



Measuring Impact and Securing the Future - Evaluating and enhancing SDUK support for veterans

Final Project Report

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Executive summary

Project Overview

Service Dogs UK (SDUK) provides assistance dogs to veterans of the Armed Forces and Emergency Services diagnosed with PTSD. This unique dual-impact model supports both the rehabilitation of veterans and the rescue and training of dogs, resulting in mutually beneficial partnerships that enhance the quality of life and independence of participating veterans. In response to growing demand and the need for sustainable funding, SDUK partnered with the ARU OneWelfare Research Group to evaluate the impact of its programme and establish a long-term impact monitoring strategy.

Key Evaluation Findings

Significant improvements in mental health and social wellbeing: Quantitative analysis of veteran feedback showed statistically significant reductions in PTSD symptoms (notably nightmares, flashbacks, and panic attacks), increased self-motivation and confidence, and improved relationships with partners and children. There was also marked improvement in social trust and frequency of engaging in public activities.

Qualitative insights reveal transformational change: Veterans described moving from survival to recovery, rediscovering a sense of purpose, independence, and social connection. Many reported a reduction in suicidal thoughts, a renewed desire to live, and a deep emotional bond with their assistance dog that served as a catalyst for personal growth.

Recommendations for sustainable growth and impact: The report proposes a structured, longitudinal monitoring system to track outcomes over time and offers practical improvements to data collection methods. These steps aim to strengthen the evidence base, support funding applications, and ensure the programme remains effective and relevant to client needs.

Significance for Future Practice

This evaluation provides robust evidence of SDUK's positive impact and outlines a clear path for enhancing data-driven service delivery. The implementation of long-term monitoring and improved data practices will enable SDUK to secure sustainable funding and continue offering life-changing support to veterans.

1 Introduction

Service Dogs UK (SDUK) is a registered charity in England and Wales (charity number: 1165409) that provides life-changing support to Armed Forces and Emergency Services veterans diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by pairing them with specially trained rescue dogs. The charity follows an innovative dual-impact approach, rescuing dogs and giving them a second chance at life while training them to support veterans in managing anxiety, hypervigilance, and distress. These dogs assist with tasks such as perimeter checks, creating space in crowds, and grounding techniques during episodes of anxiety or flashbacks. They also recognise distress signals and can interrupt nightmares or panic attacks, helping veterans regain a sense of control, security, and independence.

As an accredited member of Assistance Dogs UK (ADUK), SDUK upholds the highest standards in assistance dog training and welfare. The organisation operates from three training hubs across West Sussex, the South West, and Essex, running a structured training programme that lasts between nine to twelve months. Given the increasing demand for its services, SDUK collaborated with the ARU OneWelfare Research Group through an Innovation Voucher project to evaluate its impact and improve long-term monitoring. The project involves analysing veteran follow-up data, developing a sustainable impact measurement approach, and supporting funding applications for further implementation grants from external funders. The initiative is expected to strengthen SDUK's evidence base, support future research collaborations with ARU, and secure additional funding to enhance service delivery.

This report presents the outcomes of an evaluation of SDUK's current practices and their impact on veterans' lives, using an analysis of organisational data and veteran follow-up results. The findings provide insights into how SDUK's services contribute to veterans' well-being and highlight areas for improvement and long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, the report proposes a structured framework for ongoing impact monitoring, ensuring that SDUK can systematically track its effectiveness and make data-driven improvements. In addition, it includes support for a funding application to Assistance Dogs UK (ADUK), supporting SDUK in securing additional resources to implement these recommendations.

This evaluation and subsequent proposals are designed to enhance SDUK's operational effectiveness, strengthen evidence-based service delivery, and position the organisation for sustainable growth and funding opportunities.

2 Project rationale

Service Dogs UK (SDUK) plays a vital role in supporting veterans from the Armed Forces and Emergency Services who have been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). By pairing veterans with specially trained rescue dogs, SDUK provides life-changing assistance that helps individuals regain independence, manage symptoms, and improve their overall well-being. The success of this approach is well recognised, but to ensure long-term effectiveness and sustainability, SDUK must evaluate its current impact, implement a structured monitoring framework, and secure additional funding.

