



Impact Report

2024–2025

Empowering connection,
inclusion and independence
for people with disability.



Assistance Dogs Australia would like to acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, train and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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About Assistance Dogs Australia

Assistance Dogs Australia (ADA) is a for-purpose national organisation and a registered charity supporting over 200 clients nationwide from operations centres in NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

ADA breeds, trains and places assistance dogs with Australians with physical disability, complex autism and severe PTSD. These life-changing companions empower connection, inclusion and independence for people with disability.

Led by a belief that cost should never be a barrier to access, Assistance Dogs Australia provides each highly skilled and internationally accredited assistance dog completely free of charge. With little government funding and **each dog costing more than \$60,000 to raise and train**, the organisation relies on the generosity of individuals, corporate partners and philanthropic groups to continue its vital work.

The **2022 ABS study** identified that **17.1% of the population experienced disability with core activity limitation**. This includes physical and psychosocial disability which often leads to an experience of poor mental health, complex trauma, social isolation and lack of independence. As a result, this limits participation in, and contribution to, society, thereby reducing quality of life.

ADA has evidenced the power of the human-canine bond and has heard from individuals with core functioning disability, that as a result of their assistance dog, their life has been enhanced, and they feel empowered to seek greater connection, inclusion and independence. **Our vision is to create a world where those in need have the opportunity to experience this.**

Our commitment to our vision requires innovation, dedication and an unwavering commitment to excellence.

We are one of a few Australian Assistance Dog organisations that are internationally accredited with Assistance Dogs International. This is the gold standard in assistance dog training and by adhering to these standards we ensure our Assistance Dogs are highly skilled and accredited with public safety access. This is an increasingly important criteria and a recognition of the investment in world class dog training.

The Outcomes Our Clients Experience:



**Overall
Wellbeing**



**Emotional
Regulation**



**Social Inclusion
& Community
Contribution**

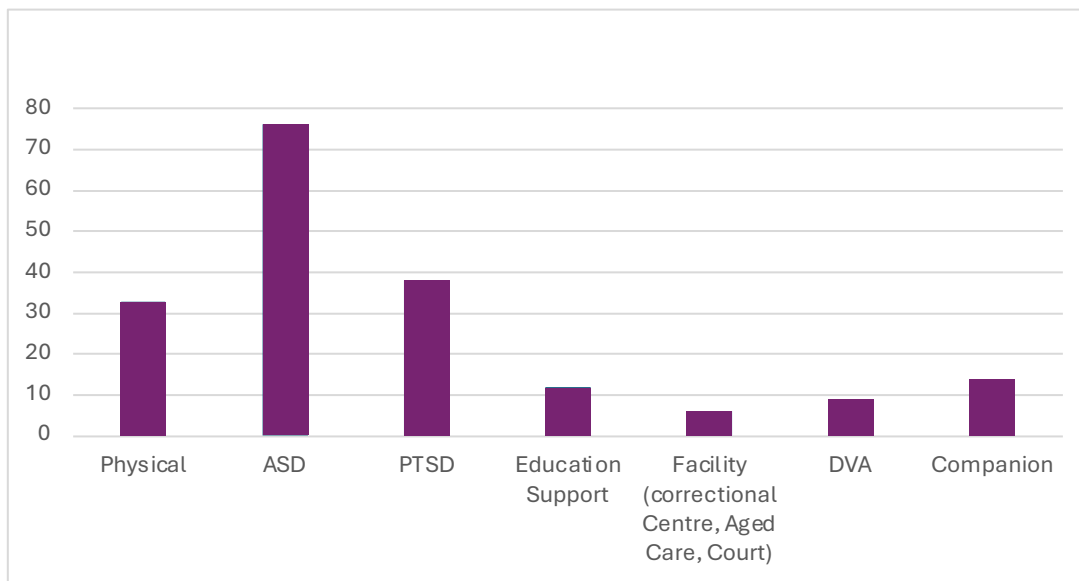


**Increased
Independence**

Our Programs

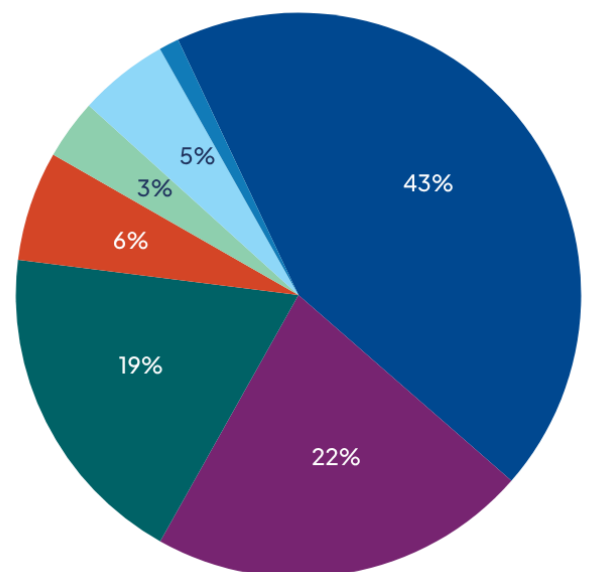
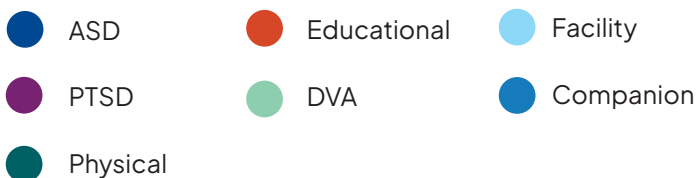
Our work includes breeding, training and placing internationally accredited assistance dogs through a range of programs to empower people with disability. The core programs require accredited Assistance Dogs and include Physical Mobility, Autism Spectrum Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Additional programs include educational support, psychosocial support, facilities such as courts, correctional centres and aged care, companion/therapy and the Department of Veteran Affairs.



