see them as talented and beautiful while trapping them in a world of violence that is nearly impossible to escape. The estimated number of trafficking victims grows almost daily, as this enslaved population exists almost invisibly. As sex trafficking awareness grows in international attention, more aftercare services for survivors must be developed as well.

A study by the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London, a group of sex trafficking victims was studied to determine the long-term mental health effects of trafficking human beings for sexual exploitation. They determined that 39% of the studied adults had PTSD.⁽⁵⁾ While, statistically, there is much less data outlining the connection between sex trafficking and PTSD, we know that given the nature of sex trafficking that survivors are at very high risk. This is backed up by the studies currently published.

It would be simple if a victim of such a heinous crime of sex trafficking could assimilate seamlessly back into modern society once victims escape, but it's not that easy. We aim to grow services for the survivors who are rescued to help them heal and recover, offering them as normal a life as possible.

There is a huge population of American society suffering from trauma with very few options for dealing with the aftermath. Yes, there are lots of domestic violence shelters, sex trafficking rescue groups, crisis centers, and options for victims experiencing trauma in the present moment. But what do we do about the healing process? What does a civilian suffering from the severe symptoms of PTSD do with such few options to live a normal life? The Freedom K9 Project aims to widen the range of survivors who have experienced crippling trauma a way to heal and experience life again. Though one may never be the same as one was before trauma, scars can heal, and beautiful and meaningful experiences are still possible after abuse.



PROGRAMS

Service Dog Program: Service dogs not only provide an extra layer of comfort that is ever helpful to a survivor with PTSD, they also perform specific tasks for their person and are essentially legally seen as a piece of medical equipment. They can go anywhere with their handler except for military bases and places where a sterile environment may be necessary. Our dogs are trained specifically for one survivor and can take a year to a year and a half to train. During this time, we teach the dogs how to interrupt the cycle of PTSD that happens near the brainstem by interrupting oncoming panic attacks, performing calming rituals, waking up their survivors from night terrors, and whatever other tasks might be helpful to the survivor's healing. When PTSD is triggered, it is caused by a "trauma feedback loop" which keeps the survivor in a near constant state of survival. When we train our dogs to interrupt that loop, the trauma becomes less enforced and therefore much easier to heal from. Everything we teach our dogs is not to help survivors cope with PTSD, but with the end goal being to help them heal altogether through methods backed by neuroscience.

Trauma Recovery Program: While the dogs initiate the interruption of the loop, we must also teach the survivors how to respond. For example, simply knowing that a panic attack is about to happen isn't enough to stop it from happening; we must also teach the survivors what to do when the dog starts the interruption. It is not enough to simply throw service dogs at people who have PTSD and expect them to heal, and it is for this reason that we are working with several practitioners from many different practices that have been proven to help with various aspects of PTSD, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness, meditation, yoga, Internal Family System, etc. Through these skills, we aim to give the survivors everything they need to take charge of their own healing process, and work with the dog as a team to lessen the effects of their trauma. The duration of this program is expected to take three weeks.

Therapy Dog Program: Our therapy dog, Echo, works full-time at Beacon of Hope Crisis Center located in Indianapolis to help victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault who are currently in crisis. AAT (Animal Assisted Therapy) has been proven to lower cortisol levels and boost serotonin levels. What this means is that stress levels are significantly lowered in the presence of an animal. For the victims suffering abuse, a therapy animal can provide much-needed comfort and an extra layer of support.

Awareness Program: PTSD is a disorder that can happen to anyone that has experienced trauma, though many people still only associate PTSD with veterans. Through our awareness program, we educate the public on PTSD and its many forms, but especially those forms which are inflicted through violence against women. PTSD isn't as simple as, "just getting over it" and it is part of our goal to help the layperson understand the conditions which cause PTSD, its symptoms, its effects, and how to respond if they or a loved one is diagnosed with it.



LEADERSHIP

Lydia Wood, Chairman of the Board, Founder and acting Head Trainer at the Freedom Kg Project, has been training dogs professionally for about five years, and training service dogs for three of those years. She's always been passionate about women's issues and mental health, and upon starting her dog training journey, she realized that service dogs for PTSD could be much more widely utilized than they were already. As she learned more about path of recovery from sex trafficking and domestic abuse, she decided that service dogs could help survivors heal much more efficiently. She learned how to train service dogs for veterans with PTSD, always with the intention to adapt it for the survivors of abuse since there was currently no organization already doing so. In addition to her passion for helping survivors of trauma heal, she works with victims of abuse currently in crisis as a Victim Advocate. Through years of studying not only dog training, but also the neurobiology of trauma, adverse trauma reactions such as PTSD, the dynamics of abuse, the dynamics of trafficking, and a plethora of recovery techniques, she founded the Freedom Kg Project as a way to bring all of those things together.