The need for this project is evident in the growing demand for SDUK's services. Veterans who participate in the programme report significant improvements in managing PTSD-related symptoms such as anxiety, hypervigilance, and social isolation. Assistance dogs help veterans navigate public spaces more comfortably, interrupt panic attacks and nightmares, and provide a sense of security and companionship. Beyond individual benefits, SDUK's initiatives, such as the Canines and Comrades Dog Walk and Talk groups, have fostered a strong sense of community, allowing veterans to connect with others who share similar experiences. These peer support initiatives have proven to be invaluable in reducing isolation and promoting mental well-being.

Despite these positive outcomes, SDUK currently lacks a long-term, structured approach to monitoring its impact. While veterans provide feedback on their experiences, there is no formalised system for tracking progress over time. This project aims to address this gap by developing a framework for continuous impact assessment. A well-defined monitoring strategy will not only provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of SDUK's services but will also ensure that the organisation can adapt and refine its approach based on data-driven evidence. This will enable SDUK to maintain high standards of support while expanding its services to reach more veterans in need.

Funding is another critical factor in SDUK's ability to sustain and grow its impact. In the past year, the organisation has made significant progress in securing financial resources, with grant income increasing from £50,000 in 2023 to £115,705 in 2024. This has enabled SDUK to establish a new training hub in Essex, expanding its geographical reach and making its services more accessible to veterans in that region. However, further financial stability is required to support the long-term success of the programme. This project will contribute by drafting a funding application to external funders, seeking additional grants to implement and sustain the findings of the impact evaluation.

A key strength of SDUK lies in its commitment to collaboration. The organisation has established strong links with veteran networks, emergency services, and mental health support groups. These partnerships enhance the scope of support available to veterans and ensure a more holistic approach to rehabilitation. By developing a structured impact monitoring framework, SDUK will strengthen its ability to engage with funding bodies, research institutions, and policymakers, reinforcing the value of assistance dogs in supporting veteran mental health.

Ultimately, this project is about securing the future of SDUK's work and ensuring that veterans continue to receive high-quality, evidence-based support. By evaluating current practices, implementing a long-term monitoring system, and securing sustainable funding, SDUK will be better positioned to meet the needs of those who have served their country. The project will provide a solid foundation for the organisation's continued growth, ensuring that veterans benefit from tailored support that improves their quality of life and long-term well-being.

3 Current practice

The training programme takes between 9-12 months of training for the assistance dog partnership to graduate and achieve the required Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited standards. After acceptance on to the training programme, participants are asked to provide feedback by completing two questionnaires, the first midway through the programme and the second at the end of the programme.

Midway Programme Questionnaire

The midway questionnaire focuses on personal progress, relationships, social engagement and overall experience whilst on the training programme. It also explores the impact the training programme has on their close relationships with their partner, children and family, as well as changes in social interactions, confidence and ability to engage with others. The questionnaire also asks for feedback on various aspects of the training programme, including the clarity of instructions, support from the training team, and quality of materials and facilities.

End of Programme Questionnaire

The end of programme questionnaire collects information from participants that have completed the training programme. It focuses on collecting information about changes to medication and therapy that participants receive. Similar to the midway questionnaire, it also explores the impact the training programme has on close relationships as well as changes in social interactions, confidence and ability to engage with others. Feedback is requested for various aspects of the training programme as well as the support outside of the training programme, such as during the application process and the Practical Access Course (PAC).

4 Evaluation approach

4.1 Data Collection

A master dataset was compiled, containing feedback from both the Midway Programme Feedback Questionnaire and End of Programme Feedback Questionnaire used by SDUK to collect feedback from their clients. A total of 40 assistance dog partnerships were included in this dataset. The Midway Programme Feedback was completed for 30 dogs, while the End of Programme Feedback contained responses for 31 dogs. Nineteen dogs had only one complete assessment (either midway or end) and were excluded from the analysis. In total, data from 21 assistance dogs, whose handlers provided responses at both assessment points, were used for quantitative analysis.

