



# FACT SHEET



**DEFENCE  
COMMUNITY  
DOGS**

## ABOUT DEFENCE COMMUNITY DOGS ASSISTANCE DOG PROGRAM

Defence Community Dogs (DCD) provides highly trained Assistance Dogs to serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members, who need physical and emotional support for mood, depressive and anxiety disorders including Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Assistance Dogs can increase independence and self-esteem and are trained to provide home support and community access support. Veterans who have received Assistance Dogs through our program have described their dogs to be a truly invaluable part of their rehabilitation. They have reported improved sleep patterns, reduced episodes of stress and anxiety, reduced reliance on medication, greater independence and a renewed ability to reconnect with family and friends. Partners and carers of recipients have also reported increased independence, and some have even been able to return to work.

*A 2018 study found that “compared with usual care alone, military members and Veterans with trained Assistance Dogs show lower PTSD symptomology, reduced depression and increased social participation.”<sup>1</sup>*

### Dog training

Every dog that enters the DCD program has been surrendered or rehomed, and must pass a strict health and temperament assessment before being accepted to undergo training.

Our dogs undertake at least 10 months – a minimum of 250 hours – of professional dog training and must pass numerous assessments in order to graduate. All training takes place in Correctional Centres with the assistance of professional dog trainers and under the guidance of one of Australia’s leading Dog Trainers, Steve Austin. Each dog is allocated to a handler for the duration of their training – a specially selected, minimum security inmate. Each dog spends 24 hours a day with their handler, who looks after all their needs – they even share a cell together.

All dogs are trained to Assistance Dog level, with training specifically focused on assisting Veterans to cope with their illnesses and injuries. This level of training equips each dog with the competencies and skills required to complete a Public Access Test (PAT), through which they ultimately attain Assistance Dog accreditation.

After dogs are placed with their Veterans, each Veteran is responsible for completing additional training in order to pass PAT requirements applicable to their state of residence.

### Handover with Veterans

Once a dog has completed its extensive training program it can be matched with a suitable and eligible Veteran. All Veterans who apply for our program complete an extensive application process and must have a medical endorsement and meet other criteria to support their application for an Assistance Dog.

Once Veterans are matched with a dog, they attend a comprehensive handover workshop at the dog’s training facility. Veterans spend eight days working with our professional trainers and program staff, learning how to correctly handle, command and care for their new Assistance Dog. This also affords Veterans an opportunity to gradually bond with their new dog under the supervision of a professional dog trainer.

(1) M. O’Haire, K Rodrigues (2018) Preliminary Efficacy of Service Dogs as a Complementary Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Military Members and Veterans. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 2018, Vol 86, No2, 179-188.



## How to support the Defence Community Dogs program

Defence Community Dogs is the only independent program in Australia that trains dogs to Assistance Dog level and provides them free-of-charge to Australian Defence Force Veterans. It costs around \$30,000 over the life of the dog to train, place and support each Assistance Dog and Veteran in our program. Please visit [dcdogs.com.au](http://dcdogs.com.au) to support our program today through a tax-deductible donation, fundraising or by making a purchase in our online shop.

For more information about our award-nominated program, please visit [dcdogs.com.au](http://dcdogs.com.au) or email us at [info@dcdogs.com.au](mailto:info@dcdogs.com.au)



## About us

The **Defence Community Dogs** program has been running since 2014, rehoming dogs, rehabilitating inmates and helping to repair the lives of Veterans. It is truly a unique Win-Win-Win program. We have successfully placed more than 55 Assistance Dogs with Veterans throughout Australia.

The **Defence Bank Foundation** is a registered independent charity with DGR status, established to support serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members. The Foundation raises funds to meet the costs of the Defence Community Dogs program. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

ABN 19 814 426 820



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*Improving the lives of Veterans. One paw at a time.*



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