



Media Info

Paws Pet Therapy

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Follow the PAWS story @

www.pawspettherapy.com

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Charity Status

Paws Pet Therapy is a registered charity endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient by the Australian Taxation Department. Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

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The story of PAWS began in earnest in 2012 when Sharon Stewart recognised, and decided to meet, the needs of her community by establishing Paws Pet Therapy.

Sharon has always had a love of animals and with her background both as a registered nurse and her broad experience working with people with additional needs, she was well placed to start the foundations of what has become a well-respected nonprofit providing pet assisted therapy to a range of people in various settings.

From its early inception at the Southern Highlands Cancer Centre, where chemotherapy patients were greeted by Sharon's Siberian Husky and PAWS "foundation dog" Zep, PAWS has continued to grow and now has more than 100 trained volunteer teams registered.

Our wonderful community of trained volunteers now visit over 200 facilities and schools across NSW, bringing the magic of pet assisted therapy to people with a range of needs, from loneliness to cancer, from anxiety to dyslexia.

PAWS volunteers come to us from a range of backgrounds with many & varied skills but the one thing they all share is a love of their dog and their desire to help those in need in their community.

The Paws Pet Therapy Team



"I am enormously proud of what Paws Pet Therapy has achieved and am excited about our future."

Founder & CEO – Sharon Stewart

I have always had a love of animals. Growing up in Camden and working from a young age in stables with dressage and show horses, provided the opportunity to work with the first Riding for the Disabled group in NSW. My early working career was in nursing, training at Marsden Hospital, Westmead, and becoming an RN in 1985. For 30 years I worked with people with disability, high needs, and challenging behaviors, both in residential/clinical settings and in the community.

I took my first steps in pet therapy, training with my dog Zep, a Siberian Husky who was to become the first Paws Pet Therapy dog. Zep and I visited nursing homes and special schools where I could see the real difference that dogs could make to people's lives; I was hooked!

Recognising a huge need for a professional pet therapy service in the Southern Highlands, in 2012 Paws Pet Therapy was created and in 2014 I left full-time employment and registered PAWS Pet Therapy as a charity. The rest, as they say, is history!

We have a fantastic team of dedicated people who work hard to maintain a professional and respected charitable organisation; our volunteer teams, board and office staff all have one common goal - to help dogs make people happy.

Office Manager – Nadine Koszka

Nadine has the all-important role of setting in motion the visits that our volunteers and amazing dogs go out on. Even though she is fairly new to the PAWS family, joining at the beginning of October 2023, she has already come to love the special role pet therapy plays in the lives of so many.

Seeing firsthand the joy, comfort and even happy tears our volunteers and their dogs make is just so rewarding! The PAWS family is one I hope to be a part of for many years to come and I look forward to heading out with a special dog of my own very soon!

Volunteer Management & Liaison – Christina Bakker

Christina first came across PAWS when reading an interview with Sharon. Its message struck a chord and after a call to the PAWS office she was hooked. By the end of the day, she had signed up to begin her volunteering journey with her beautiful dog Pepper Potts.

Sadly, Pepper is no longer with Christina but luckily for us she has joined the PAWS office in a new role, assisting aspiring and existing PAWS teams with bringing the magic of pet assisted therapy to their communities. She has also welcomed Dave the energetic Sheepadoodle to her family and more recently to the PAWS team.



Coordinator Children's Programs – Lisa McKay

After a stint of over 7 years with PAWS followed by a short break due to personal reasons Lisa is back as the Coordinator of Children's Programs.

Having struggled herself at school with reading Lisa is passionate about supporting Children's Programs which bring learning opportunities and dogs together. From a background in libraries and now in Schools as an SLSo she can see there is still a lot of work to do. And what better way to make learning fun than time spent with a dog!

The Paws Committee

As we go about our busy days, washing dogs, preparing gear and paperwork, and visiting our special clients, we may not always notice what is going on “behind the scenes” at PAWS Pet Therapy. Like a duck in water, we look calm on top, but are swimming frantically below the surface, just to stay afloat.

PAWS Pet Therapy is in a significant period of growth and expansion, and it takes an army of people to ensure our service is top quality and professional. We would like to introduce you to the Paws Pet Therapy Committee for 2021.



