



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, 2 March 2021

VETERAN FOUNDED ORGANISATION DELIVERS FIRST ASSISTANCE DOG

THE first Psychiatric Assistance Dog trained by veterans, for veterans, has moved home with her veteran handler in Canberra.

The veteran founded not-for-profit specialist service, Integra Service Dogs Australia, helps veterans manage their post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and has delivered its first dog under the Federal Government's Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester welcomed Belle to the ranks of these amazing assistance dogs who are helping change the lives of veterans and their families.

"Belle will be an amazing help to her veteran handler, Ben Jones," Mr Chester said.

"The dogs provided through this program, like Belle, play an important role for veterans and their families living with PTSD as they are trained to the individual needs of their veteran and perform specific tasks to help them with their recovery and general wellbeing."

As Belle and Mr Jones have completed their intensive training program and passed the Public Access Test, they will now spend each day together. The bond formed during Integra's training program means that Belle has insight into Mr Jones' condition and knows his unique triggers allowing him to reclaim his place in the community and rebuild his life.

"I have greatly appreciated the professionalism and support provided by Integra. They have worked closely with me to match me with a highly suitable and intelligent Labrador and developed us as a bonded team," Mr Jones said.

Mr Chester said this was a life changing program for so many veterans managing PTSD as part of their ongoing mental health plan.

"These dogs have such a profound impact on the day-to-day lives of our veterans and it is so encouraging to hear the stories of success and of veterans overcoming challenges with their dogs by their sides," Mr Chester said.

"Thank you for your service Ben. I wish you and Belle all the very best on your journey together."

Integra joined three other organisations as a provider of psychiatric assistance dogs in early August 2020 and they have since supported veterans through the matching, placement and training of these amazing companions. Belle is the first of four Integra dogs to pass their Public Access Test and take up residency with their veteran handlers this month.

Twenty-one psychiatric assistance dogs have now passed their intensive training program across the four providers and are helping veterans every day, and an additional 89 dogs are in training across Australia.

Eligible veterans who have a diagnosis of PTSD can access the Psychiatric Assistance Dog program, by contacting the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). Veterans currently accessing treatment for PTSD may wish to speak to their mental health professional to see if a psychiatric assistance dog would be a suitable adjunct to treatment. For more information, visit the Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program page on DVA's website at www.dva.gov.au/dogs.

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