

PAWS at Warrigal



Bec (left) and John Evers on a visit. Joyce Garland (centre) looks forward to seeing Harry

JOHN EVERS AND his daughter Bec have been at Warrigal Care weekly for some five years, accompanied by Harry. Harry is a Border Collie/Kelpie cross, and did his time as a farm dog. But now, as an accredited member of PAWS Pet Therapy, he is among those pets of all sorts which bring joy to the residents of Warrigal. "It makes everyone happy to be able to give Harry a pat," Bec says. "I'm glad to be able to give something back to the community, and I enjoy talking to the residents."

John, Bec and Harry meet people throughout Warrigal. Heather Peacock, Activities Officer, welcomes their visits. "The residents love it and look forward to it", she explains, adding that even visually impaired people love to pat Harry, even if they can't see him. Bundanoon personality Joyce Garland agrees: "It's wonderful Harry comes to see us," she says, "and he gives us much pleasure and joy." Harry often gets something out of it too, from residents like Pat Wells. Pat meets Harry every week, and always has a biscuit for him.

Harry goes on individual visits, in both high- and low-care areas, and also meets groups where appropriate. When some 90% of residents have once had a dog of their own, his presence makes for a

welcome and reassuring time together.

John, Bec and Harry are able to give them that for about two hours every Tuesday, and to chat with the residents as well, which John, like Bec, enjoys.

John, a retired veterinarian, has been in Bundanoon for eight years. He became aware of the PAWS program because Bec knew about it, and so Harry was taken for his training. This was a six week program run by a specialised dog trainer, and held near Mittagong, with six other dogs on the course as well. When Harry visits he looks the part with his purple "PAWS Pet Therapy" scarf around his neck.

PAWS is a not-for-profit organization based in Thirlmere, and is able to offer its services across Sydney, and in the Southern Highlands and Illawarra areas. Its program is staffed by volunteers, and as its Mission Statement says, sets out "to train and support volunteers to carry out safe, enjoyable pet assisted therapy visits to people with a range of needs, and to promote the benefits and magic of pet assisted therapy." Warrigal residents seem to agree that indeed, "magic" is not too strong a word.

Not all the dogs are like Harry. PAWS dogs come in all shapes and sizes, and meet people of all ages, across a remarkable range of needs. From reducing the stress for children struggling with reading difficulties, to supporting people dealing with mental illness or other serious medical problems, they are able to bring joy and reassurance.

There's more about the PAWS program on their website pawspettherapy.com. They remain on the lookout for volunteers, and if your dog is putting his paw up, the details are all there.

—Geoff McCubbin

Pat Wells with Harry

