

# Emergency Dispatchers Receive Visits From Service Dogs To Combat On The Job Stress

The Hunterdon County Department of Public Safety Communication Division employs twenty-seven Public Safety Telecommunicators(PST), or 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers, and because there are multiple demands placed on each dispatcher as they answer calls for numerous police departments, fire companies, first aid squads and mobile intensive care units, the opportunity to visit with service dogs, on site, is a very successful source of stress relief.

“Tethered” to a console, PSTs work long hours, including weekends and holidays, often during inclement weather and severe storms. For the past several months, PSTs have been participating in a program to socialize puppies who are being trained for service and visiting with dogs already trained as service animals. These visits allow PSTs an opportunity to destress for a few moments.

Freeholder Matt Holt, Public Safety Liaison said, “No one calls 9-1-1 with good news. It is a demanding position that requires the ability to react at a moment’s notice, gathering resources and help, while remaining calm and recognizing they are that person’s ‘life-line’ until first responders arrive at the scene. Service dogs, and other animal programs, provide a few minutes of relief during a dispatcher’s shift.”

James Curry, Communications Division Head, said, “Last year, the Communications Center answered over 41,000 9-1-1 calls. The constant barrage of pleas for help is stressful to say the least. Being able to bring dogs into the center whether they are being trained, or are already trained, is a benefit to all involved. These visits have shown to significantly reduce the stress placed on PSTs and improves job performance and recently published research from the medical community backs this up.”

Curry continued, “Most of the calls our PSTs receive are from people who need assistance for matters that are beyond their own capabilities. The comfort and calming of scratching a dog’s head and rubbing their bellies provides an outlet for the stress handled throughout a normal shift.”

For more information, or to volunteer, please visit <https://www.puppiesbehindbars.com/> or <https://www.caringk9s.org/>.