

Animals save lives too!

A) Therapy animals

Animal-assisted therapy is a type of treatment offered to certain patients to help them feel better. Therapy animals are particularly useful for people who have been involved in accidents or had illnesses and need extra support as they recover at home. They are also used to treat people suffering from conditions such as autism. The main thing these animals provide is comfort and friendship, to help people feel relaxed and calm. Dogs, cats, horses, pigs, and even reptiles are all trained as therapy animals, sometimes visiting people in hospitals and others going to live with people at home. Therapy animals do not need a lot of training. They need to know basic commands and must interact well with humans. Anyone with a pet can volunteer to offer animal-assisted therapy. So if you are kind and caring and your pet is too, this could be an opportunity to do something good.

B) Hearing dogs

When we think of dogs helping people with disabilities, we usually think of guide dogs for the blind, but just as important are hearing dogs for deaf people. There are obvious dangers for people who can't hear such as not noticing alarms, but there are many other ways that hearing dogs help their human companions. Alarm clocks, doorbells, and mobile phone notifications can all easily be missed by deaf people living or spending time alone. Hearing dogs are very highly trained. It takes up to two years to prepare a puppy for work, and many of the dogs chosen for the job do not go on to become hearing dogs. They just don't have the right skills and personality. When the right dog is matched to the right person though, the relationship between the dog and owner can be very strong.

C) Rats discovering landmines

Where dogs used to be the animal of choice for clearing dangerous war zones from explosives, a new and unlikely animal is now being used in Cambodia. Almost completely blind, the African giant pouched rat has such a good sense of smell that it is perfect for detecting hidden dangers. They are easier to transport than dogs and a lot cheaper. They also work much faster and are smaller so don't need much space to live. However, dogs are a lot easier to train. The rats don't understand spoken commands so are trained to understand different clicking sounds. They are also more afraid of humans and it takes a long time for them to learn how to wear a harness. It takes almost a year to train them and they only live to an average age of eight. It's all worth it though. The rats have made a huge difference to people's lives. People are now able to move around without fear which has greatly improved their general health and well-being.