4.2 Data Processing and Classification

To facilitate statistical analysis, the data was reclassified by assigning numerical values to each response where applicable. Two questions related to medication and therapy did not have answers that could be meaningfully quantified and were therefore excluded. Additionally, any questions that appeared only in either the midway or end-of-programme questionnaires were removed from the analysis due to insufficient comparable data.

To match the responses between the two time points, dog names were used as identifiers. Discrepancies were identified in the dataset, including one instance where a dog appeared twice in the midway assessment due to an unsuccessful partnership with the first handler. These discrepancies were resolved before analysis.

4.3 Quantitative Analysis

Paired data from the Midway Programme Feedback and End-of-Programme Questionnaires were analysed using Wilcoxon's signed-ranks test, a non-parametric test suitable for comparing paired ordinal data. Descriptive statistics were also used to summarise findings, including medians (most frequently selected responses) and standard deviations to measure variability.

4.4 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative descriptive analysis¹ was employed to analyse responses from open-ended questions, identifying key life changes and recurring themes related to the impact of assistance dogs on handlers' daily lives, well-being, and overall quality of life.

¹ Sandelowski, M. (2010) 'What's in a name? Qualitative description revisited', *Research in Nursing & Health*, 33(1), pp. 77–84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.20362>.

4.5 Exclusion Criteria

Dogs that had only one complete assessment (either midway or end of programme) were excluded from the analysis. Additionally, questions related to medication and therapy were removed as they were not structured in a way that supported statistical analysis.

5 Evaluation findings

5.1 Quantitative data

The responses from the multiple-choice questions that appeared in both the midway and end of programme questionnaires were analysed using the Wilcoxon's signed-ranks test to determine if there was a significant improvement between the two sets of responses. This statistical test was used as the data is paired; responses from the same participants at two different time intervals. The analysis included data from 21 dogs that had complete datasets.

The results indicate significant differences between the midway and end of programme data for nine multiple choice questions. A significant difference refers to the difference between two values (median from the midway data and the median from the end of programme data) that is unlikely to have happened by random chance. A p-value helps determine if the difference observed is statistically significant, a p-value of 0.05 means there is a 5% chance the result happened by chance, so we can be 95% confident the difference is real and not due to random chance. A p-value of 0.01 is even more significant as there is a 1% chance the result happened by random chance, so we can be 99% confident that the difference is real.

For clarity we have used the term "significant improvement" to describe the changes between the midway and end of programme data. Questions that show significant improvement indicate that statistically identifiable progress has been made by participants throughout the programme. This means the SDUK training programme is currently having a positive impact in these key areas.

Clients reported significant reductions in the frequency of PTSD symptoms (Table 1) between the midway and end of programme questionnaires, particularly for nightmares ($p = 0.021$), flashbacks ($p = 0.025$), panic attacks ($p = 0.023$), and self-motivation ($p = 0.024$) with p values less than 0.05. Additionally, client self-confidence ($p = 0.002$) significantly improved. The significant improvement in symptoms refers to individuals experiencing a positive change since joining the training programme.

Relationship changes between the midway and end of programme questionnaires significantly improved between participants and their partner ($p = 0.01$) and/or children ($p = 0.039$). These results show significantly positive improvements as family members have noticed a positive change in the participants since the middle and end of the programme.

Table 1: Symptom and relationship changes from the midway (MID) and end of programme (END) questionnaires.

Question	Significantly improved?
Your Symptoms [Feeling agitated, irritable]	No
Your Symptoms [Feeling down, depressed or hopeless]	No
Your Symptoms [Nightmares]	Yes
Your Symptoms [Zoning out]	No
Your Symptoms [Flashbacks]	Yes
Your Symptoms [Struggling with getting out of bed]	No
Your Symptoms [Panic or anxiety attacks]	Yes
Your Symptoms [Feeling calm]	No
Your Symptoms [Ability to relax]	No
Your Symptoms [Ability to concentrate]	No
Your Symptoms [Better/more sleep]	No
Your Symptoms [Ability to self motivate and pushing yourself to do things]	Yes
Your Symptoms [Recognising achievement]	No
Your Symptoms [Self confidence]	Yes
Your Symptoms [Feeling a sense of pride]	No
Your Symptoms [Controlling anger/frustration]	No
If applicable.... relationships with Partners/Significant others	Yes
If applicable... relationships with Children	Yes

The questions relating to social engagement and interactions show significant improvements in two areas (Table 2). Between the midway and end of programme questionnaires, participants ability to trust people ($p = 0.026$), and the frequency of getting out ($p = 0.041$) have both significantly improved. This shows that between the midway and end of programme questionnaires participants have experienced positive changes in their ability trust in others and their willingness to engage in activities outside of the home.

