



**Assistance Dogs of the West
Warrior Canine Connection Program
In Veterans Court**

**EVALUATION REPORT
May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust Grant**

**Pivot Evaluation
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**PIVOT
evaluation**

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ASSISTANCE DOGS OF THE WEST: WARRIOR CANINE CONNECTION 2017-2018

May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust Evaluation Report

I. Introduction

Assistance Dogs of the West (ADW) began its fourth year of Warrior Canine Connection (WCC) implementation in collaboration with New Mexico's Second Judicial District Court in the fall of 2017. Veterans that are not justice-involved are also included in the program, as well as Military Family Members caregiving for a Veteran with a disability.

WCC has two main purposes. The first is to provide highly-trained assistance dogs to people with disabilities or exposure to trauma, in the case of our Courthouse Facility Dogs and Crisis Response Canines. These dogs mitigate the impact of those disabilities and trauma and improve the quality of life of those individuals. The second purpose of WCC is to involve Veterans with challenges and disabilities in the training of the service dogs.

This report details ADW's WCC program staff efforts to fulfill the activities, outputs, and outcomes associated with the May and Stanley Smith funded project.

II. Program Purpose

WCC's purpose is to provide Veterans with service-oriented support to aid with the difficulties of transitioning to civilian life after military service. Many of these Veterans experience injuries, both physical and socio-emotional. WCC specifically trains Veterans with physical, emotional, and social challenges to train dogs. In this manner, Veterans receive the calming effects of working with dogs combined with the sense of purpose of training a service dog for a fellow Veteran or community member in need.

After experiencing initial success with the WCC program, Assistance Dogs of the West staff focused their efforts to prepare for expansion. This consists of two activities. First, ADW sought to increase number of clients they could serve. However, they require skilled staff with experience working with people with disabilities and trauma exposure to simultaneously train service dogs and serve clients. This limits the pool of readily



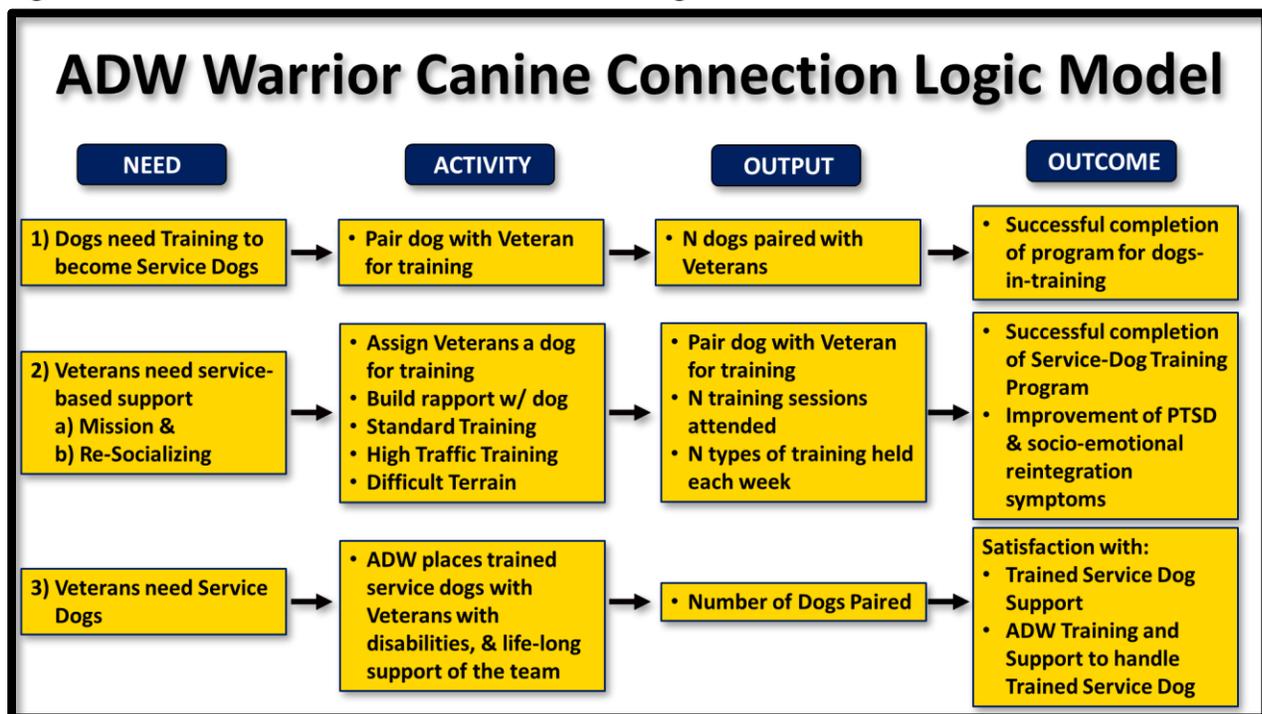
available qualified applicants, leading ADW to develop an apprenticeship program this past year with the goal of meeting this need with in-house screening and mentoring of potentially successful applicants. Data collection and analysis has been the second major focus of ADW for its WCC program. The May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust Fund resources have supported these efforts.

