



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01744

Name of petitioner

Karen Mercedes Greer

Petition title

Psychiatric service dogs in Scotland

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to recognise the valuable role psychiatric service dogs can play in helping people recover from trauma and mental ill health, and to fund a pilot programme of accredited psychiatric service dogs in Scotland.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

I met with Linda Fabiani MSP to discuss this petition. I have also researched the varying types of service dogs and confirmed that psychiatric service dogs are not currently available in the UK.

Petition background information

In Scotland, particularly for children and adolescents, there are a lack of mental health services available. Those being referred to CAMHS (Child and adolescent mental health services) by their GP may find that they are not accepted for counselling or, if they are, that they experience lengthy delays. By the time they receive their appointments, then it can be too late to help them. The same is likely to be true of many adults seeking mental health support.

I decided to research alternatives and discovered a useful tool to combat mental health issues that is being used in America: psychiatric service dogs.

These are service dogs (assistance dogs) which have been trained to deal with mental health problems such as anxiety, panic attacks, depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)/Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD), autism and schizophrenia.

Due to suffering from some of the above and being close to others who do too, I began searching to see if there were any service dog charities which could provide these types of dogs in the UK, only to discover that there were not.

I am petitioning to introduce these dogs to Scotland because of the amazing things

they can do to help their owners. These dogs can assist with PTSD/CPTSD by 'blocking' (standing in front of the owner to form a protective barrier to help prevent flashbacks/anxiety attacks), being trained to recognise a PTSD attack and pulling the owner to the side and beginning its calm down/distract training.

Psychiatric service dogs can also be used for anxiety/panic attacks through DPT (deep pressure therapy), nosing/pawing the owner to prevent self-harm during an attack and be trained to recognise the signs that the owner is anxious or going to have a panic attack. They can also be used to help with depression: they can nudge the owner out of bed to help them get up and can motivate them and provide medication reminders.

These are different to therapy dogs, where it is their presence alone which is used to help calm the intended user. Psychiatric service dogs, however, perform tasks and provide a service to the owner, rather than just being there to pet and play with.

If psychiatric service dogs were to be introduced to Scotland, I would also like to propose a scheme to help with their training. Unlike some other assistance dogs, these dogs do not need to be trained from a very young age and their training can also be owner-delivered. This means that rescue dogs could be used, potentially reducing the pressures on over-crowded animal shelters.

A rescue or other animal charity could potentially also help with creating an accredited training program.

Psychiatric service dogs could be revolutionary for those of us who struggle with our mental health. They could also help relieve some of the current pressures on mental health support services in Scotland. I urge you to consider this petition.

Unique web address

<https://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01744>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

16 / 09 / 2019

Comments to stimulate online discussion

- What difference do you think psychiatric service dogs could make to people with mental health problems?
- Who would benefit most?
- How should their training be accredited?
- Who should provide this training?