Training related ratings showed no significant improvements between the midway and end of programme questionnaires (Table 3). All the evaluated sections maintained similar positive ratings throughout the training programme. The p values for theses comparisons were above the 0.05 threshold of significance, indicating that the participants perceptions and experiences of the training programme remained consistent throughout the training period.

Table 2: Social engagement and public interaction changes from the midway (MID) and end of programme (END) questionnaires.

Question	Significantly improved?
Social engagement [Seeing friends]	No
Social engagement [Contacting friends]	No
Social engagement [Calling on the phone]	No
Social engagement [Make small talk]	No
Social engagement [Ability to self motivate and pushing yourself to do things]	No
Social engagement [Ability to trust people]	Yes
Social engagement [Self confidence with others]	No
Social engagement [Managing anger/frustration]	No
Are you more or less confident in public?	No
Getting out	Yes
Do you get out and TALK to people (friends or talking to people you don't know) compared to when you started?	No

Table 3: Training programme evaluation changes from the midway (MID) and end of programme (END) questionnaires.

Question	Significantly improved?
Please rate the training [How would you rate the training OVERALL]	No
Please rate the training [Clarity of homework]	No
Please rate the training [Venues]	No
Please rate the training [Training sessions]	No
Please rate the training [Responsiveness of your questions/concerns about training]	No
Please rate the training [Quality of training equipment given/used]	No
Please rate the training [Pace of training]	No
Please rate the training [Training manuals]	No
Please rate the training [Support of training team]	No

5.2 Qualitative data

The journey through this assistance dog programme represents far more than just training and companionship. The responses to open-ended questions from veterans at both mid-course and at the end of the programme reveal a remarkable transformation, not only in their ability to manage PTSD but in their confidence, independence, and sense of self-worth. The shift is clear: at the halfway point, many are still struggling, cautiously optimistic but held back by fear, isolation, and self-doubt. By the end, however, a significant number describe feeling empowered, reconnected to society, and finally able to look forward rather than simply existing in survival mode. The qualitative descriptive analysis revealed seven overarching themes in the answers provided by veterans (see Table 4). These themes are further explored below.

Table 4: Themes in questionnaire answers following qualitative descriptive analysis

	Impact themes
1	From surviving to thriving
2	Rediscovering independence
3	Managing PTSD
4	A renewed sense of purpose and identity
5	The evolution of the human-dog bond
6	From isolation to community
7	Reduction of suicidal thoughts: from holding on to wanting to live

5.2.1 From surviving to reclaiming life and thriving

Across all the responses, the central and overarching theme is the transformation from merely surviving to actively reclaiming life. At the start of the programme, many veterans are in a state of survival, where PTSD dominates their daily experiences, and the primary focus is on coping, enduring, and making it through each day. Their assistance dog initially acts as a lifeline, a source of comfort and motivation to take small but meaningful steps forward.

By the end of the programme, however, the responses reflect a fundamental shift. Veterans are no longer just trying to manage their symptoms—they are actively regaining control, rebuilding confidence, re-engaging with the world, and rediscovering a sense of purpose. PTSD is no longer the defining force in their lives; instead, they are shaping their own futures, taking on new challenges, and setting goals that once felt unattainable.

This transformation is not just about mental health improvements or learning to work with an assistance dog—it is about rediscovering agency, autonomy, and self-worth. Veterans move from a place where they feel trapped by PTSD and its limitations to a place where they can see beyond it, redefining their lives on their own terms.

5.2.2 Rediscovering independence: the journey from hesitation to reconnection

At the halfway stage, a key theme emerging from the responses is the effort it takes to re-engage with the world. Many veterans describe pushing themselves to go outside, to visit public spaces, and to interact with others. However, these steps are still accompanied by significant anxiety and a sense of discomfort. While their assistance dogs provide encouragement and reassurance, social situations remain daunting, and simple outings require considerable mental preparation.