III. Program Description

Veterans volunteer for dog-training service either through Veterans Court recommendation, in which case they commit for 6 months, or through their own search for volunteer service, in which case ADW initially asked for a commitment for a minimum of three months. Volunteer trainers may continue as advanced trainers and mentors to the most-recent participants.

Program Evaluators worked with ADW to create the Logic Model for Warrior Canine Connection (Figure 1) to have a visual map of the program. For this report, the program evaluators focused on the analysis of data collection forms for the activities, outputs, and outcomes that fulfill the needs of Veterans to obtain service-based support.

Figure 1. ADW Warrior Canine Connection Logic Model



This past year, ADW explored modifying the program structure to provide Veterans the opportunity to start and end together. This change intended to build camaraderie among the Veterans and makes it easier to for trainers to plan for the individual



trainings. This change also improves data-gathering structures for program evaluation to improve processes and implement needed program modifications.

The new program structure has volunteer Veterans start on the same date and remain as a cohort for the 6 months. Classes meet one time per week at each of the three sites; Albuquerque has three separate classes meeting each week. Training staff take great care to attend to the status and well-being of participating Veterans. Often, service dog trainings take place in public places that can be difficult to handle for assistance dogs-in-training and for Veterans. Program staff began asking Veterans to fill out a Monthly Status form indicating how they are doing, so they may understand any situations or locations they need to avoid during that class. Program staff report this form has not worked well, and they are developing a new method of understanding Veterans' immediate needs or concerns. The new method is discussion based and uses group dynamics that allow Veterans to express their needs in the context of the supportive group. By providing a focus on the improvement and comfort of the dogs-in-training in crowded and boisterous environments, Veterans may experience some benefits, as well.

IV. Output and Outcome Results

ADW met their enrollment goals along with their completion targets and service dog and Veteran matching goals.

Target Output 1: Enroll a minimum of 30 unduplicated veterans in WCC for the year.
Output 1 Result: ADW **exceeded** their target by enrolling 37 veterans in the program.

Target Outcome 1: Obtain an 80% completion rate.
Outcome 1 Result: The WCC **surpassed** their target with an 89% completion rate.

Target Output 2: Place a minimum of 3 fully trained assistance dogs with veteran clients with disabilities; additional placements of dogs trained in WCC program with non-veterans with disabilities and as Courthouse Facility Dogs.

Output 2 Result: ADW **exceeded** their target by placing 4 trained assistance dogs with disabled Veterans and more than 19 trained dogs with non-veterans with disabilities, and as Crisis Response Dogs and Courthouse Facility Dogs.

Target Outcome 2: At least 3 veteran clients will be successfully matched with a trained ADW service dog; will be satisfied with the support provided by the ADW dog; and will be satisfied with the client training and support provided by ADW

Outcome 2 Result: ADW **surpassed** this goal by successfully matching 4 Veteran clients with trained ADW service dogs.



V. Program Implementation

a. Veteran Participation

In the past year, ADW exceeded their WCC participant goal of 30 participants. The WCC 6-month program enrolled 37 Veterans, and 33 successfully completed the program (Table 1).

Table 1. Veteran volunteer trainer program participation November 2017- July 2018

Participation	Albuquerque	Santa Fe	Taos	Total
Completed Program	23	6	4	33
Did not complete Program	4	0	0	4
Total	27	6	4	37

Participants who withdrew suggested that scheduling conflicts, health, or other issues in their personal lives interfered, not displeasure with the program.

b. Trained Dog Placement

ADW staff and volunteers successfully trained many dogs during the past year. Four of those dogs were successfully matched with Veterans with disabilities. Additionally, ADW graduated 7 Courthouse Facility Dogs and eleven non-veterans were paired with assistance dogs. One of the trained dogs became a Crisis Response Dog. In addition, 4 people with disabilities completed the Owner Self-Trainer program with their own dogs.

c. Data Collection Instruments: Design and Implementation

Program staff noticed positive changes in the Veterans that participate in the program and collected data on the challenges that Veterans face daily. The ADW WCC program faces the same challenges as other programs in early years of development, such as having a clear understanding of the full intended and unintended effects of their program. As ADW prepares for program expansion, they seek to identify these effects and program weaknesses.

Therefore, in addition to focusing their efforts on the current year outputs, ADW staff spent the year focusing on a second programmatic goal. They dedicated much time and effort to improving their data-collection instruments for informed program modification/improvement and future expansion.