President – Russell Stewart



It may be said that Russell’s association with PAWS was inevitable. As the husband of founder and CEO Sharon, he has been there for all the ups and downs, tears, and drama in starting up a fledgling nonprofit.

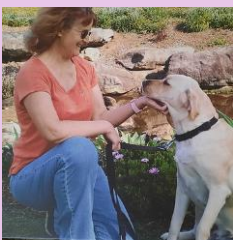
Russell proudly served with the Royal Australian Navy before working as an electrician, later starting his own successful and respected electrical business serving the mining industry.

When he is not busy working as a project manager, Russell pops on the PAWS uniform to help the PAWS cause.

Committee Members



John Durbridge joined the PAWS committee in 2016 bringing considerable fundraising and networking skills with him. Having personally experienced the beauty of a PAWS visit, John is now a dedicated advocate for everything we do. Starting his working life in the Police he is currently the Campus Security Manager at Macquarie University. John’s generosity and spirited love of PAWS makes him an integral member of the team.



Megan Flood’s journey with PAWS as a dedicated volunteer alongside her beloved Labrador, Leona. Through her volunteer work Megan has gained firsthand understanding of the challenges and rewards of volunteering making her an invaluable asset to the Committee. Megan’s dedication and pride in being part of PAWS have shone through in all her contributions, and in 2022, her efforts were recognised when she was awarded the prestigious ZEP Award for Volunteering Excellence.



David Muller alongside his wonderful rescue dog Bronix have been volunteering at various facilities since mid-2023. Volunteering has always been a significant part of David’s life. After losing his wife to cancer in 2008, he began supporting the Macarthur Cancer Therapy Centre through committee roles with the 24-Hour Fight Against Cancer Macarthur. His passion for helping others continues to drive his involvement with PAWS, where he and Bronix form a strong team bringing smiles and joy to those who need it most. He also enjoys assisting at assessment days, offering tips and support to new volunteers. In recognition of his volunteering efforts, he was honoured to receive the ZEP Award for Volunteering Excellence in 2024.

PAWS dogs & people...

something special

JACK

"I'm not well, I'm not well today!"...at this point Jack poked his head through the door as he could feel she needed a visit. She almost leapt out of bed and was so happy to have a pat and cuddle. It was at this moment I felt the enormity of what PAWS does!

PAWS volunteer - Michelle



Harvey and Ally joined the PAWS team in 2012. In Ally's words she..."*totally underestimated how much we would both love volunteering with Paws...being such a big dog he is used to getting down low, so he is not intimidating to small people but since we have been assigned to aged care, he has learnt sitting up straight with the older generation earns him more pats! The effect he has on the dementia patients makes my heart sing.*"

PAWS volunteer - Ally

HARVEY



"Sarge and I completed the Paws training late last year and were excited to be offered weekly visits to Cumberland Hospital, a mental health facility, at the beginning of this year. We were allocated a specific ward that has long term clients but also serves as a day stay ward. It wasn't long before Sarge made an impression on the ward and is now affectionately known as 'their' ward dog.

When we arrive, there is usually a congregation of people waiting at the door for his arrival, it is so lovely to have a fan club waiting for him. Sarge has made clients laugh, reminiscing about their dog, his plain goofiness or his silly antics and he has also made them cry, happy tears, release tears and sad tears –which is great to let these emotions out, somehow he just knows to sit quietly beside his friend and let them have their moment, I mean who doesn't need a shoulder to cry on occasionally."

PAWS volunteer - Carolyn

SARGE



About our service...

PAWS trains & supports volunteers and their dogs to deliver a safe and professional pet therapy service to people with a range of special needs, in hospitals, supported accommodation, community groups and other health and educational settings. Our volunteers have all successfully completed the comprehensive Paws Pet Therapy training course, which covers best practices for pet therapy, WH&S, hygiene and basic dog health, training, and management. We currently have over 100 active teams, providing over 160 hours of service every month. Since our earliest days we have trained over 500 teams.

Paws Pet Therapy has strict standards of hygiene and visit protocol, and our service meets or exceeds the standards outlined by NSW Health and the facilities we visit including COVID safe practices. All PAWS volunteers are Police checked and have Working with Children Checks.