The People We Serve

Recipients of our Assistance Dogs are located nationwide, across a broad age range and a diversity of disability.



“He has given me ‘hope’ which I didn’t have before and ‘meaning’ in living a life well lived. Before having my dog I could not imagine feeling happiness and joy again..” ~ ADA Client



“Wherever I go, it’s basically: wheelchair, dog, me. It’s a package deal.”

~ Natasha

Natasha & Emma’s Story

Emma the Assistance Dog joined this package deal in 2019 when she was paired with Natasha. Emma is Natasha’s second Assistance Dog, so Natasha was already familiar with the impact their crucial support can have on day-to-day life.

Natasha likens growing up and getting older with cerebral palsy with car ownership.

“I like to think of it as a car that’s been without a wheel alignment. You wear things out because you are using your body in a way that it wasn’t actually designed to be used.”

The daily wear and tear means Emma’s support is needed more as time goes on. Physical Assistance Dogs like Emma provide greater access to independent living that is so often taken for granted. For Natasha, that looks like:

- Medicine and water bottles being brought to her
- A steady place to rest her hand when standing up from the toilet before returning to her chair
- Having the shower door opened and a towel brought to her. These are moments of privacy that are so important.

Emma also brings in the mail, presses traffic light buttons and is learning how to put laundry in and take it out of their new front-loading washing machine.

Natasha says of Emma, *“She’s really enjoying the challenge.”* Above all, Emma shines when she’s supporting Natasha emotionally and as her companion. Natasha believes if she had to choose between her chair and Emma, she’d choose Emma. *“She’s that integral.”*

Living in the small community of Launceston, Tasmania, Natasha feels like Emma’s a bit of a celebrity.

“Emma’s the PR princess. People know you... or rather, they know the girl with the dog and the wheelchair. People tend to remember her name and not mine, which I’m totally cool with.”

Our Impact Goals

Over the next 5 years our goal is to deepen our impact through dedication and focus on our transformation plans. Through our work this will enable us to:



Place **50%** more **Assistance Dogs** with people in need



450 clients will have **increased their independence**



250 clients will have improved their ability to **emotionally regulate**



1200 family and carers will have improved their **wellbeing**, including their **social connection** and **community contribution**.

Our Short-Medium Term Outcomes

Functional Outcomes

- Improved ability to perform daily tasks
- Access to and engagement with community

Psychosocial Outcomes

- Increased confidence
- Reduced anxiety and stress
- Increased sense of purpose

Participation Outcomes

- New skills acquired
- Improved family functioning
- Expanded friendships & support networks
- Engagement with education &/or volunteering

Our Long-Term Outcomes

Increased Independence



Positive Emotional Regulation

Improved Wellbeing



Increased Social Inclusion & Community Contribution





Our Impact on Independence

Increased Independence is one of the most significant changes that recipients of Assistance Dogs experience. Independence for a person with an Assistance Dog means being able to rely less on a support worker, family member or friend.

Their Assistance Dog can perform tasks such as:

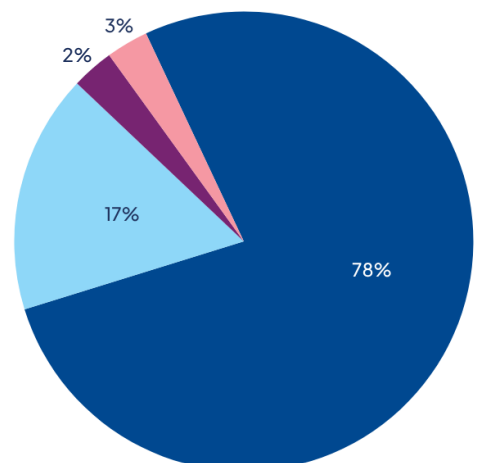
- Retrieve dropped items
- Open and close doors, wardrobes and drawers
- Open and retrieve items from the fridge
- Remove items of clothing such as socks and jumpers
- Retrieve the phone
- Alert bark if their owner falls out of their wheelchair or is in danger
- Press the buttons at the traffic lights and lifts
- Accompany their owner on public transport
- Brace when need to support their owner if they become unstable in their chair
- Deliver and retrieve items at the shop counter
- Help carry or pick up shopping items
- Pulling washing out of front-loading machines

Allowing them to leave the house to go shopping, to the café, engage with the community, cross the road safely, and be at home alone and independent to a greater degree.