In 2017, ADW begin revising their data collection instruments used since 2015 to collect data on participant progress. Program staff implemented pre and post training session surveys to obtain self-reported physical and socio-emotional status. While this process worked to gain some insight into the changes the participants experienced, ADW’s staff wished to learn more about data type and quality, as well as the data-gathering process. Evaluators analyzed the instruments using Cronbach’s alpha, a reliability measure. Other activities described in Table 2 led to upgraded instruments.

Table 2. Pivot Evaluation Activities

Completion	Pivot Activities
✓	a. Analyze existing instruments including a summary of existing data,
✓	b. Recommend instrument improvements,
✓	c. Upgrade instrument according to ADW specifications,
In process	d. Procure IRB (human subjects protections) approval for work,
✓	f. Reanalyze new instrument version results with a larger data set.

The evaluators performed an analysis of the WCC Baseline Assessment and Session Pre-Post Surveys for 22 participants. The sample number was large enough to give an indication of the instrument performance. Evaluators found the instrument in use presented reliability challenges. Column 2 in Table 3 shows very poor reliability ratings for the original Client Response Survey. Generally, Cronbach’s alpha values should range between 0.75 and 0.95 to indicate strong reliability.

Instrument testing results showed significant improvement in the new forms (using Cronbach’s standardized Alpha) (Table 3). In addition, the new instruments measure an additional construct, Cognitive Function. The new instrument’s questions measured reliably Desire to Isolate, Pain, and Cognitive Function. Emotional Distress’ and ‘Fatigue’ constructs may need improvement. These constructs pose unique challenges. A larger sample size will help clarify details of construct to have a clear understanding of which questions need to be deleted or modified.

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha measure of construct questions

Construct	Original Client Response Surveys	Updated Client Response Surveys
Desire to Isolate	0.436	0.954
Emotional Distress	0.255	0.510
Fatigue	0.148	0.546
Pain	0.262	0.894
Cognitive Function		0.867

* Based on Standardized Items



During the period of transition, ADW staff were unable to collect consistent participant data for the entire year as different versions of surveys were being tested out and modified. Staff effort was focused on the improvement of the data gathering process. Staff actively participated in discussion about the best approach to gather critical data with the least amount of intrusion on the Veterans. Program staff spent significant time December 2017 to April 2018 testing different survey versions and their implementation. ADW staff participated in design and three rounds of revisions of new intake forms. They also decided to ask for a six month commitment to WCC from non-justice-involved Veterans, the same time length commitment of those participating in Veterans Court. The revision process included active staff involvement to ensure that program staff could easily implement data collection in the field. ADW staff tested the forms with their clients; however, there was insufficient time to produce large enough participation numbers that would provide confidence in reliability measures. Nevertheless, Table 3 column 3 shows encouraging improvements.

Find the form development process description in Table 4. In April, WCC staff gave the current cohort Start-Up forms to fill out, even though they had started in January. Even though this makes it difficult to use the form information as baseline data, it allowed the staff to obtain current participant feedback on the forms. The Albuquerque staff began implementing the monthly surveys in May. Eight participants filled out the Exit Forms at the end of their 6-month commitment.

Table 4. 2018 Data collection form details

Form	Frequency	Changes/Improvements
Start-up Status	Once – Beginning	<i>Revised point of data collection.</i> Demographic and baseline data.
Monthly Status	Monthly	<i>Reduced frequency of collection.</i> Improved questions for physical and socio-emotional status.
Exit Form	Once – End	<i>New point of data collection.</i> Final physical and socio-emotional status after program completion.
Trainer Activity Log	At every training session	<i>New point of data collection.</i> Task of identifying issues during training transferred from the participant to the trainer.



VI. Results

a. Findings for Veteran Participants

Although the new instruments provided information for 12 individuals, they provide an insight into the type of information that will be gathered at a greater scale in the future. According to the forms filled out by 12 participants:

- Veterans Court referred 27% of the respondents to the program.
- Respondent VA disability rating percentage mode is 100.
- All but one of the 11 responding participants has owned a dog in the past, and so are familiar with canines.
- 36% of the respondents have had negative experiences with dogs in the past, mainly isolated experiences of dog bites or dog attacks;
- None of the respondents claim to have long-lasting fear of dogs before entering the program.
- 73% of the respondents owned a dog at the program beginning.

Because the participant rates are so small, breaking the description into ethnicity or gender may identify individuals. Both males and females participated and individuals from diverse ethnicities. Participants were between 25 and 75 years old and averaged 53 years old. Participants reported serving in multiple branches of the military.

b. Trainer Survey Instruments

WCC works to reduce Veteran and assistance dog anxiety in public, boisterous environments. In June, three of the eight dog training sessions in Albuquerque involved field trips to public places: the mall, a coffee shop, and a dog park. The trainers in Albuquerque started using the Trainer Activity Log forms to track the activities, participant numbers and each documented any issues that arose. Program staff found the mall to be problematic. The coordinator recorded that the training session had to be moved to one of the least crowded stores for the benefit of both the canines and the Veteran trainers.

c. Well-Being Data Results

The five well-being factors show that respondents had a positive change over time (Table 5). None of the respondents had a change in a negative direction. Detailed interpretation will require a larger sample size. Each of the scales uses a different range of possible responses. Future work with sufficient sample sizes will standardize these values to ease interpretation.

