

Assistance animals ensure mobility and independence for people with special needs



Animal companions can ease loneliness, calm our emotions and soothe in times of illness and hardship. For people with special needs, specially-trained animals are available to assist with mobility and independence.

A wide range of organisations, small and large, formal and informal, provide opportunities for animals to assist and interact with humans, across all ages of life and in diverse environments. Animals are involved in programs with children, adolescents, people with disabilities, prisoners, the elderly, hospitalised patients and many others.

Programs involving animal companions can contribute to social capital by helping people who may otherwise be isolated or marginalised to care for themselves and interact more readily with the community.

"Animals that work with humans are amazing. They're trained to support people perform ordinary activities but they can also undertake highly specialised tasks that draw on their unique skills." Dr Kersti Seksel, Australian Companion Animal Council

The Australian Companion Animal Council has published a directory which identifies some of the organisations responsible for dogs that assist people with sight, hearing or mobility. It also identifies organisations where animals form part of the therapy that patients receive.

"The role of dogs in supporting people who are visually impaired is well known but there are actually more dogs that work with people with hearing impairments," says Kersti. "In total, there were 389 guide dogs and seeing-eye dogs in Australia in 2005 and 405 dogs working with people with hearing difficulties. This directory helps put people who can benefit from these services in contact with organisations in their area."

Lisa Murray appreciates the companionship and assistance provided by her support dog, Cassie. "Cassie's changed my life. She turns barriers into opportunities, affording me greater choice and stability. She removes the element of risk and injury that can accompany me undertaking daily tasks and activities solo."

"With her life loving attitude and her golden paws at my side, I have been humbled, inspired and transformed. It is just awesome. I cannot thank Cassie, Australian Support Dogs and the general public enough for their generous donations and support. Life is definitely richer. I am undertaking animal studies at TAFE as a result of my golden girl."
Lisa Murray, Cassie's owner



Benefits of using animal interaction in the community

- Helps people perform day to day tasks so they can achieve a level of independence
- Creates opportunities for local special needs residents to remain interactive with their communities
- Provides an opportunity for people to volunteer leading to feelings of wellbeing

Tips

- People may not be aware that there are many organisations that exist in Australia that help animals help people - a range of these organisations are listed in the Directory of Human Animal Interaction Organisations
- Ensure Occupational, Diversional and other therapists in your local area are aware of the Directory and its usefulness in identifying programs and organizations operating
- The Directory of Human Animal Interaction Organisations is available online at www.anthrozoology.com.au

Web Links

The Human Animal Interaction Directory
- www.humananimalinteraction.org.au

Australian Companion Animal Council - www.acac.org.au

Anthrozoology - www.anthrozoology.com.au