

# Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program



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## Document Control

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| <b>Author:</b>         | Adelaide K9 Services.   |
| <b>Applies To:</b>     | All staff, contractors, volunteers, clients and handler/dog teams.      |
| <b>Review Cycle:</b>   | Every two (2) years, or earlier if legislation or best practice change. |

## Disclaimer

The Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program has been developed by Adelaide K9 Services to guide owners in achieving certification with their own dog. It does not guarantee successful completion of the Public Access Test, or certification of your dog. Adelaide K9 Services accepts no liability for use of this document.

## Author & Contact

### Adelaide K9 Services

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# Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program

## Introduction

The Adelaide K9 Services **Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program** has been designed to provide individuals with disabilities with the opportunity to train their own assistance dog under professional supervision.

This model addresses the national shortage of certified assistance dogs by enabling owner participation in the training process, thereby reducing costs, enhancing accessibility, and fostering stronger bonds between handlers and their dogs.

## Program Rationale

Demand for assistance dogs continues to grow due to increased recognition of their role in supporting mobility, independence, and community participation. Rising diagnoses of PTSD, autism, and other physical or psychological disabilities further highlight the need. Unfortunately, long waiting lists (often 2–3 years) and the resource-intensive nature of traditional training programs limit access.

By involving owners directly, Adelaide K9 Services offers a cost-effective, empowering alternative.

## Who is this Program For?

This program is available to individuals with disabilities as defined under the **Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)**. Eligible disabilities include physical, cognitive, sensory, and psychosocial conditions. Participants must be willing and able to contribute actively to their dog's training, supported by our professional trainers. This includes engaging in daily obedience practice, exposure to diverse environments, and ongoing care responsibilities.

## Type of Assistance Dogs

There are 5 types of assistance dogs:

- Guide Dogs,
- Hearing Dogs,
- Mobility Assistance Dogs,
- Medical Alert Dogs, and
- Psychiatric and Developmental Support dogs.

Please note owner-trained pathways are **not recommended** for those with significant **visual or hearing impairments**. Specialist organisations such as Guide Dogs Australia or Lions Hearing Dogs are better equipped to meet those specific needs.

Also at this time we are **unable to support medical alert dogs** with an olfactory (scent) component. This is a very specific skill set that requires special equipment and expertise.

# Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program

## What an Assistance Dog Does

Beyond offering comfort, assistance dogs are trained to perform disability-specific tasks.

The list of things dogs can be trained to do is extensive, and we are not able to do them all.

- Mobility support and balance assistance.
- Medical alerting (e.g., seizures, hypoglycaemia).
- Retrieving objects, opening doors, or pressing switches.
- Psychiatric support tasks such as deep pressure therapy or interrupting harmful behaviours.

## Where can an Assistance Dog Go?

Certified assistance dogs are legally recognised under Australian law and enjoy **full public access rights**, provided they meet the following criteria:

- They are trained to alleviate the symptoms of the handler's disability, and
- They meet the standard of hygiene and behaviour appropriate for a public place.

The first requirement is signed off on by your trainer, and for the second your dog needs to pass the Public Access Test (PAT), administered by the Dog and Cat Management Board.

## Dog Selection and Suitability

Any breed can become an assistance dog, but **not all dogs are suitable** for assistance dog training.

Adelaide K9 Services offers assessment of existing pet dogs or support in sourcing an appropriate candidate. Our preferred breeds include Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Cobber Dogs and other Lab / Golden crosses. They are our choice due to their temperament, intelligence, and trainability.

**Size is also a factor**, particularly if the dog is required to help pull a wheelchair, or to provide comforting pressure with its body. As is age - dogs are typically between 18 and 36 months of age when they are mature enough to sit the Public Access Test.

Our tips on dog selection:

- If you have a puppy that you intend to train as an assistance dog, we recommend you start the program right away, so we can help you avoid problem behaviours.
- If you are looking to purchase a dog, an adult dog can be a good choice as temperament and trainability are more predictable when they are older.

# Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program

## Consultation

Initial consultations are conducted in the client's home to assess suitability, identify individual needs, and determine how an assistance dog can provide support. An application will be completed prior to, or during this consult. Functional and assistive technology assessments may also be requested.

## Dog Selection & Assessment \*optional

We can help you find a dog and assess the dog's suitability or assess your current dog. The assessment involves a physical examination of the dog, as well as handling, obedience and environmental assessments.

## Foundation Training

During this phase you will learn how to train the dog, how to care for the dog, and how to keep accurate training records. Socialisation, loose leash walking and toilet training are key objectives in this phase. You will be required to walk and train the dog every day and take them to a minimum of three new places each week. The dog will learn to be calm in public, to use public transport, to walk nicely and lay down quietly at cafes and restaurants.

## Public Access Training

In this phase we prepare you, and your dog, to sit the Public Access Test. This will involve regular outings to shopping centres, cafes, restaurants as well as walking in busy streets and using public transport. We will desensitise your dog to stairs, escalators and lifts - as well as other dogs, people and food distraction. As the owner you must complete the PAT with your dog, we can't do it for you.