The Board of Directors is made up of several passionate and experienced individuals living across the United States. McKenna Hight is herself an abuse survivor with years of experience as a writer for others who have suffered trauma. She has a BA in English and Professional Communications from KSU, and her fire and passion to help others overcome their demons fuels her desire to see the Freedom Kg Project help as many survivors as possible.

Cody Claborn, though this is his first time on the Board of a nonprofit organization, has almost 2 years of experience working with nonprofits as a Software Engineer at a donor tracking software company. His level head a calm demeanor give him an edge when making critical decisions, and his organizational and technological skills give the Freedom Kg Project that same edge in regards to fundraising and the latest advances in nonprofit technology. In addition to his personal abilities, he monitors the finances of the organization to make sure that every penny is spent to the benefit of the survivors we aim to serve.

Lacey Smothers graduated from IUPUI with a BA in Psychology and a minor in Sociology in 2016. Since then she has worked as a Client Success Manager, where she does trainings, coordinates events, and handles the day-to-day affairs of the office as the self-appointed "Office Queen." No matter where she is, Lacey's true passion is to help people. Her fun spirit and honesty uplift the Freedom Kg Project's team as a whole as her generosity and drive makes helping survivors first and foremost as the organization propels forward.

The leadership stretches from Atlanta, GA to Indianapolis, IN, with Board meetings taking place monthly over the Internet. All members have given both their time and their finances to make sure the organization succeeds.



FINANCIAL NEEDS AND GOALS

We are currently raising funds to both adopt and train our first set of service dogs. Service dog training is rigorous and time consuming, costing most organizations who train dogs with a similar method approximately \$40,000 for each dog/survivor team. With this first class we plan on starting with two dogs/survivor teams. In addition to adopting the dogs themselves, we will also need pay for their food, veterinary care, training costs, training equipment, and housing.

While we are growing quickly, and the increasing attention is an attribute to the need we fill, it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep up with the demand without any paid staff. Through hiring a part-time salaried Executive Director and Head Trainer, not only can we keep up with the current demand by giving this person the time they need run the organization as it is, as well as outreach and events, but we can also ensure that our puppies will have the best training and care once adopted. The Board of Directors has determined that this wage be set at a \$36,000 salary, as they will be in charge of running the logistics of the organization as well as ensuring that our dogs are trained well.

In addition to hiring an Executive Director/Head Trainer, we need finances to maintain the health of animals in our care i.e. veterinary care, food, and housing, and the training, which will take place under the Executive Director/Head Trainer's salary. For each dog we estimate this to cost \$8,000 including housing, food, veterinary care, and a small buffer for emergencies, for a total of \$16,000 for the first class. We partner with several rescues, and the initial cost of the dog along with care varies depending on age, current vaccinations, medical history, and genetics. For this reason, our estimates are as accurate as possible.

For survivors, we aim to charge them as little as possible for being involved in our program, as many times the survivors of abuse have limited resources, and we don't want that to affect who can receive the help they need and who can't. We accept applications from survivors all throughout the United States, and when they come to Indianapolis, IN to receive their dogs for the three-week Trauma Recovery Program, they will need housing and transportation. We estimate that this will cost a total of \$3,500 per survivor, for a total of \$7,000 for the first class to fly the survivor round-trip to Indianapolis and put them up in a hotel for three weeks.

CONCLUSION

While our program is young, our team has the full knowledge and capability to implant the use of service dogs for a new group of people. With a thorough understanding of PTSD, service dog training, psychology, healing techniques, the dynamics of exploitation and abuse, and effects of trauma, we are excited to implement our understanding to get survivors the help they need. With your help, we can change the healing processes for those who need it most.

SOURCES

- 1: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/somatic-psychology/201105/domestic-violence-power-struggle-lasting-consequences>
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- 3: <https://www.fcadv.org/projects-programs/trauma-mental-health-and-domestic-violence>
- 4: <https://www.safehorizon.org/get-informed/domestic-violence-statistics-facts/>
- 5: <https://www.medicaldaily.com/human-trafficking-takes-serious-toll-mental-health-ptsd-and-depression-often-357674>