Our Impact on Independence:

- Great/Extreme
- Small
- Moderate
- Not at all

97% of clients reported that the support of an Assistance Dog has increased their independence.



Our Impact on Independence

Those with an ADA dog require less medical or allied health support hours than estimated without an ADA dog.

88%

of respondents have learned new skills as a result of having an Assistance Dog

65%

of people experienced a great or significant impact on accessing places and services with the support of an Assistance Dog

97%

of respondents indicated that the support of an ADA dog has had a positive impact on their ability to perform daily activities



“Just the freedom of getting out the front door and realizing there is a big world to explore”

~ ADA Client

Karen & Meg's Story

Karen was paired with her first Assistance Dog in 2007 after a long and patient wait. She might not have known about Assistance Dogs Australia (ADA) were it not for her mother reading an article about ADA in the Woman's Day magazine. Karen applied, got approved, and her very first Assistance Dog, Meg, entered her life.

"Life was a challenge" for Karen before receiving an Assistance Dog, having been born with cerebral palsy and living in a wheelchair from the age of 18.

Now with her third Assistance Dog, Karen can't imagine life without one. Karen no longer does her own laundry as her scoliosis has worsened over the years but when Meg came into Karen's life, she helped her do laundry and eased some of the frustrations of completing tasks slower than she'd like to.

"That was a bit of a task, reaching in and getting the clothes in and out."

Along with much needed daily physical assistance, Meg provides Karen with emotional support through lots of cuddles.

"I love her cuddles, she's just beautiful. Meggy-moo just wants to know where I am at all times."

Meg picks up dropped items for Karen – even when she's sound asleep. "She'll come up to me with it as if it say, 'Here, Mum, grab it!'".

The benefits of an Assistance Dog are impactful, not only because of the physical assistance they provide, but also for their psychological impact.

Stress and isolation reduction, offering moments of privacy that a carer might otherwise need to be present for, increased independence, confidence, and providing emotional support are just some of the ways our dogs support people with physical disabilities.





Our Impact on Emotional Wellbeing

An ability to regulate emotions more effectively and experience improved daily functioning are two of the most significant outcomes reported by families of children and young adults with Autism.

For families this means trips into public places is possible, like the beach or the park, allowing family time to be enjoyed. ASD Assistance Dogs provide support in the following areas for children and young adults with autism and their families:

- Communication skills
- Confidence and independence
- Empathy in new situations
- Emotional understanding
- Environmental understanding
- Self-esteem
- Family relationships
- Creating new behaviour patterns
- Social relationships
- Tactile perception
- Anxiety reduction
- Routine and stability

“Because of our Assistance Dog, my daughter is no longer isolated at home. She has opportunities to interact with others in a controlled safe space, and contribute to her community. Her Assistance Dog has not just transformed daily life, but also her long-term future.” ~ ADA Client



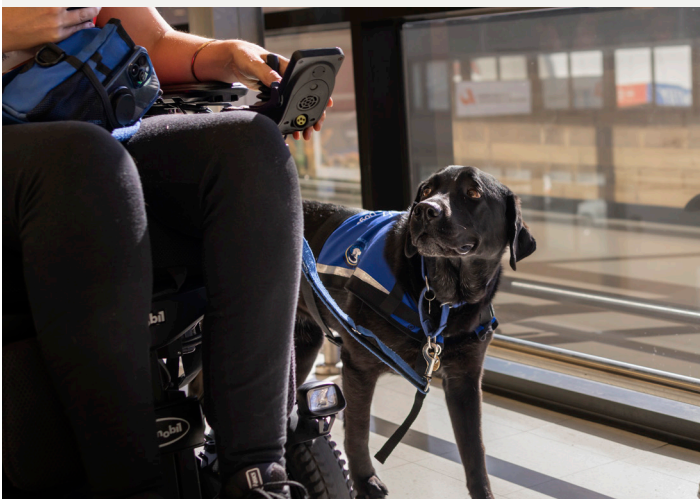
Our Impact on Emotional Wellbeing

89%

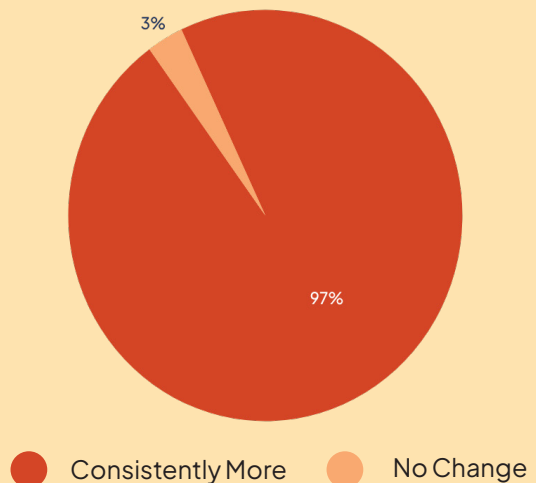
of respondents said that they experienced an extreme sense of wellbeing improvement with the support of an Assistance Dog.