By the end of the programme, this has changed significantly. Veterans no longer talk about forcing themselves to go out—they describe actively participating in life once more. Many report a return to activities they had previously abandoned due to PTSD, such as socialising, attending work-related events, or visiting new places. The fear that once dictated their actions has lessened, replaced by a sense of confidence and security. Their assistance dogs, once a source of motivation to leave the house, have become trusted companions, allowing them to navigate the world with a renewed sense of control.

5.2.3 Managing PTSD: from coping to actively overcoming

The responses at mid-course suggest that, while veterans are beginning to see improvements, PTSD still dominates their daily lives. Anxiety, panic attacks, and avoidance behaviours remain common, and many still feel as though they are living moment to moment. The presence of their assistance dog provides reassurance, structure, and emotional support, but symptoms of PTSD remain a constant battle. There is a focus on coping—managing each day as it comes, using their dog as a stabilising force to help them push through.

By the end of the programme, the tone shifts. PTSD is no longer an all-consuming presence, but something that can be managed and reduced. Many veterans report that their symptoms have eased, with some experiencing fewer panic attacks, improved sleep, and a reduction in nightmares. A number of them even mention reducing their reliance on medication, something that had previously seemed impossible. What began as a tentative effort to manage symptoms has developed into a more confident and proactive approach to taking back control from PTSD.

5.2.4 A renewed sense of purpose and identity

Halfway through the programme, many veterans begin to describe a shift in their perception of themselves. No longer entirely defined by their PTSD, they start to acknowledge the small victories they have achieved. However, this sense of self-worth is still largely external—it comes from their dog, their trainers, or the supportive community they have found within the programme. While these factors provide an essential foundation for recovery, there is still an underlying sense that PTSD remains a significant barrier to achieving the things they once aspired to.

By the end of the programme, a transformation has taken place. Veterans speak about feeling valuable again, about setting and achieving new goals. Some take on challenges

that had previously felt out of reach, whether that be returning to work, applying for promotions, or simply feeling able to plan for the future. There is a distinct shift from hoping for progress to actively pursuing it, as many veterans begin to re-establish an identity beyond their PTSD.

5.2.5 The evolution of the human-dog bond

The relationship between veterans and their assistance dogs evolves significantly over the course of the programme. At mid-course, the dog is primarily seen as a source of comfort and emotional support, helping to create a sense of routine and offering reassurance in difficult situations. Veterans describe their dogs as a lifeline, a presence that encourages them to go outside and engage with the world.

By the end of the programme, this relationship has deepened into a true partnership. The dogs are no longer just providing comfort—they are actively assisting their handlers in meaningful ways, from medication reminders to interrupting nightmares and managing anxiety in social situations. Veterans begin to see their dogs not just as support animals, but as essential companions who provide stability, security, and the confidence to move forward. Their bond has strengthened to the point where the dogs are seen as irreplaceable, with many veterans unable to imagine life without them.

5.2.6 From isolation to community

One of the most significant transformations seen throughout the programme is in the way veterans connect with others. At the halfway stage, social interaction is still a challenge. Some veterans mention beginning to engage with fellow participants, but many still feel isolated, hesitant to fully open up about their experiences. There is an underlying sense that, while they appreciate the support of the programme, true connection with others is still a work in progress.

By the end of the programme, this has shifted dramatically. Many veterans now describe a strong and supportive community, where they feel understood and valued. For some, admitting they have PTSD and openly discussing their experiences has led to deep connections with others who share similar struggles. This newfound sense of belonging has provided them with not only emotional support but also a sense of solidarity and purpose. What was once a solitary struggle has become a shared journey of growth and recovery.

5.2.7 Reduction of suicidal thoughts: from holding on to wanting to live

Perhaps the most profound transformation seen across these responses is the change in how veterans talk about their will to live. At mid-course, a number of veterans describe their assistance dog as the only reason they are still here. They speak about feeling lost, as though life has lost its meaning, and express a deep reliance on their dog to give them a sense of purpose.

