

# 50 CANINE COMPANIONS STILL NEEDED

## Give to the paw on Assistance Dogs Australia Day

**Assistance Dogs Australia (ADA) has helped give freedom and independence to more than 150 people with physical disabilities during the past decade.**

But with each dog costing up to \$20,000 to train, a further 50 people are waiting for the support and companionship of an Assistance Dog.

Assistance Dogs Australia Day on November 30 aims to raise awareness and funds for this worthy cause. ADA together with electrical retailer, The Good Guys plan to use the funds to continue training and placing dogs with recipients nationally who have quadriplegia, cerebral palsy or paraplegia.

ADA's 'Top Dog', Richard Lord, says: "November 30 will mark the launch of The Good Guys gift card program, an exciting ongoing initiative that will see The Good Guys donate 50 cents to ADA from every gift card sold.

"Receiving an Assistance Dog is life changing for people with physical disabilities as it gives them opportunities they may not have had before," said Lord.

ADA recipient with quadriplegia, Paul Cox says: "My dog Harley has made a real difference to my independence and quality of life. It is the little things that Harley does that makes a real difference, opening doors, picking things up off the floor and with the shopping.

"My chair used to be a bit off-putting for those around me but Harley is a great ice-breaker.

People now actively come up to us to have a chat and shake Harley's paw," said Cox.

Australian Paralympian Champion and ADA Ambassador, Louise Sauvage is an avid supporter of Assistance Dog Australia, highlighting the independence ADA provides to members of our community who have a physical disability.

"Independence is one of the most important attributes that I have. It has enabled me to live my dreams, travel the world and be happy in everything I choose to do. Independence is however so often taken for granted," says Sauvage.

"That's why I believe in the work of Assistance Dogs Australia. The contribution they make to providing independence to so many lives is invaluable. Without Assistance Dogs Australia many members of the community would not have the opportunity to the quality of life they so deserve," said Sauvage.

The process in receiving a dog can be drawn out as personalities and recipient requirements need to be matched with their puppy's abilities; when a match occurs however, the result is often overwhelming.

An Assistance Dog is trained to help their recipient with everyday tasks such as opening doors, turning on light switches, pressing pedestrian buttons, picking up mobile phones and more.

The two-year training program is intense from the breeding or acquisition phase to foster puppy raising, rigorous dog training, 'team' training and annual accreditation for handlers.

The Labrador and Golden Retriever puppies are placed with volunteer foster puppy raisers for 18 months before going to the Assistance Dogs training centre for six months of intensive training.

Lord says: "We aim to place at least 30 dogs a year with disabled recipients so the financial support from the community is absolutely vital for the ongoing success of the program."



Tanya Clarke with Harry

### Tanya Clarke

Twelve years ago, at the age of 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.

Tanya became completely dependent on her parents, unable to do anything on her own. That's until Tanya meet Harry.

In January 2001 Harry became Tanya's Assistance Dog. "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," says Tanya.

Harry helps Tanya around the home. Owing to her disability, she is always dropping things such as her hairbrush, mobile phone, remote controls. Harry often only has to hear something drop and he comes to the rescue, retrieving the item and returning it to Tanya. This saves Tanya's mother a lot of time and effort running and Tanya now has her own wheelchair accessible unit in the backyard of her parent's home, with an intercom for communication. If Tanya gets into trouble and cannot access her intercom, she gets Harry to speak. Her family knows that if they hear Harry bark, she needs their help.

"For the first time I could get out of my own front door, because Harry could open it for me! I can now come and go independently without parental assistance, which makes such a difference."

The other interesting thing that Tanya has noticed is that before she got Harry she tended

to be invisible to the people around her – they bumped into her or even walked over the top of her.

Now when she is out with Harry, people notice both of them and they offer to help. She meets a lot more people as they stop to talk. She is no longer invisible.

Tanya is employed in the field of website design and development, having completed two Diplomas after her accident. In the evenings, Harry and Tanya go to the movies, concerts, nightclubs and the theatre. With Harry she is approached more and people are more comfortable in making eye contact with her, which means a lot to Tanya.

As Tanya says, "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."

### Assistance Dogs Australia background

- Assistance Dogs Australia (ADA) was established as a non-profit organisation for charitable purpose in August 1996.
- ADA places up to 30 dogs a year with people with physical disabilities such as paraplegics, quadriplegics and multiple sclerosis.
- More than 50 people are awaiting an Assistance Dog.
- All puppies are raised and trained by volunteer foster-puppy trainers.



- Each puppy costs \$20,000 to train and takes two years.
- An Assistance Dog can save the community significant money by reducing the attendant care needs of their disabled recipients.
- Puppies include Golden Retrievers, Labradors and Golden Retrievers/ Labradors crosses.
- ADA ambassadors include;
  - o Dr Katrina Warren – Vet
  - o Dr Chris Brown – Vet
  - o Louise Savage OAM - Australian Paralympian Champion
  - o Tanya Clarke – ADA recipient
  - o Tim McCallum – ADA recipient
- Assistance Dogs Australia Day is an annual event.

### Puppy raising

The Puppy Raising Program is a vital element in ADA training, preparing the puppy to become a successful, dependable and trustworthy Assistance Dog for a person with a disability.

After 18 months with the puppy raiser, the young adult dog returns to the Assistance Dogs National Training Centre for six months of specialised training.

Once trained, the dog is matched to a person with a physical disability

A two week full-time "team training" program is then completed to correctly match the dog with their new owners.

Dogs and recipients are evaluated on an annual basis to ensure that standards are maintained for the dog's working life.

### People with disabilities

The 2003 Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing & Carers showed:

- Twenty per cent of Australians have a disability.
- Approximately 93 per cent of people with disabilities (3.6 million) live in private dwellings, alone or with at least one other person.
- 79 per cent of people with disabilities living in households that need help with one or more of their daily activities receive it from partners, relatives or friends.

Just over half of those with a disability (53 per cent) received assistance from formal providers such as home-care workers and voluntary workers.

Assistance required is generally to move around or go out, shower or dress, prepare meals, do housework, light maintenance, paperwork or communicate.

The Good Guys doing 'good' in the community · In twelve months The Good Guys is aiming to raise over \$750,000 for local community organisations at a grass roots level.

In addition to their support of ADA, The Good Guys have partnered with United Way nationally to connect each of their 75 stores with local community organisations in need.

The Good Guys donate 20 cents from every transaction in every store to community organisations in addition to the 50 cents donated to ADA from each gift card sold.

**Assistance Dogs Australia Day is on November 30.**

To support Assistance Dogs Australia, visit The Good Guys and purchase a gift card. The Good Guys will donate 50 cents to Assistance Dogs Australia from every gift card sold.