

**The Role of Dogs in Psychiatry: The development  
Psychiatric Service Dogs, ESAs and Facility Dogs  
(Fur-Therapists) in South Africa  
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**Abstract:**

Honeys Garden for Medical Alert Dogs SA is an NPO that launched in 2017 with the training of Diabetic Alert Service Dogs. It progressed to training Seizure Response Dogs and other Medical Service dogs for a variety of physical and mental illnesses and disorders. Since the Covid19 pandemic, it has been noted that the need for Psychiatric Service dogs, emotional support animals as well as facility dogs (affectionately referred to as Fur-Therapists) based in a therapeutic setting, as well as providing mobile visits to individuals and groups of children and adults in need, has greatly increased.

Worldwide, the benefits of utilizing dogs in psychiatry has been researched with overwhelmingly positive results. Results show that spending time with a support dog lowers blood pressure and heart rate, increases the patients ability to communicate during therapeutic sessions, increases confidence, provides a social or physical buffer when needed, alleviating loneliness, providing purpose for patient and creating fun and pleasure.

Honeys Garden is working towards a comprehensive system for the three types of support dogs with regards to psychiatry. We invite and encourage local and national research institutions to aid us in the growth and development of this program, with the hopes of helping more people, utilizing the amazing skills of our canine companions.

Skills that a support dog can provide include but are not limited to two essential categories, trained specific tasks performed according to a human behavioural cue, and generalized emotional support based on both the bond between dog and human, and the intuition of a carefully selected dog. Dogs for psychiatric and emotional support are selected for their work ethic, trainability, confidence in a variety of settings and empathetic nature. It is important to note that the dog itself needs to be monitored for mental health, safety and work satisfaction, in order to provide the best possible service to the people in need.