## Advanced Training

In this phase the dog will learn specific tasks that will alleviate the symptoms of your disability. Things your dog may learn during this phase include mobility assistance, alerting to medical situations, picking things up, opening doors, and psychiatric support (e.g. comforting body pressure).

# Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program

## Program Exit Points

Despite our best efforts not all dogs will become Assistance Dogs. Training for the role is challenging, time consuming and expensive. For these reasons we have three levels at which your dog may exit the program.



### Pet Plus:

The Pet Plus level represents a well-trained dog that completes foundational obedience and some environmental training. These dogs make excellent family pets, with reliable behaviours, such as loose leash walking, and basic obedience.



### Therapy Dog:

While not officially recognised no one can deny that dogs are good therapy. We provide additional training to help them bring comfort, companionship, and emotional support to their person. A Therapy Dog may alleviate stress, anxiety, and isolation, and may be allowed in some private settings with permission.



### Assistance Dog:

A Certified Assistance Dog has reached the highest level of training; they have met rigorous standards for behaviour and have been trained to alleviate the symptoms of their handler's disability. With full public access rights under Australian law, Assistance Dogs can accompany their handlers in most areas where the public can go.

# Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program

## Costs

| Expense                       | Description   | Cost                | Time                          | Total               |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Initial Purchase</b>       | Locate, assess and transport the dog from point of sale to you.   | Varies              | Varies                        | Call Us             |
| <b>Foundation Training</b>    | In this phase you will learn how to manage the dog and condition the dog in foundational obedience.             | Individual<br>\$199 | 6 – 12 sessions               | \$1,200 to \$2,400  |
|                               |   | Group<br>\$89       | 6 – 12 sessions               | \$530 to \$1,060    |
| <b>Public Access Training</b> | In this phase we focus on social skills, environmental & preparing you and your dog for the Public Access Test. | Individual<br>\$199 | 6 - 52 sessions               | \$1,200 to \$10,400 |
|                               |   | Group<br>\$89       | 6 - 52 sessions               | \$530 to \$1,060    |
| <b>Advanced Training</b>      | In this phase we will condition the dog in role specific tasks to alleviate your disability.                    | \$250               | 6 - 12 sessions               | \$1,500 to \$3,000  |
|                               |   | <b>Total</b>        | 18 – 76 sessions              | \$2,560 to \$15,800 |
| <b>Ongoing</b>                | Ongoing costs of food, veterinary care, equipment, training & insurance.  |                     | Varies but allow \$5,000 year |                     |

## Why does the cost vary so much?

Because every dog, and handler are different! The overall cost is dependent on a number of factors, including: the age and temperament of the dog, the amount of training the dog has had, and your ability to train the dog. Also, if you need individual lessons, they are more expensive.

**Group Foundation** and **Public Access** classes will keep the cost down, if you are unable to attend group classes (for any reason) you will need individual classes.

**Group Classes** cost \$89 per week.

**Individual Training** cost \$199 per session.

**Advanced Training** cost \$250 per session.

## Funding options

NDIS funding for an Assistance Dog is difficult to get because there are other assistive technologies that are more cost effective than a dog, so funding is rarely an option. Most clients are self-funded.

## Remote Clients

We offer the program remotely throughout **South Australia** and **New South Wales**. Remote clients will benefit from access to our training plans, and weekly Zoom coaching.

# Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program

## Our Team



### Scott Corcoran Dip CBST, CBCC – KA

Scott is our Managing Director, a graduate of the Companion Animal Sciences Institute, with a Diploma of Canine Behaviour Science Technology, and is also a Certified Behaviour Consultant Canine – Knowledge Assessed, by the Certification Council of Professional Dog Trainers. He specializes in behaviour modification.



### Vanessa Owens BSc (Animal Behaviour) (Hons)

Vanessa Owens has 20 years' experience in animal behaviour and training, across a wide range of roles and species.

She complements this experience with a Bachelor of Science majoring in behaviour, ecology and zoology. She is currently studying her Cert IV in Animal Behaviour (Assistance Dogs). Specialising in advanced training Vanessa brings knowledge, compassion and professionalism to the team.



### Jim Killen

Jim is passionate about helping others, and loves dogs, qualities that have seen him excel as a puppy raiser for Guide Dogs Australia for 15 years. Jim is one of the most prolific and successful puppy raisers ever!

He consults with Adelaide K9 Services on a wide range of behaviour including assistance dog selection and development.

## Want to learn more?

Phone: 0413 067 769

Email: [scott@adelaidek9.com.au](mailto:scott@adelaidek9.com.au)

Web: <https://www.adelaidek9.com.au/assistance-dog-program/>

# Owner-Trained Assistance Dog Program

**DOG AND CAT  
BOARD.COM.AU**  
APPROVED

Adelaide K9 Services had our first assistance dog accredited in **South Australia** in 2025. We are on the DCMB list of approved trainers and are working toward assistance dog accreditation.



**Transport  
for NSW**

Adelaide K9 Services had our first assistance dog accredited in **New South Wales** in 2022. We are on the Transport for NSW list of approved assistance dog trainers.



