



# **Autism**

## **Assistance Dog Program**

Your Autism Assistance Dog Program is designed to improve the quality of life for both your child with autism and your family through three key areas: safety, independence and inclusion.

### **Safety**

An Autism Assistance Dog can make a substantial contribution to your child's safety particularly during outings.

The dog is connected to your child via a tether that is secured to a belt around your child's waist. This allows your child to move and walk along together with the dog and with you. Should your child attempt to 'bolt', the dog is trained to resist the pull away by sitting or lying down, which provides a sensory pressure through the belt and tether to your child

This will support the safety of your child and give you time to intervene. Your child quickly learns that they are unable to abscond and the attempt to bolt is reduced or completely removed.

The dog is trained to stop at kerbs, steps and stairs and responds to vocal commands from you, such as 'left' and 'right' providing extra security for the child and support to you.

### **Independence**

An Autism Assistance Dog assists with early intervention training for independence and to manage challenging situations while reducing levels of stress and distress. The presence of the Autism Assistance Dog calms your child, distracting or preventing meltdowns and interrupting repetitive behaviour patterns before sensory overload is experienced. Life goals are individually set by parents and the team such as dealing with changes in routine, buying something at a shop, waiting in line etc

The dog can provide companionship for your child, as well as social and emotional support for the parent. Some of the family benefits reported to us include: improved quality and quantity of sleep; lower overall stress levels; increased number of outings and social interactions.

### **Inclusion**

An Autism Assistance Dog can help your child participate in social, leisure and educational activities, as well as reducing the stress associated with interacting with other people. The dog's presence may also encourage and increase social interaction between your child and his or her siblings and peers.

**Who is eligible for assistance?**

Our dogs are trained to benefit children who:

- aged between the ages of 3 and 8 years.
- have a confirmed diagnosis of Autism
- have a severe deficit in verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- have a severe impairment in functioning
- have limited to nil social interaction ability
- have severely repetitive behaviours
- have severe and frequent absconding tendencies.

There are additional criteria that parents are required to meet which are available upon application. Guide Dogs SA only offers Autism Dog Services in South Australia at the present time due to demand.

**A real sense of commitment**

Once accepted into the program, one or both parents must commit to training courses at our centre 251 Morphett Street, Adelaide and at home.

**Application and Assessment Process**

If you are interested in participating in the Autism Assistance Dog Program or have any further questions, please contact Guide Dogs SA toll free on 1800 757 738 or email [yoursupportline@guidedogs.org.au](mailto:yoursupportline@guidedogs.org.au) for an initial inquiry. Please contact us if you require further information prior to seeing your NDIS Planner.

“The biggest change is that we can leave the house for a walk without any stress or fear of danger. It’s such a relief to know he is safe. Blake has given Riley a new level of independence.” Nicole, Mother of Riley