By the end of the programme, this has changed significantly. Veterans now talk about wanting to live—not just for their dog, but for themselves. Many describe a renewed sense of hope and motivation, and some explicitly mention that the programme has reduced their risk of self-harm and suicidal thoughts. What began as a desperate need to hold on has evolved into a genuine desire to move forward.

5.3 Overall findings

The journey through this programme is one of profound and lasting change. At mid-course, veterans are beginning to see glimmers of hope, yet PTSD still has a strong grip on their lives. Their assistance dogs provide comfort, structure, and the encouragement needed to take small steps forward.

By the end of the programme, those small steps have turned into meaningful strides. Veterans are no longer just coping with PTSD—they are actively reclaiming their lives. They have rediscovered independence, built confidence, and formed bonds that extend beyond their assistance dog to a wider community of people who truly understand them. PTSD is no longer an insurmountable barrier—it is something they can manage, control, and even overcome.

This programme is far more than just training assistance dogs. It is a lifeline, a community, and a pathway to a renewed sense of self-worth and purpose. It is not just about surviving with PTSD, but about learning how to truly live again.

There were significant improvements in the frequency of nightmares, flashbacks, panic attacks, self-motivation, and self-confidence. Notable improvements were also seen in relationships with partners and children. Social engagement shows positive progress, with participants demonstrating increased trust in others and a greater willingness to engage in activities outside their homes.

The most evident benefits of the training programme are the significant improvements in participants' relationships with their partner and in their self-confidence. The findings suggest that the programme consistently received positive feedback from participants and has led to significant improvements in emotional wellbeing, relationships, and social engagement. These positive effects were not only recognised by the participants themselves but were also recognised by their partners and children.

6 Recommendations

To strengthen how SDUK measures the impact of its programmes and ensure future research projects are informed by high-quality, robust data, there are several constructive recommendations that can support more effective data collection and analysis. These suggestions are intended to build on current efforts and promote consistency, clarity, and confidence in the research process and its outcomes.

1. Create a data handling and sharing policy

One important area to consider is data handling. Given that this is the first research project in which SDUK has shared anonymised client data with external researchers, there are valuable lessons to be taken forward. In the early stages of the project, inconsistencies in the datasets provided by different staff members led to confusion and delays. This stemmed largely from a lack of shared understanding about the volume and format of data being stored. To support smoother collaboration in future, it would be helpful to ensure all relevant staff are clearly informed about what data is being collected, how it is stored, and how it may be used in research. This can be achieved through internal briefings or documentation that set out the data parameters in a consistent format. As a practical step, maintaining an up-to-date anonymised spreadsheet of client data would allow for quicker and more accurate sharing of information with researchers, while remaining in line with privacy and data protection requirements.

2. Refine the questionnaires used for evaluation

The design and structure of the questionnaires used across the programme timeline is another area where improvements could support stronger impact measurement. During the analysis stage, discrepancies between the midway and end of programme questionnaires made it difficult to draw clear comparisons. These inconsistencies related both to the number of questions asked and differences in question wording. To allow for meaningful tracking of client experiences over time, the midway and end of programme questionnaires should ideally include a core set of identical questions. This would allow for consistent comparison of key indicators and ensure that any observed changes can be reliably attributed to the programme's effects.

Another challenge encountered during the data analysis phase was the presence of multiple-answer questions that permitted contradictory responses. This not only introduced complexity into the analysis but also made it harder to draw definitive conclusions. To enhance clarity and avoid conflicting answers, it would be advisable to use single-answer questions wherever possible. Where a more nuanced understanding is required, an open-ended follow-up question could be included to gather additional detail.

In addition to structural refinements, the phrasing of specific questions can also be improved to enhance their effectiveness. For example, one question relating to therapy in the end of programme questionnaire lacked a counterpart in the midway questionnaire, making it impossible to assess any changes over time. Furthermore, the answer options

provided did not clearly reflect the possible variations in client experience and would have required analysts to make assumptions that risked compromising data quality. A more effective approach would be to rephrase the question to focus specifically on changes since the midway point, such as: "Since the midway programme survey, have there been any changes in the frequency of therapy you receive?" Suggested answer options could include: "Yes, an increase", "Yes, a decrease", "Yes, I no longer receive therapy", "No, it has stayed the same", and "N/A". Including this question in both the midway and end of programme questionnaires would enable clearer analysis of progress and changes in client needs over time.

