

PAWS' PETS FOR VETS PROGRAM MATCHES VET WITH CANINE COMPANION

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fter two tours in Iraq and four years of service in the Marine Corp, civilian reintegration proved a formidable opponent for Corporal William O'Hara. Meanwhile, a year-old American Pit Bull Terrier was struggling to fit in, too.

The original owners of Annie Warbucks (formerly named ICE) surrendered her to a shelter and then found safe residency at Philadelphia Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to saving homeless, abandoned and unwanted animals.

Now 'battle buddies' thanks to PAWS, William and Annie are navigating life together. The Marine and his new companion are another success story of how this important bond can transform the lives of both animals and people. "She's my girl!" William boasts as Annie snuggles up alongside him. "She keeps me company day and night." Most importantly, the former infantryman explains, the 43-pound puppy "helps take the focus off of me."

Annie, adorably demanding but well-mannered, is only too happy to oblige!

William O'Hara is part of a growing fraternity of veterans, often returning home from multiple tours of combat duty in hostile areas, who struggle as civilians to find their way in a world that is dramatically different from the survival focused, structured environment they left.

"You go from being a hero and receiving praise and thanks," he reflects on his military service, "and when you get out, you feel empty." The world-class military training he received that sharpened his survival instincts and prepared him to 'effectively engage troops with fire and



William O'Hara and Annie relax in their Philadelphia home.



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maneuver' did not place him in a competitive position for a civilian job.

When Corporal William O'Hara, formerly from Richboro and a 2005 graduate of Archbishop Wood High School, separated from the service in 2010, his life spiraled downward.

At its worst, he was homeless, drug addicted and feeling hopeless. William was struggling to find help at the VA medical center for PTSD, anxiety and depression.

O'Hara has since been classified with a 100% service connected disability and has aspirations to be a medical technician, the training he hopes to receive through the Veterans Administration Vocational Training Program.

In 2013, he got his own apartment in South Philadelphia and, when visiting the VA for his own treatment, he keeps his eyes out for other young veterans who may need help.

William's bond with his 'battle buddy' has confirmed clinical research that proved that companion dogs and cats have reduced stress and helped veterans acclimate back to civilian life, especially those suffering from PTSD and Traumatic Brain Disorders as well as psychological issues from life in combat.

"Annie has given me a responsibility," he muses. "It's not just about worrying about me - she makes me think twice before making negative decisions that could harm my life."

The lovable puppy has given the Marine a new purpose and life to protect. Annie is effusive in her love for the human who is every bit HER HERO.

ABOUT PHILADELPHIA ANIMAL WELFARE SOCIETY (PAWS)

PAWS is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to saving Philadelphia's homeless, abandoned and unwanted animals. PAWS is the city's largest no-kill shelter and operates a high-volume, low-cost clinic serving pet owners and rescue organizations that lack access to affordable basic veterinary care. Through its adoption locations, special events and foster care network, PAWS finds loving homes for thousands of animals each year. PAWS is working to make Philadelphia a place where every healthy and treatable pet is guaranteed a home. For more information visit phillypaws.org or visit their adoption center at 100 N. 2nd Street (at Arch), Philadelphia, PA 19106 215-238-9901