97%

of respondents felt consistently more confident being supported by ADA.



Impact on Confidence



84%

of respondents state that working with an Assistance Dog reduced their feelings of anxiety or distress to a great or extreme extent.

76%

of respondents have an increased sense of purpose with the support of an Assistance Dog to great or extreme extent.

Max & Watson's Story

Before Watson came along, Max, a young adult, was having a lot of difficulties at school and at home with emotional regulation. Therapy worked for a time but reached a point where he could benefit from support that extended to the home environment as well.



Selena, Max's mum, describes what matching with Watson was like. *"It was very exciting to think that this might be our dog. It was a good first introduction and Chris [ADA's Senior Instructor] asked how we'd feel about having Watson overnight. It was exciting, but I also was nervous. It's a big leap going from no pets to having an Assistance Dog."*

In a family system where the parent is the primary client, Assistance Dogs often have a delayed bond with their teammate. Selena was nervous that Watson might bond with her over Max but with support from Chris and repetitive training behaviours, Watson found his place with Max in the family home living with Selena, Max's younger sister and their pet macaw.

"He'll sit with Max when he's doing his schoolwork. Always having him around means that Max never gets to that point where he's too overwhelmed or in that meltdown stage."

Life before Watson involved a lot of calls from the school and suspensions. Selena says he'd often come home in a state of overwhelm and it was difficult to get him to regulate and calm down.

"He often just didn't want anyone around... when you're younger, people who you're angry with won't help you calm down. Whereas with a dog, you can't be angry with him, so it's an instant calming presence. It was much easier with that tool that you can just instantly calm down, rather than me having to try when no words will ever, ever help."

Watson often provides "visits" and deep pressure against Max's leg when they're sitting together on the lounge. *"It's calming and regulating, and Max isn't as fidgety."* Beyond those two essential cues taught in Advanced Training, Watson supports Max by being his friend. He's readily available to play games when Max is finding it hard to focus on his schoolwork, and Max has also been enjoying the rewards of teaching Watson new skills.

Two other significant impacts Watson has made to Max's life are his social skills and confidence. More people are likely to engage with Max because he has Watson, which in turn creates social opportunities that he might not normally get.

At a recent event that Selena spoke at with Max and Watson attending, she was pleased to see that Max had no problem talking to adults he'd never met before.

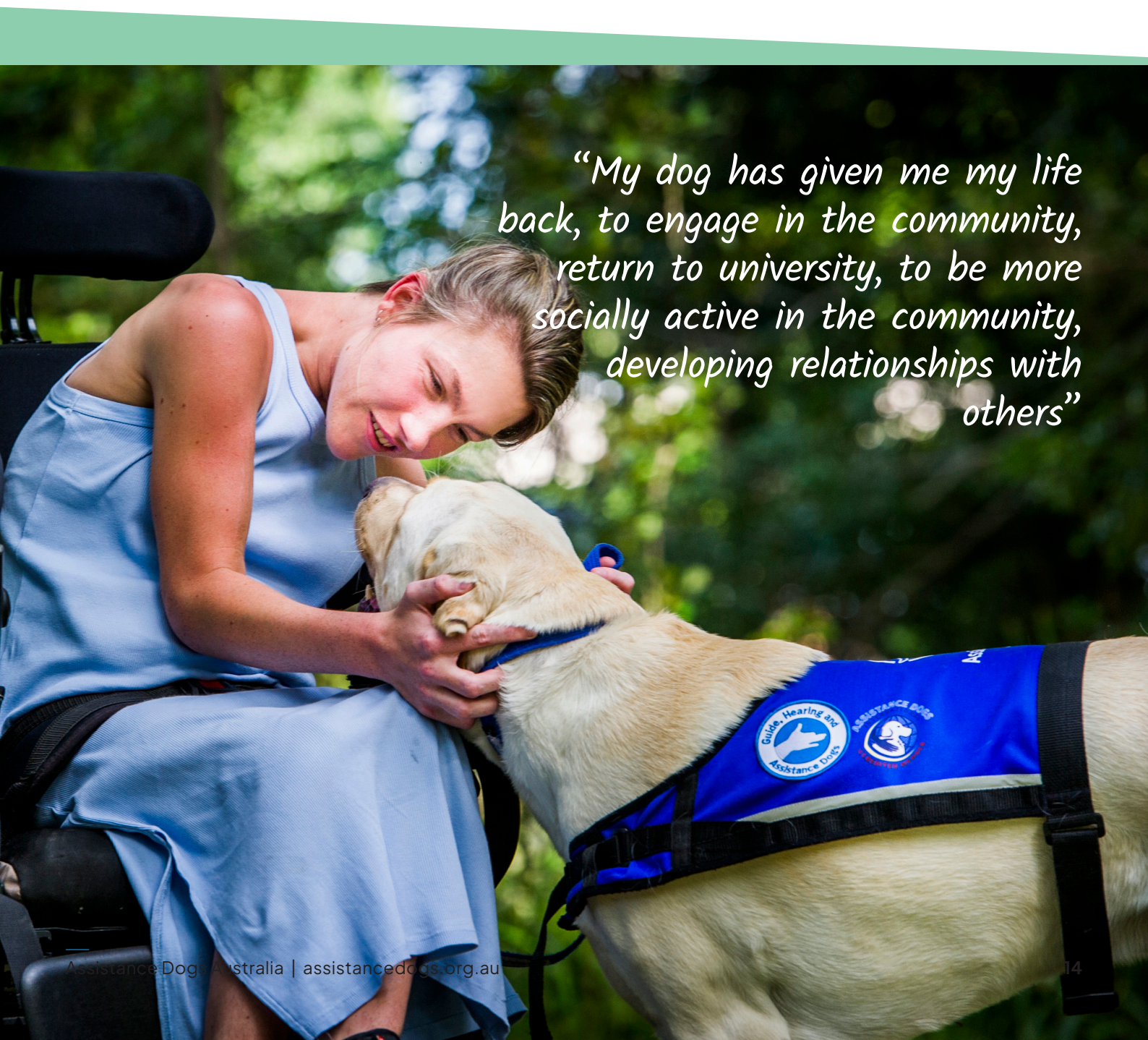
"He never would have done that a few years ago. He would have been in the corner and would have had to bring his device."

