

Educational charity founder earns Points of Light award for dog work



» Tracey Berridge, founder of Dogs Helping Kids, with her top dog, Vader

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THE Prime Minister recognised Tracey Berridge, from Barnstaple, on Friday, for founding the charity Dogs Helping Kids.

The charity uses professionally trained dogs to help children with their personal development, learning and wellbeing.

Tracey, a professional dog trainer, was inspired to found the organisation in 2002 following her own post-graduate research into the benefits of introducing dogs into school environments.

Today, Dogs Helping Kids have 40 trained and certified dogs across England and Wales, working to educate, help and support both children and teenagers of all backgrounds, gender and abilities.

Trained 'listening dogs' help children read out loud confidently, with the charity's research demonstrating an increase in reading levels, word

recognition, and interpersonal skills.

Tracey is the latest recipient of the Points of Light award, which recognises outstanding volunteers who are making a change in their community and inspiring others.

Each day, someone, somewhere in the country is selected to receive the award to celebrate their remarkable achievements.

In a personal letter to Tracey, Prime Minister Theresa May said: "Through Dogs Helping Kids, you are bringing a pioneering and therapeutic way of learning to children with a range of educational and emotional needs.

"Your project training listening dogs is helping children improve their literacy skills and their confidence and I wish you all the best as you continue this important work."

Tracey said: "I am both incredibly honoured and lost for words (which rarely happens!) at receiving such an unexpected and prestigious award. I cannot thank the Prime Minister

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Tracey Berridge

and the Civil Service enough for recognising the work of my very small children's charity, Dogs Helping Kids, and the work that our very special dogs undertake each day all across the country.

"Dogs Helping Kids has been my life's work for more than 30 years and I have put my heart and soul into the charity. However, none of this would have been possible if I had not had the enormous support and help of my amazing husband Mark, my family, and a great friend Gail Laurence. It was always my hope that if one child's life was

changed forever then all the hard work, late nights, and as my Mum would put it, 'burning the candle at both ends,' would all be worth it.

"I am so proud of the fact that during this time Dogs Helping Kids has changed thousands of young lives with help of our highly trained DHK school dogs and this is something we will continue to do.

"To receive a Point of Light award in recognition of our work with children is the most amazing start to the year and one I will never forget. I could not have achieved this without the help of all of our school dogs and this award is for all of them, especially Laya, our first school dog and my beloved friend, without whom this charity would not have been possible. Thank you so very much for such an esteemed award."

Tracey is the 1,122nd winner of the Points of Light award, which was developed in partnership with the Points of Light programme in the USA.