

OPERATION FREEDOM PAWS



O P E R A T I O N F R E E D O M P A W S I N 2 0 2 0

UNPREDICTABLE TIMES A TRUE STRUGGLE

Dear Readers,

We are in unpredictable times. Many people are feeling helpless, isolated, and anxious. At the same time, so many of our clients from the early days are reaching out on social media, by phone and asking for help. We currently have 424 clients and their families to support.

Operation Freedom Paws is struggling, as are all non-profits and small business. The federal relief program is a joke and takes forever, what was to be 10k is now 1k. If you're not a large non-profit or business supporting thousands of people, you're on the bottom of the list for funds.

Operation Freedom Paws income is down by 80% because of the shelter in place. But all of the regular expenses of running the program continue.

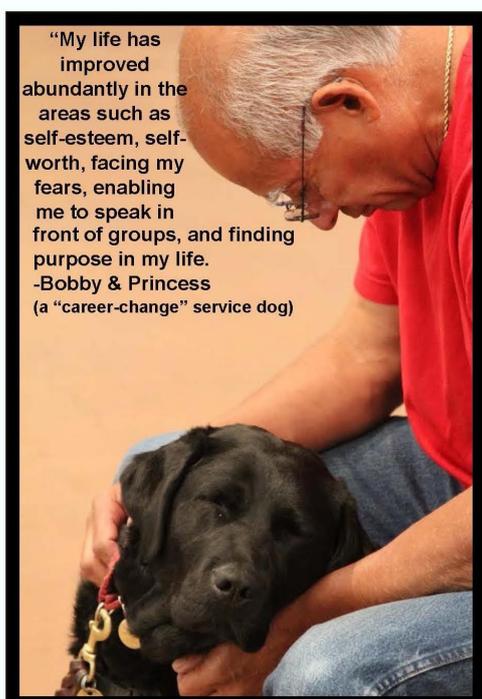
We work so hard to teach our clients to stop isolating, and here we are with shelter in place orders. Right back to square one isolating, they have their dogs but are afraid to take them out because of rumors that dogs can get the virus.

Because we care about the safety and well being of those we serve as well as our volunteers, staff, and our entire community, we are following protocol and cooperating with local authorities every step of the way. Holding small classes, reaching out and connecting with all of our 424 clients via text, phone calls, FB messenger, Face time, Zoom and email. It's the reason why we do what we do. To keep our clients connected and moving forward. Keeping them social in any way we can right now.

As much of our attention is focused, rightly so, on those needing critical services like health care, food, and shelter, we want to continue to inspire, encourage, and empower our community during this precarious time.

We will move to host virtual conversations, Webinars, and Facebook Live events to replace our on-site training, educational and advocacy programs. We don't have the details locked down yet, but we will continue to amplify our concerns around and advocate for disabled veterans, individuals and the use of service dogs.

We look forward to when our doors will re-open and our programs return to normal. Until then, we will prepare to make up for lost time and set a course for the future. We hope that you will join us in making sure that our mission remains sustainable as we navigate this unknown territory.



"My life has improved abundantly in the areas such as self-esteem, self-worth, facing my fears, enabling me to speak in front of groups, and finding purpose in my life.
-Bobby & Princess
(a "career-change" service dog)

We believe in keeping love, joy, and patience flowing – even while engaging in social distancing. When all of this is over, we will be here to help our clients and those yet to come to move forward.

That's why I'm asking you, to consider supporting our efforts during this incredibly difficult period by giving today. If you are able to donate at this time to support the ongoing good work of OFP we can use your help, more than ever.

Donations can be made through Network for the Good, our website www.operationfreedompaw.org, PayPal, or you can create a fundraiser on Facebook. You can also mail a check to Operation Freedom Paws, 777 First Street PMB 515, Gilroy, CA 95020. You can also transfer stock. Any amount helps.

Please check our website and social media for updates. We will get through this -- together while apart. We will adapt. We will learn lessons. On behalf of Operation Freedom Paws and all our clients, I want to thank you personally for your support. We couldn't do this without you.

Mary Cortani
Founder and Executive Director

Meet Matt and TJ

Providing a balanced lifestyle

Every day, challenges confront us, obstacles block us, and the unforeseen can derail us. In a normal life, these factors can make life hard. In a life with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), it can make it unbearable. The unfamiliar creates distrust. Failure transforms from a learning opportunity to becoming completely unacceptable.



Loss becomes normal and grief is not an emotion allowed in our psyche. In our military lives, each of these actions allowed survival. My life and the lives of my brothers in arms depended on our ability to face these factors. Outside the military, these traits are no longer as valuable. Operation Freedom Paws (OFP) has been a godsend in helping relearn and transition the mindset more appropriate for life in the wide-open world. Bonds formed between the veteran and service dog teams create behaviors to adjust to a life without the heightened conflicts of past experiences.