Max even went on a 12-night Scouts jamboree in Queensland without Selena – or Watson. *"He's never been away for that long, I'm really proud of him."*

Our Impact on Social Inclusion & Community Contribution

Social isolation is a common concern for people with disability. The difficulty integrating leads to less contribution in the community and a reduction in overall wellbeing.

An Assistance Dog by the side of someone with disability opens their world to improved connections, ability to access places or services, opportunities to further study or volunteer and has a positive impact on their relationships with others.



“My dog has given me my life back, to engage in the community, return to university, to be more socially active in the community, developing relationships with others”

Our Impact on Social Inclusion



56%

of respondents said they have made new friends since being supported by ADA.

38%

of respondents have undertaken volunteering since receiving an Assistance Dog.



24%

of respondents have undertaken further education since receiving their Assistance Dog.

96%

of respondents said that having an Assistance Dog had a positive impact on their family.

Connections Program

In early 2025, ADA collaboratively partnered with Happy Paws Happy Hearts to develop the Connections Program. This program utilises ADA dogs in HPHH programs whereby together we create a social inclusion hub for engagement and connection, reducing social isolation and broadening the impact of dogs for individuals with disabilities.

By leveraging the strengths of both organisations, The Connections Program provides a sustainable, dual-impact solution that directly addresses barriers faced by people with disabilities while enhancing and providing the opportunity to develop and socialize ADA puppies as part of their training to become Assistance Dogs.

The Connections Program aims to support participants on their journey of change from social isolation to social inclusion and wellbeing. Building from this, a sense of greater independence, increased connections, confidence and hope for the future, often culminating in volunteering, education, and/or employment.

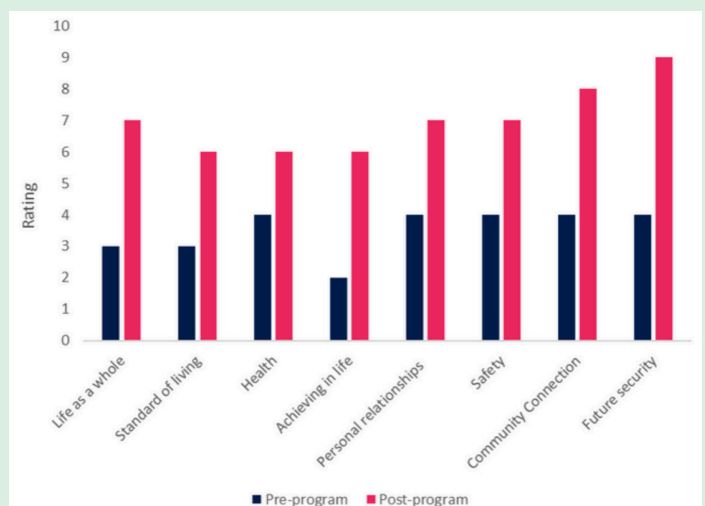
Hosted at ADA's innovative Puppy Kindergarten in Waterfall, NSW, this program integrates ADA's expertise in training Assistance Dogs with HPHH's proven success in delivering inclusive group-based programs for socially isolated Australians.

Together we collaborate to deliver the program over 12-week sessions, where participants will gain hands-on experience training assistance puppies at ADA's innovative puppy kindergarten, while gaining transferable and social skills for improved social inclusion, education and employment pathways. The program benefits both participants and puppies.



