

STUDYING SERVICE DOGS

Article provided by Dr. Colleen Dell

AUDEAMUS Inc. is an injured veteran-run Canadian non-profit organization dedicated to providing service dogs to persons traumatized in the line of duty. Service dogs are increasingly recognized as a support for some veterans suffering an Operational Stress Injury (OSI), including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). To date, AUDEAMUS has paired 87 fully trained service dogs with persons traumatized in the line of duty and whose quality of life depends on the support. Approximately 80% of the dogs were adopted from a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), including in Saskatchewan.

There is a lack of quality evidence on service dogs for veterans with PTSD, although the research field is expanding. There is also a growing presence of service dogs for veterans with PTSD, and emerging stories about their benefits. For example, Master Corporal (retired) Eric Pellerin, an injured veteran with the Canadian Military and living in Saskatchewan, was paired with his Service Dog Sophie

a little over a year ago. He is now an Assistant Trainer with AUDEAMS Inc. because he says, "It is important to give back as the program has helped give me my life back." Eric knows the many benefits of the bond he has with Sophie, saying "She is my constant, she is always there for me." Sophie is also trained to do behaviour disruptions, break dissociation and help Eric to emotionally regulate. To sum up his relationship with Sophie, Eric shared that "She gives me something to do, but it is more than that. It is purpose. Kids grow up and it is easy for a teen to make his own supper. But Sophie can't. I have to feed her."

For a week in April of this year, another researcher with AUDEAMUS Inc., Dr. Darlene Chalmers from the University of Regina, Faculty of Social Work, and I began participating in the full AUDEAMUS Inc. Public Access Certification service dog training program with canine partners. The aim is to understand, to the extent we can, the veterans' program experience. This aligns with scientific research methodology compatible with AUDEAMUS's vision of making sure that the veterans' welfare forefronts any involvement in research. This experience is allowing Darlene and me to meaningfully inform the content and processes of research with AUDEAMUS.

Our team, in collaboration with Dr. Nathaniel Osgoode from the Department of Computer Science at the U of S, recently began a study titled *The Impact of Service Dogs in the Lives of Veterans who Problematically Use Substances*. So, for example, by training with my canine partner Subie I came to understand how some wearable



Photo of Master Corporal Eric Pellerin (ret.), along with Monty, a service dog in training, and Colleen Dell's dog, Subie

technology we were considering is unreasonable to ask a veteran training a service dog to engage with.

I have also gained a deeper appreciation of the role and welfare of a service dog. My experience of training Subie without treats for service dog work heightened his level of engagement with me; that is, it made learning and doing his job easier on him. It is through these on-the-ground experiences that our team can better understand and engage with our study and all of its participants – human and canine – in an informed and meaningful way.

For more information, visit:
www.AUDEAMUS.ca
www.colleendell.ca
Facebook: AnnaBelleSubieAdventures

WITH LOVE AND HONOUR

The Saskatchewan SPCA would like to recognizing those who have donated in memory or honour of a loved one.

The following individuals have donated in honour of a loved one:

- Shiela Lendsay in honour of Andrea and Reid's birthday
- Ashley Page in honour of Silver and Allegro (Mayce's cats)

The following individuals have donated in memory of a loved one:

- John W. Myers in memory of "my coonhound, Leeroy"
- Friends and Family in memory of Ms. Kay Braget
- Pauline Dziaduck in memory of Michael Harkusha "who had a great love of dogs"

- Deb Fehr in memory of Scooter
- Trevor Dubiel in memory of "my late cat, Rosie"
- Mrs. Willis McClymont in memory of "my cat, Toby"
- Sandra Archer in memory of "my beloved cocker spaniels, Cinnamon, Opal, and Thumper"

On behalf of the Board and staff of the Saskatchewan SPCA, we extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who has made a donation to the Society.

Correction: In the Spring 2017 issue of The Humanitarian, we incorrectly spelled the name of Laurie L'Heureux. We apologize for this error.