A similar revision would be beneficial for the question about medication use. As with the therapy-related question, the current version could be reworded for clarity and consistency. A revised question might read: "Since the midway programme survey, are you still taking medication?" with response options such as: "Yes, an increase", "Yes, a decrease", "I no longer receive medication", "Yes, it has stayed the same", and "N/A". These reworded versions can be slightly adjusted for each stage of the programme to ensure they remain relevant, while preserving their ability to support comparative analysis. A draft of the revised questionnaire has been included in Appendix B.

3. Establish a long-term evaluation and monitoring practice

Looking further ahead, incorporating the revised questionnaire into the 12-month review questionnaire would offer significant benefits. Doing so would enable a more comprehensive picture of both short-term and long-term outcomes for clients, including the sustained impact of the human-dog partnership. This would help to build a more complete understanding of the programme's effects and the trajectories of clients over time. A draft of this

Taken together, these changes offer a constructive pathway to refining SDUK's approach to impact measurement. By aligning data collection processes, enhancing the clarity of survey tools, and maintaining consistent question structures across time points, SDUK can improve the quality of the data it gathers. This will, in turn, strengthen the organisation's ability to conduct meaningful analysis and generate evidence that reflects the depth and complexity of its work.

Improving how SDUK collects and analyses client data will support more accurate measurement of its impact, providing clearer insights into programme effectiveness and enhancing its ability to demonstrate value to funders, stakeholders, and the wider community.

7 Proposal for long term impact monitoring

Implementing a system for monitoring long-term outcomes is crucial for understanding the programmes value and effectiveness. The short-term outcomes from the current programme questionnaires offer valuable insights into the programme's immediate effects, however understanding the lasting effects of the programme is essential for understanding how the programme continues to benefit the participants over time. It will provide SDUK with an understanding of how the training influences their personal development, social interactions, and relationships. Additionally, an ongoing evaluation will also ensure that SDUK have a training programme that remains relevant and effectively meets their clients evolving needs, whilst potentially highlighting new areas of support.

We propose an annual follow up questionnaire for clients that have completed the training programme. There should be a core set of questions that are asked at each assessment stage (midway, end, 12-monthly review) to effectively measure the programmes impact over time. This will allow consistent tracking of key information and provide insights into a client's progress once they have settled into the partnership. A draft of this questionnaire has been included as Appendix B.

8 Funding application support

The OneWelfare Research Group at Anglia Ruskin University will continue to support SDUK in utilising the findings of this project, with a particular focus on preparing future funding applications. This support will remain in place and is not dependent on SDUK identifying a specific funding opportunity in advance. Instead, the research team will remain available to assist SDUK in shaping and presenting the project outcomes in ways that are compelling to a wide range of potential funders.

This includes helping to craft strong narratives that draw on both the quantitative data—such as statistically significant improvements in PTSD symptoms and social engagement—and the rich qualitative insights that highlight the transformative personal journeys of veterans. The ARU team will also provide guidance on integrating these findings into funding bids that reflect the organisation's mission, demonstrate measurable impact, and showcase the long-term value of SDUK's work.

As funding opportunities arise, the OneWelfare Research Group will work alongside SDUK to adapt and tailor the evaluation findings to meet the priorities and criteria of individual funders. The ongoing nature of this collaboration ensures that SDUK has continued access to academic expertise in evidence-based practice, impact communication, and interdisciplinary research—positioning the organisation to confidently pursue funding that can enhance service delivery and support the development of long-term impact monitoring.

Appendix A: Evaluation team

Zoe Thomson MSc is a researcher with a strong academic background in animal science. She has been a Research Assistant on projects with Anglia Ruskin University, such as Collaboration for Research in Amputations in Essex (CARE) and Preparing for Assistance Dog Retirement (PADRe) and is a member of the ARU OneWelfare Research Group. Her academic background combined with extensive research experience allows her to bring an interdisciplinary approach to her research, blending animal welfare and human wellbeing.

