



To: Mayor Glover and Members of Council
From: Gary Monahan, Fire Chief
Date: 12 Mar 2024
Subject: Trauma Support Dog

Report Highlights

- Health and Wellness of the Firefighters and Staff

Recommendation

WHEREAS the Council of the Corporation of the Township of Lake of Bays receives the staff report "Trauma Support Dog" dated March 12, 2024:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council approve staff to enter into an agreement for a Trauma Support Dog for the purpose of increasing firefighter and staff health and wellness.

Origin

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the importance of Mental Health Support for first responders, including firefighters, who often face traumatic and distressing situations as part of their duties. Current support programs for our firefighters include; Peer Support Team, Fire Department Chaplains and Employees Assistance Program.

With the increase in call volume and traumatic incidents the department is facing, our goal is to continue to expand the support available to our members to ensure they remain healthy as well as the community that we serve.

Analysis

Staff are taking an innovative approach to expand support and have researched Trauma Support Dogs, also known as Therapy Dogs, who are specifically trained to provide comfort and emotional support to individuals experiencing stress, anxiety, or trauma. The mental well-being and resilience of our firefighters, staff and the community is our reason for implementing a Trauma Support Dog.

Interacting with a Trauma Support Dog has several benefits, listed below are some Therapeutic Benefits that a Trauma Support Dog would have for staff:

- Reduction in Stress and Anxiety
- Emotional Support
- Increased Morale
- Mood Enhancement
- Improved Coping Mechanisms

Promotion of Healing and Recovery

Emotional Support: Dogs offer unconditional love, companionship, and non-judgmental support, which can alleviate feelings of loneliness, depression and anxiety.

Stress Reduction: Interacting with a dog has been proven to lower cortisol levels, reduce blood pressure and promote relaxation, leading to decreased stress and tension.

Increased Morale: The presence of a dog can elevate mood and induce feelings of happiness and contentment, providing a natural mood boost for individuals struggling with mental health issues.

Social Connection: Dogs facilitate social interaction and bonding among individuals, serving as conversation starters and fostering a sense of connection and belonging.

A certified Trauma Support Dog would also benefit the Fire Prevention Division when delivering Fire Safety Messages/Public Education Events and visits to schools, retirement homes etc. Expanding support options for our firefighters and staff may assist with retention and may decrease possible WSIB Claims to the town.

Emergency Services and agencies that are currently utilizing Trauma Support Dogs for their members are:

- Mississauga Fire
- Sudbury Paramedics/ Fire Services
- Victim Services Nipissing
- Riverview Fire and Rescue, New Brunswick

Peterborough Police

Financial Implications

Through the generous donation from Lucky Labs, Keans K9 and Citadel K9 Society, obedience and behavioral dog training, staff has determined that a certified trauma support dog would be of no cost to the Townships of Lake of Bays and the Town of Huntsville.

These organizations can provide a dog and the training immediately with no waiting.

The annual maintenance and care expenses are estimated to be approximately \$4,000.00 and will be split between the Townships of Lake of Bays and the Town of Huntsville.

Alternatives

Option # 1

Council approve staff to enter into an agreement for a Trauma Support Dog (**Recommended**)

Option # 2

Council not approve staff to enter into an agreement for a Trauma Support Dog (**Not Recommended**)

Approved by:

Gary Monahan, Fire Chief

Patricia Allen, Director of Finance/Treasurer

Bryan Brown, Chief Administrative Officer

Approved - 26 Feb 2024

Approved - 26 Feb 2024

Approved - 26 Feb 2024