TJ and I met on August 13th of 2018, a milestone date. Since that time, he and I have worked together to overcome many of the crippling behaviors stemming from PTSD. Prior to pairing with a service dog, meeting new people and standing in unfamiliar areas were causes for high stress. Not knowing the people around me, I was unable to delineate between enemy or ally. Until I knew the persons intent, they remained a cautious enemy to be observed. Sitting in a restaurant, constant scanning of people and behaviors left me distant from the family that was sitting at the table with me. TJ alleviates this issue. When at a table with my family, going into scanning or hyper-vigilance mode, TJ will remind me immediately about where I am. From a simple nose tap on my leg to standing up and putting his head into my lap, when I chose not to listen to him initially, places the focus back onto the immediate and at the table. A quick acknowledgement and TJ will lay back down and quietly wait for the next time I decide it is more important to look around than to be present with my company. TJ's assistance is beyond just social setting. He ensures my expectations are accurate for people and myself.



Losing myself in work releases my mind from memories and thoughts of the different life I had in the service. My mind must be completely occupied to ensure that any stressful memories are suppressed. Sitting at a desk at 7 am and not acknowledging the outside world until 5 pm gave me purpose and drowned any opportunities to recall my nightmares. This unrealistic and unsustainable behavior drove my expectations of those around me to this obsessive end. Those not matching my intensity and work ethic were simply failures and unacceptable. TJ gives me respite from this lifestyle. It would be unfair to expect him to lay down and not move for 10 hours.

Meet Matt and TJ

Providing a balanced lifestyle (cont'd)

It would be almost cruel to fail to allow TJ to take breaks and walk outside every couple of hours. TJ is careful to remind me of the importance of getting up and stop focusing so intensely. TJ provides the reminder that I too am being cruel to myself and not allowing any freedoms with my actions. TJ does not stop me from working and being productive, rather he provides a sustainable balanced lifestyle while working. It sets more realistic expectations and a balanced work style for myself; therefore, to those around me. Most importantly, my service dog partner has allowed me to feel and express my emotions in a constructive way.

Death is an inevitable and acceptable risk of life in the military. A reaction to loss is anger at the cause. Mourning and sadness are not allowed. The last two emotions can create a domino effect that can affect our ability to perform for our brothers-in-arms. Death of a service member is a sad event but, in those environments, there is no time allowed to process the grief. As stated earlier, August 13th is a milestone date and one that I will never forget. Driving this memory is the death of my first service dog partner, Kopitar. Kopitar's passing was the first time I allowed myself to feel grief and sadness. Emotions that were previously forbidden were not available and provided a means to cope with my loss. In addition to teaching me these emotions and allowing sadness to enter my life, TJ also provides a great example of living a multifaceted life. Whenever I return to the training center, TJ gets very excited to see the handlers and other staff. His sheer joy reminds me that it is okay to remember and love Kopitar while also loving and enjoying every moment with TJ. His happiness shows me that life is a not an all or nothing affair. We can be nuanced in our emotions and express them when appropriate.

OFP has facilitated my growth as a person. My service dog pairings have provided the ability to learn, acknowledge, and accept my emotions and actions. Without OFP, my life would differ vastly. My relationship with my wife, my sons, and my daughter has never been stronger. As a family we can create fond memories of being with each other. TJ allows me to confront PTSD and the related symptoms and overcome those challenges. If there is any proof positive of the effect that OFP and TJ has had on my life, the words written above would never have been possible without their help. Life is still not easy. With TJ guiding me, it has become more than just bearable.

Matt and TJ





Operation Freedom Paws
777 First St. PMB 515| Gilroy, CA 95020
"Four Paws, Two Feet, One Team"

WAYS YOU MAY HELP NOW

Thank You!

- Donate to OFP by using the "DONATE" button at www.operationfreedompaws.org and make a secure credit card donation. Or you may send a check to Operation Freedom Paws - mail to 777 First St, PMB 515, Gilroy CA 95020. THANK YOU!!

- OFP is in constant need of supplies. Find our Amazon Wishlist on our home page at www.operationfreedompaws.org and order supplies that are needed for the dogs and the Mission. THANK YOU!!



- **amazon smile** Shop and OFP will receive a small contribution.....it all adds up! Use Amazon Smile and a percentage is given to a charity of your choice, which we hope is OFP!

- Shop at iGive.com. You Shop. Your Charity Gets Money. For Free. There are over 2,100 stores to choose from. Choose Operation Freedom Paws as the beneficiary and we receive a donation.



- Call 1-877-977-9577 or e-mail [Able Auto Charity Donation Corporation](mailto:AbleAutoCharityDonation@gmail.com) at Ableautocharitydonation@gmail.com to donate a vehicle. Mention that you would like a percentage to go to OFP. These friendly folks have contracts nationwide.

- Host a Fundraiser on your Facebook page.

- Consider a Legacy Gift.....ask OFP for details.

- Like and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and share our posts with your friends!!!



- Watch for updates on the news of the children's book about to be released, written by a veteran, Connor Quinn.

A story of a Service Dog, Dakota – Four Paws, Two Feet, One Team.



- Ask about our OFP Merchandise.....T-Shirts, Sweatshirts, Long Sleeve T-Shirts, Hoodies, etc.

Thank You, stay healthy, stay safe.