



The Power of Ideas to Save Lives

## Sample Detailed Outline

**Organization:**

**Contact:**

**Email:**

**Lifesaving idea:**

Heroes & Hounds Volunteer Dog Training Program

**Short statement:**

Implementing a veteran's program will save the lives of at-risk dogs

**Evidence to support your idea or practice:**

- a. Shelter dogs learn basic obedience and trust which improve adoptability and preps them for home life.
- b. Training/enrichment efforts can be increased while keeping costs down with a volunteer workforce.
- c. A population of the community becomes part of the organization and agent of your mission.
- d. Veterans benefit in many ways. Our local VA office refers veterans to participate as a form of therapy.

**Call to action:**

Provide an opportunity for veterans and shelter dogs to help one another take that next step.

**Detailed outline:**

Through each step we will show visuals depicting what is being said: photos and video clips, slides for statistics and step-by-step process, as well as comments from our veterans who have been through the program.

## 1. Enlistment

Since the Heroes and Hounds program began at our shelter, the average length of time an adult dog-waits on the adoption floor has dropped by over 50%.

In 2014, an employee came up with an idea: What if we started a program that invited military veterans to train shelter dogs along with us? "I have a passion for both veterans and our shelter animals. I wanted to find a way for them to help each other," says the HSTV Heroes and Hounds Coordinator and wife of a veteran. "I believe that through this program, the lives of both veterans and our shelter dogs are becoming more meaningful."

## 2. Boot Camp

We invited a representative from the local Veteran's Administration to talk with our staff about working with veterans. They were very excited to have this volunteer opportunity for vets! He explained how we should structure the program and things we should consider before we began in order to accommodate veterans who are most likely dealing with challenges such as PTSD.

### Highlights:

- Program should have a definite outline and specific goals in a list that can be checked off.
- Give the veterans the opportunity to be away from excessive noise.
- Don't patronize them. They are just like anybody else. They may not want to talk about their military experience. Let them bring it up.
- They get to choose the dog - we give them a choice amongst adult dogs who are facing challenges to adoption such as high energy dogs, those with bad manners, mistrust, or fear.
- Number of training sessions expected.
- Can the dogs go off premises? Can they be adopted or fostered by veterans?

*This turned out to be a key step in developing the program.*

## 3. Recruitment

Our staff created a Heroes and Hounds dog training binder for each dog in the program. Our coordinator visits the VA regularly with a canine buddy to reach out to veterans. Within the first few months, we had nearly a dozen veterans join the program. Many of

who have stuck with the program and trained multiple dogs! So, in response to the program's success we created an informational "rack card" about the program. These are left at the VA to share with veterans who may be interested. They are also distributed at community events.

#### **4. Active Duty**

As veterans come to our facility to train dogs, our coordinator and another trained volunteer spend the first session with them, showing them how we train the dogs. We use only positive reinforcement and we are teaching specific skills:

Sit, Stay, Down, Come, Off. This first session is known as "Train the Trainer".

Each veteran and dog pair receive a training binder outlining tasks and goals. Dogs who are being trained in the program have a sign on their cage. When we started this, people started to adopt the dogs because a veteran trained them! Because of this program and the shelter enrichment program, adult dog adoptions have increased by 48%.

#### **5. Mission Accomplished**

Today, nearly 20 veterans have trained 70 dogs through Heroes and Hounds. Their participation in this program has saved the lives of shelter dogs. Local businesses want to help support the program and the veterans behind it. One veteran did end up adopting her trained dog, who is now her emotional support dog, "Genavieve".

The Heroes and Hounds' veterans have their own special bond. This has been a true WIN-WIN experience for all involved! Dogs get the one-on-one training they need to be adopted, the veterans experience a great sense of accomplishment because they are part of saving that dog's life. Two lives are given new meaning. As one veteran has said, "I really take pride in what I do. When a dog comes to me and I work with her, every new thing that she learns is an accomplishment for me. When a dog gets adopted, it's just the best feeling knowing that I contributed. I'm much happier now that I'm able to serve my community in a positive way."