Participants were asked what they enjoyed about the Happy Paws Happy Hearts program, and how their lives have transformed since joining.

This feedback highlights the importance of the program for improving well-being and helping participants on their journey out of social isolation.



Luke & Yoyo's Story

After an almost 17-year career in the police force, Luke stopped working due to his PTSD diagnosis. Suffering from PTSD, means the outside world can be very overwhelming. Having a PTSD Assistance Dog by one's side can alleviate the pressure of daily social expectations. Before Luke was paired with Yoyo, everyday tasks seemed unimaginable but with Yoyo, his life has transformed.

For Luke, having Yoyo by his side means they can go down to the beach regularly for walks. When he takes off her jacket, she gets to run and play in the surf, "but she's always there for me and will always come back to me. It's a bit of me time for both of us."

"Going down the street for that coffee is my benchmark, because I really never did that before. She's made it easier for me to go shopping, too, because I focus on her and I don't see what's going on and what's around me."

"The focus she gives me makes all the difference because I used to be a police officer, and I used to be aware of everything that was going on."

"We just exist together. When she's wearing a jacket, people leave us alone. The few times that something that does happen, she's there to help me, even if it's just calming me down."

Luke says that there's no comparison to the life he had before and that life now is "brilliant".

He experienced mood swings and sometimes wouldn't leave the house for days. Luke has found that his temper has improved as well, when years before he didn't know he had one.

"For well over the last year or more I've just been very calm."



How do Assistance Dogs Help People with PTSD?

One of the programs that ADA has for clients with disability is providing PTSD Assistance Dogs. These dogs are trained to recognise when their handlers are re-experiencing trauma or experiencing distress, often before their handlers can feel it themselves.

Cues taught in Advanced Training (over a period of four to six months after the age of 14 months) that support people with PTSD include:

- Positioning cues, which allow the handler to position the dog as needed to create space for themselves in public or crowded places. This allows for an increased sense of security and encourages community engagement.
- Contact cues, which allow the handler to request physical contact from their dog. This facilitates grounding, mindfulness and gives them something to focus on.
- Nightmare interruption, which allows the dog to recognise signs of distress in sleep, or immediately after waking and provide support for calming down.



Support Dogs

Every ADA dog has a purpose. Whether it is to support an individual with disability through an accredited Assistance Dog with public access or a support dog providing emotional assistance, the training each dog goes through ensures it is able to perform the skills required for the role it will go on to play.

Educational Support Dogs

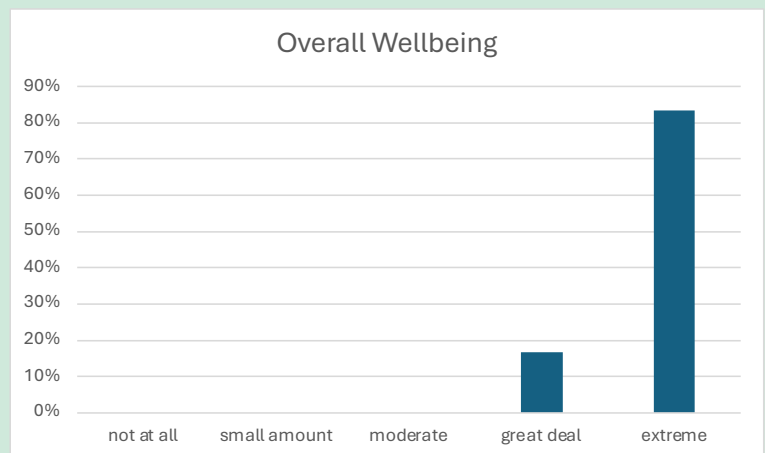
What our clients have had to say about our Educational Support Dogs:

“Having a dog in our setting, allows us to always have a way to connect with our most disconnected students”

“It’s an amazing feeling knowing that the dog’s presence has made such a positive difference to those students he works with.”

“Working as a Handler with an ADA dog in a school setting has been truly life-changing. The presence of the dog creates unique connections and breaks down barriers in ways that humans alone simply cannot. The entire school community is better off for having the dog as part of the environment. It’s hard now to imagine our school culture without a dog in it.”

Extent of Wellbeing Experienced by Educational Support Dog Clients:



Correctional Centres

We partner with correctional centres with the aim to build on the success of animal therapy within correctional environments by offering inmates the opportunity to take on full-time employment as puppy carers under the guidance of professional ADA dog trainers.

This initiative not only supports in the training of Assistance Dogs who are in high demand in the community but also equips inmates with essential skills and fosters a sense of community contribution with the opportunity to continue working with ADA post release.



The correctional centre programs aim to help reduce reoffending rates and boost community safety, while also supporting ADA in training dogs for people with post-traumatic stress disorder, physical disability and autism.

Court & Facility Dogs

What our clients have had to say about our Educational Support Dogs:

“The gratitude that people feel when they are supported by the dog constantly reminds me that running this court program is worth all the challenges.”

