

Assistance dogs enhance quality of life for those on the outer

Benefits of supporting assistance dogs in the community

- Increases life quality for other marginalised communities with opportunities for animal bonding and training
- Enhances quality of life for recipients of assistance dogs and creates new social networks for assistance dogs recipients
- Saves costs to the community by reducing attendant care needs

Both evidence and anecdote confirm the positive role that pets have played in assisting people with special needs. Assistance dogs are trained to enhance the quality of life of physically or mentally challenged persons while still maintaining independence for the handler. Interestingly, many handlers find that their “cloak of invisibility” also disappears when they are accompanied by an assistance dog.

Assistance Dogs Australia (ADA) was established in Sydney as a non-profit organisation in 1996 with a mission to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The organisation obtains, trains and maintains dogs in community settings to assist people with disabilities, give them more confidence, relieve social isolation and help them achieve greater levels of independence.

Since Richard Lord came on board as CEO four years ago, the mission statement of the organisation has expanded to include enhancing the quality of life for others in marginalised communities. This has been done by asking selected community members to train puppies for a number of months.

Pups have worked with people in prison, the long term unemployed and are soon to be trained by juvenile offenders.

“It’s a win-win scenario for the community and the dogs. Pups can be very life affirming for people who may not feel that they belong in the same way that others do.” Richard Lord, Assistance Dogs Australia

Similarly, ADA will begin to trial a program for children in early primary school years who experience difficulty in reading and can practice their skills on non-judgemental Labradors. Richard sees the program as an

opportunity for recipients of assistance dogs to connect into other areas of the community, like local schools.

At age 19, Tanya Clarke was involved in a road accident, which left her a quadriplegic, confined to a wheelchair, with limited arm movement and no hand function.

In 2001 Harry arrived as Tanya’s assistance dog. As Tanya says, “Harry came into my life and made a huge difference to my level of independence. For the first time since my accident, my quality of life has improved a great deal.”

Each assistance dog is fully trained to specific standards and provided to disabled recipients free of charge.

Assistance dogs are trained over a two year period to perform specific tasks that will help their disabled recipients, including opening and closing doors, turning light switches on and off, pressing pedestrian crossing buttons and retrieving items off the floor. They can also bark for assistance, if required.

Web Links

Assistance Dogs Australia - www.assistedogs.org.au



“Harry has improved my independence, my quality of life and the way I feel about myself. He is also my companion and the very best friend anyone could ever wish for.”

Tanya Clarke

Tips

- Promote assistance dogs services through the use of Council promotional material
- Publicise their recruitment drive for volunteer puppy sitters