Our PAWS dogs are veterinarian checked for temperament, health, and obedience, and are assessed for their ability to socialize and engage, obey commands, and safely visit people with a range of health and behavioural conditions, in unfamiliar environments. They are also vaccinated to C7 standard. Paws Pet Therapy volunteers have the skills and knowledge needed to tailor visits to meet the unique needs of their clients. Our volunteers understand that people have specific needs, and will ensure that everyone is included, and everyone benefits from interaction with their friendly, healthy, and loving dog.

Our PAWS teams are trained and ready to support people in their community. Here are a few of the programs we support...

General Therapy visits by a loving dog and their caring owner can be designed to support a wide variety of health needs – from mental health, university wellbeing programs and rehabilitation to aged care, Cancer Centre or hospital visits we have it covered.

Paws 'n' Tales is a literacy program with a difference. Based around the unconditional and nonjudgmental love of a dog, the program for 4–8-year old's encourages a love of reading and books for reluctant readers.

Mate @ the Gate is a program designed to help children who are challenged with their school transition. It is amazing the difference a friendly face & wagging tail at the start of the day can make.

School Wellbeing visits are tailored to the needs and age of students. Dogs help support students in reducing anxiety, encouraging school participation and attendance, teaching empathy, encouraging social engagement with peers...and much more.



Learn More...





Frequently asked questions

What is a Therapy dog?

A therapy dog is trained along with their handler to provide psychological or physiological support to individuals or groups in the community. They provide various therapeutic benefits to a diverse range of people including children and the elderly by providing comfort, companionship, and support.

What is the difference between a therapy and assistance dog?

An assistance dog provides support to a person with a disability and is often a member of the household. They are trained to assist in a specific way, depending on the person's need, for example Guide Dogs. A therapy dog works with its handler to provide therapeutic support in a range of settings with their work restricted to a timed therapy session.

How do you become a volunteer?

A PAWS volunteer must complete a course of study with us and participate in a training day where we assess them and their dog in different situations and settings. We ask that our volunteers present themselves in a clean and tidy manner and expect them to always conduct themselves in a way that reflects the core values of PAWS Pet Therapy.

How many volunteer teams do PAWS support?

We currently have 105 trained teams with over 70 actively engaged in regular visits. We are recruiting new volunteers all the time and are open for applications from people in all areas of NSW and interstate.

Does PAWS operate in other states of Australia?

At this stage we operate predominantly in NSW. We are currently developing our regional program so that we can train teams and support people in regional NSW. We are also taking expressions of interest from facilities in other states and from those seeking volunteering opportunities.

Are PAWS dogs a particular breed?

No! We accept all breeds or cross breeds of dogs (unless they are a restricted breed) and welcome animals and humans from all walks of life. We are an inclusive and diverse organisation. On application volunteers are interviewed extensively about their dog's suitability.

Do you charge facilities for visits?

Yes. We charge facilities \$80.00 plus GST for a visit by a professionally presented, insured, and supported team. This cost helps cover things like insurance, operational costs, recruitment, training etc. We mostly rely on generous donations from our supporters to operate.

How is Paws Pet Therapy funded?

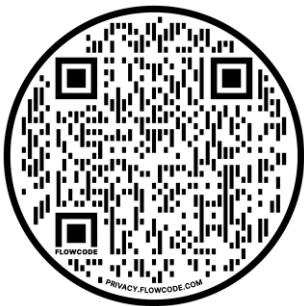
Paws Pet Therapy relies on donations and fundraising events as well as government grants and private sponsorship to operate. We also charge a small fee to our facilities. A (once only) cost for the PAWS course, kit and training is partly covered by the volunteers themselves.

How many paid staff work for Paws Pet Therapy?

There are four paid staff in the **PAWS** office working various part-time hours. Sharon Stewart works full time as CEO and Founder of PAWS, Nadine Kosztko, Christina Bakker, and Lisa McKay work together from our head office in Orangeville to keep the wheels running smoothly and the good times rolling.

Media

The PAWS tale is special and there are many stories we would love to share with you. To get you started on the PAWS journey we encourage you to visit our website, Facebook, and Instagram pages. Scan the code to check out the latest PAWS images along with more testimonials from our volunteers and clients.



For all media enquiries or to book an interview please contact Sharon Stewart 0418 869 181