“Our court dog has supported hundreds of children going through stressful court processes. and helped to reduce the stress and anxiety of children giving evidence at court. Her support is immeasurable and she brings joy to what is often a very difficult process for children and their families.”

Extent of Wellbeing Experienced by Court and Facility Dog Clients:



Purposeful Placement Dogs

Whilst all ADA dogs spend time in advanced training learning over 50 skills, some because of their uniqueness are better suited to roles other than those requiring public access. Some of these dogs support educational and facility programs and others become purposeful placement dogs.

These expertly trained dogs are placed with individuals where they offer emotional and/or physical support but are not required to have public access to support their human. This unique support is provided in a home or private setting and delivers all the outcomes of an Assistance Dog; greater wellbeing, positive emotional regulation, increased social inclusion and community contribution.

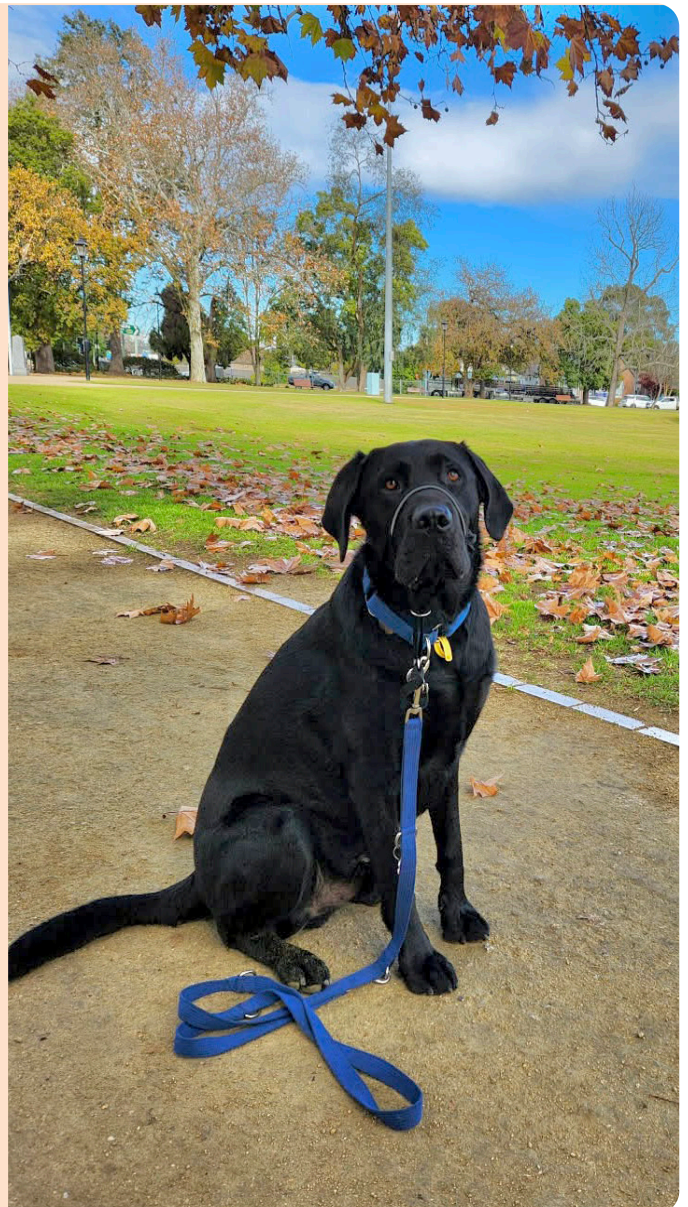
Meet Norris!

He is an intelligent, friendly boy who has been a charmer since he was just a puppy. During his time at Advanced Training, he learnt a lot and was keen to please.

Close contact skills like **visit, lap and tug** were easily put into his repertoire and often without prompting, Norris was always happy to rest his muzzle onto the lap of his handler for a gentle visit.

Norris walks beautifully on lead and regularly checks in with his handler, but he has trouble focusing and keeping his 'listening ears' on. The most exciting distractions include birds and other dogs and he had to spend a lot of time practicing being calm.

Norris completed his Advanced Training without public access rights, **but he absolutely has a purpose!** We see the power of the human-canine bond every day and know the extraordinary difference a dog can make in someone's life.





Impact of Our Volunteers

We are supported by over

400 volunteers nationwide

who care for our dogs in training from 20 weeks to around 14 months and for our brood mums and the littlest pups before they go to puppy kindergarten.



Our volunteers delivered over

80,000 hours

of support in the 12 months of 2024–25 and are a central pillar of the Assistance Dogs Australia organisation. We could not function without them.



Our volunteers receive online support and training with our field trainers, regular group discussions and dedicated team members.

Their essential role in the organisation is to raise ADA puppies and provide short term care for dogs in Advanced Training. There are a number of ways in which volunteers support ADA:

Full time Puppy Carers:

Take in puppies from our puppy kindergarten at 20 weeks of age to 12–18 months to raise them in a loving home environment. They foster the dogs and teach them basic skills with the regular support of our Puppy Trainers, who are professional trainers that catch up regularly online and in puppy classes to support the educational process.

