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'It's really hard to be in a bad mood'

Afghan dogs help veterans with PTSD

TO APPLY for Tazie or another dog, learn about [paws4vets](http://paws4vets.com) or to donate, go to dominionpost.com and click on the link. Checks can be mailed to P.O. Box 491, Round Hill, VA, 20142-0491.

BY BRANDY BRUBAKER
The Dominion Post

Somewhere out there, there's a veteran who survived the war, but isn't really living.

Suffering from severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the veteran avoids family and friends, battles sleepless night after sleepless night, and keeps himself locked up at home.

The world is a dark, scary place and any sound or image might trigger some awful memory of a far-off land where he watched friends die and wondered every day if that day might be his last.

Now, the nightmare that is war is long gone but the nightmare itself isn't.

This is where Tazie can help.

Tazie is a 2-year-old royal Afghan hunting hound rescued from war-torn Afghanistan. U.S. Penitentiary inmates trained her at Hazelton for the past four months and is ready for her next mission — to help a veteran who just can't transition back to life before the war. A veteran who might not make it without her.

"Somebody out there is hiding in the closet, is suicidal, is manic-depressive," [paws4vets](http://paws4vets.com) Executive Director Terry Henry said. "We're looking for somebody with really complex PTSD who will be able to bond with Tazie because she's been in Afghanistan. She's been in the war zone."

Tazie was the first dog brought to Hazelton from Afghanistan as part of AfghanDogz, a branch of [paws4vets](http://paws4vets.com), and is the first ready for placement. Three more dogs, Ebony, Golden and Survivor, arrived more recently and are being trained. The program brings rescued dogs from Afghanistan to the United States to be trained as therapy or service dogs for veterans with the most severe cases of PTSD.

Tazie is a changed dog in the time she's spent in the United States. Her coat is shiny and soft. She's out-

going and friendly and no longer so



Ron Rittenhouse/ The Dominion Post photos

Paws4vets trainer Heidi Livengood practices a few commands with Tazie, a royal Afghan hunting dog rescued from Afghanistan. Tazie is being trained by inmates at the U.S. Penitentiary at Hazelton and will be placed with a veteran suffering from severe post-traumatic stress disorder.

shy. She knows where her next meal will come from. Before, she ate out of Dumpsters. She understands English now. A peanut butter rawhide puts an almost-visible smile on her face, and makes her start wagging her hook-shaped tail.

Trainer Heidi Livengood, who works with the Hazelton inmates, said Tazie will make someone a great friend.

"We try to expose her to as many people as we can. She's come a long way," Livengood said. "She loves people. Her favorite thing is to show her belly. She loves to show her belly."

It isn't long before Tazie proves she loves to show her belly. She rolls over on her back, expecting a good belly rub. She gets it.

Brandon Gregory, the newly appointed [paws4vets](http://paws4vets.com) veteran's advocate, said it's little things like that that are helping him cope with his PTSD.

Gregory was recently matched with Wyatt, a [paws4vets](http://paws4vets.com) dog trained at Hazelton.

Wyatt is transitioning to life with



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MOOD

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Gregory and is staying with him at his home in Morgantown on the weekends. Soon, training will be complete, and Wyatt will live with Gregory full time.

Gregory said Wyatt is helping him get back into a routine — a important step for PTSD sufferers.

"He's full of energy and that rubs off on me, gets me motivated for the things I need to do for the day," Gregory said. "At 6:30, he's ready to go, he needs breakfast, water and to go outside. It's a routine."

Wyatt also makes him smile.

"He's always happy. It's really hard to be in a bad mood around him," Gregory said.

When Gregory came back from Baghdad, he battled PTSD, insomnia, depression and some physical dis-

abilities.. Sounds of airplanes flying overhead gave him flashbacks.

"All of that triggers memories of being over in Iraq and all of that," he said.

A WVU professor recommended paws4vets.

"I was going through a really rough time and the professor knew it," Gregory said.

He said Wyatt, a certified service dog donated to the program as a puppy by a Virginia breeder, gives him a type of therapy he couldn't find anywhere else.

"Don't be afraid to ask for help, and be open minded to what most people consider alternative forms of treatment," Gregory said. "The government likes to push pills. That's not good enough."

Henry said Tazie is ready and waiting to help. "We're here to help pull somebody out of the darkness."

[Link: http://olive.dominionpost.com/Repository/ml.asp?Ref=RFBvc3QvMjAwOS8xMC8wMyNBcjAwOTAx&Mode=Gif&Locale=english-skin-custom](http://olive.dominionpost.com/Repository/ml.asp?Ref=RFBvc3QvMjAwOS8xMC8wMyNBcjAwOTAx&Mode=Gif&Locale=english-skin-custom)