Dr Nieky van Veggel is a senior research fellow and academic with expertise in applied social science, qualitative and quantitative research, and evidence-based practice. He leads the ARU OneWelfare Research Group. His work focuses on developing evidence-based approaches to Animal Assisted Services, and enhancement of professional practice within multidisciplinary environments. He is actively involved in doctoral supervision, supporting EdD and DProf students, and leads Stage 2 of the DProf in Health and Social Care. His teaching includes qualitative research methods, professional practice, and grounded theory methodology across doctoral programmes. His research portfolio includes studies on human-animal interactions and disability, grounded theory methodology development, evidence-based leadership, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Appendix B: Proposed annual impact monitoring survey

Programme Feedback

Please answer the following questions to help us evaluate our programme. Your input is necessary so that we can identify what works well and where we can improve.

Equally so we in the future can give real medical validity to what we do so your feedback is essential in proving what we do makes a difference.

Please take your time it's important to the future and development of providing others with PTSD Assistance Dogs.

A) About You

Your Name*

.....

Dog's Name*

.....

Medication*

Since starting/midway/end of the training programme have there been any changes to your medication?

Please select one answer:

Currently receiving but it has increased since I started

Currently receiving but it has stayed the same

Currently receiving but it has decreased since I started

No longer receiving medication

N/A

Therapy*

Since starting/midway/finishing the training programme have there been any changes to the frequency of therapy?

	Yes, receiving currently and stayed the same	Yes, receiving currently but reduced	Yes, receiving currently but increased	No longer receiving	N/A
CBT					
EMRD					
Other					

Your Symptoms*

Please compare the below to the start/midway/end of the programme compared to where you are now.

	More often	The same	Improvement	Significant Improvement	N/A
Feeling agitated, irritable					
Feeling down depressed or hopeless					
Nightmares					
Zoning out					
Flashbacks					
Struggling with getting out of bed					
Panic or anxiety attacks					
Feeling calm					
Ability to relax					
Ability to concentrate					
Better/more sleep					
Ability to self-motivate and push yourself to do things					
Recognising achievement					
Self confidence					
Feeling a sense of pride					
Controlling anger/frustration					

B) You & Others

Close Relationships

If applicable..... have your relationships with Partners/Significant others changed *

Please choose one answer.

- My relationships have improved
- My close relationships have stayed the same
- My close relationships have worsened
- N/A

If applicable..... have your relationships with Children changed *

Please choose one answer.

- My relationships have improved
- My close relationships have stayed the same
- My close relationships have worsened
- N/A

If your close relationships have changed, in what way?

.....

Have friends and/or family noted changes in you? If so what?

.....

C) You & The World

Please compare the below to the start/midway/end of the programme compared to where you are now.

Social engagement *

	Less	The same	Improvement	Significant Improvement	N/A
Seeing friends					
Contacting friends					
Calling on the phone					
Make small talk					
Ability to self-motivate and push yourself to do things					
Ability to trust people					
Self-confidence with others					
Managing anger/frustration					

Are you more or less confident in public? *

Less confident compared to when I started

The same compared to when I started

More confident compared to when I started

Getting out *

Getting out less

The same compared to when I started

Getting out more but struggling

Significantly getting out more

How often do you get out and TALK to people (friends or talking to people you don't know) compared to when you started? *

Less often

No change

More often

D) The Programme

Please rate the training *

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
How would you rate the training overall				
Clarity of homework				
Venues				
Training sessions				
Responsiveness to your questions/ concerns about training				
quality of training equipment given/used				
Pace of training				
Training manuals				
Workshops				
Field Trips				
Support of training team				

Any comments on Training

.....

Please rate support outside of training*

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
How would you rate the SDUK support outside of training				
Regarding your health and wellbeing				
Regarding your dogs health and well being				
Regarding personal issues				
Regarding family				
Supplies and equipment				
Responsiveness to your questions and queries on anything other than training				
Dogs behavioural issues				

Any comments on the programme outside of Training?

.....

Please provide as much Information as you can *

What have you found difficult so far? *

What have you enjoyed about the programme so far? *

What have been the key changes for you now that you are halfway/end/since the programme? *

Would you recommend the programme to someone else, and if so, why? *

Any further comments you wish to make