Short Term Carers:

Look after puppies for a few days, weeks or months at a time – removing the pressure to commit to the full process. Puppy Carers also provide basic training for puppies so that their training can remain consistent as they continue their journey towards Advanced Training.

Weekend Carers:

Take care of Advanced Training dogs on weekends. Dogs are collected on a Friday afternoon and are free to play and relax with their volunteers for the weekend before being returned for another week of training on Monday morning.

Regardless of the volunteer stream one takes part in, every volunteer makes a huge impact on the lives of the puppies. Providing the love, care, socialisation and support a growing puppy needs to thrive is so rewarding and they return that care with unbridled joy and affection. We asked Puppy Carer, Julie about her experience. Together with her daughter, Kate, they have raised six puppies and have been short-term carers for a further six puppies.

Julie Shares Her Experience as a Puppy Volunteer

The best part about volunteering is knowing that our efforts will hopefully make a positive impact on someone else's life.

To us it is an incredibly rewarding and enjoyable experience – what is there to not love about building a relationship with a puppy over a 12–18-month period, where you can see the visible results of your time and energy reflected in a well-behaved and well-socialised dog?

One of the best things about ADA's Puppy Education Program is that the options they offer for volunteers. The co-raising program allows me to continue as a Puppy Carer part-time by co-raising a puppy with another family on a 3-week on/3-week off roster, which gives me the flexibility without impacting the puppy's training. Finally, one of the highlights has been the incredible friendships that we have made with our fellow volunteers.





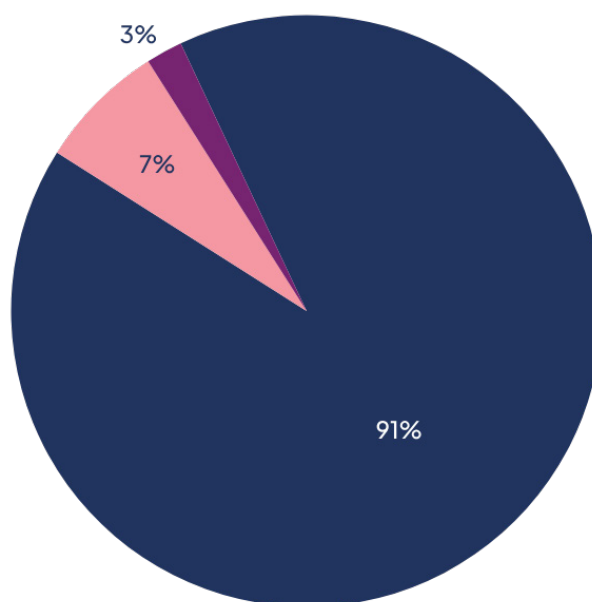
Impact of Our Ambassador Teams

Our ambassador dog teams provide ADA with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in the community supporting awareness, fundraising and volunteer recruitment. They are immensely important in educating the community about the impact our dogs have on their human.

Net Promoter score

We asked our clients if they would recommend ADA and the result was overwhelmingly positive with a **Net Promoter Score of 91%**.

- Promoters
- Detractors
- Passives



Scaling for Impact

Our future is bright. The life-changing impact our remarkable dogs have is on display every day. We have a world-class national training centre and a purpose-built innovative puppy kindergarten. We are supported by incredible volunteers and a generous community of donors.

Our goal is to support 10,000 people in 10 years through the power of the human-canine bond.

National Training Centre

We will double the number of dogs we can train in our training centre



Puppy Kindergarten

We will continue to improve dog outcomes through early socialisation training in our puppy kindergarten



Dedicated Volunteers

Our team of incredible volunteers will continue to grow to support our dogs in training to become life changing assistance dogs.



Partnerships

Our partnerships will continue to expand allowing us to deepen our impact



Get Involved

Every contribution makes a lasting impact. Whether you can help with volunteering, donating, partnering with us or working for us, we value the contribution of every individual in empowering connection, inclusion and independence for people with disability.

Volunteer with Us

Every volunteer is an important member of our community. Whether you care for a dog or volunteer in other ways, we are immensely grateful. Find out more about volunteering at

www.assisteddogs.org.au/support-us/puppy-volunteering/



Partner with Us

Our partners are incredibly important to us. They include corporate organisations, major donors, trusts and foundations and community organisations. To find out more about partnering with us visit

<https://www.assisteddogs.org.au/support-us/corporate-support/become-a-partner/>



Donate to Us

Our work is only possible thanks to the generous support of our community. To donate and create lasting impact for people with disability visit

www.assisteddogs.org.au/donate



Work with Us

We are always on the look out for exceptional people who have a passion for helping others and empowering lives. We offer a supportive environment and a rewarding career. For available job opportunities visit

www.assisteddogs.org.au/about-us/jobs/





Contact Us

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