Table 5. Amount of quality of life improvement for 2018 Veteran cohort

	Cognitive Function Difference	Desire to Isolate Difference	Emotional Distress Difference	Fatigue Difference	Pain Difference
N	8	5	5	7	8
Mean*	1.1	0.2	1.60	0.91	0.6
Std. Dev	1.55	5.22	.548	0.69	1.19
Range*	1-10	9-32	8-13	2-11	0-7

d. Program Design Challenges

ADW planned to establish a session series that would have one cohort of Veterans work together for 6 months. However, ADW staff faced difficulty for a couple of reasons. WCC allows justice and non-justice related participants to participate together, but the required commitment lengths had been different; Veterans Court referrals have a set 6-month commitment, while non-justice related volunteers simply had a minimum of 3 months. This commitment difference results in participants not completing the program as a cohesive unit. A second program element includes allowing volunteers who complete the program to continue participating as a mentors to new volunteer participants. The fluidity of these two participation features hinders ADW’s ability to have set session groups with distinct cohorts. After having tried implementing the cohort method, ADW staff need to weight the pros and cons of implementing it. The new cohort method uses the familiar experience for veterans of joint mission accomplishment. On the other hand, the needs of the different individuals may absolutely require flexible start times.

VII. Conclusion

ADW staff have shown their ability to sustain sufficient Veteran numbers to fill service dog training slots throughout multiple years. Their high program completion rates (89% in 2018) demonstrates high Veteran interest in the program. Once ADW increases the number of specifically-skilled staff needed, they will be able to expand the WCC program further.

Factors indicating WCC is ready to expand include developing a better understanding of necessary processes and better data collection for informing program improvement and outcomes. Process improvements include:

- a) developing procedures for rare events where a Veteran may need immediate support not available at WCC at that moment;
- b) improved enrollment opportunities, and
- c) better consistency of implementing data collection forms.



Data collection instruments are still in the process of completion. The first three rounds of revision created instruments with questions that had high completion rates in the field. The initial trial with 12 participant respondents has given some insight into necessary improvements, although it is insufficient to complete more advanced testing of the constructs. Instruments at this stage of development often experience deletion or modification of questions that are not delivering the needed information accurately. Future analysis upon receiving enough respondents will continue evaluating instrument performance using factor analytic procedures.

Results from the monthly survey forms suggest improving usefulness to the trainers and Veterans. There remains a need to improve ease of form implementation in the field. Furthermore, the forms need to easily convey to trainers information about the immediate needs and concerns of the volunteer Veteran to accommodate those needs.

While the WCC program staff met all their goals and targets, they also focused on program improvement and have set the stage for discovering patterns of veteran behavior preferences and measuring their program effectiveness. WCC considers improving Veteran wellbeing the ultimate measure of success. Since this participant response instrument is new, more instrument testing is necessary to understand how to interpret magnitude of change in pre to post scores. Testing quality of life changes over time using these instruments will require larger numbers of participant scores (more than over 30 at a minimum). Attributing success solely to WCC would require additional research. ADW continues to prepare for that research.

VIII. Methods

i. Data Collection Instrument Analysis

After the creation of the Logic Model and the Instruments, the next step was to analyze the data collected by the instruments to gain an initial understanding of how well they work. For this, we performed a Cronbach's alpha analysis on the questions grouped by construct to measure how well they related to each other as a group. We performed this analysis for both the original instruments and the updated instruments.

ii. Well-Being Data Analysis

We performed pre-post analysis for the new instrument questions. Many of the questions were repeated throughout the Start-Up form, the Monthly Assessment, and the Exit Form. We compared the difference between the first and the last date that each of the 12 participants filled out one of these forms. For those respondents who are still

in the middle of their 6-month program, we were able to compare the questions from the Start-up Form to the last monthly Status form they filled out.

The survey questions had different numbers of respondents because not all participants were able to fill out all the forms, such as those who are missing the exit form because they have not yet completed the program. Another reason for the difference in number of respondents per question is that the process of handing out these program evaluation surveys is designed to be as least intrusive as possible. From the beginning, Veterans are told that they may feel free to decline answering any questions or forms altogether if they feel that the questions make them feel uncomfortable or trigger any negative emotions. Although this can create difficulties in the data analysis, this is preferable to having the program evaluation process impact the experience of the program participants.

