

# Happiness is a best friend like Teddy

Madilyn McKinley

THE saying goes that a dog is a man's best friend, but for a Baranduda resident, his pet means a little more.

Chris Reeves was scrolling on social media when he came across a post advertising assistance dogs. Although he had never had one, he knew that it could change his life.

The veteran has hypervigilance from his service, but since gaining his own assistance dog Teddy more than two years ago, life has been a little bit easier.

"(He has helped me with) Everything. With everything, even my mood. He improves my mood. I'm a lot happier now. Leonie could probably contest to that," he said.

Mr Reeves' wife Leonie has seen the positive impact of having Teddy around.

"He goes to the shops with Chris and he takes his focus off what's going on around him so that he can focus on the dog instead," she said.

"Teddy's also heavy, so he can be a weighted blanket. He creates conversation and stops loneliness and isolation.

"So because of mental health and things, he creates conversation because he's so pretty. When we're out in public, everybody stops to have a chat and talk about the dog and what goes on."

The now three-year-old Australian shepherd was provided to Mr Reeves by Dogs For Life, which is seeking dedicated foster families in the Albury-Wodonga community.

"It was only by chance I travelled down to Melbourne for a training session down to Southland (shopping centre) and there was a lab there and Teddy arrived," he said.

"And I just took him for a walk and me and him just gelled. He stayed by my side. He responded and I just said, 'yeah, I'll have him'. He went into intensive training for two weeks before he was handed over to me."

The Baranduda resident is the fourth veteran in Australia to receive an assistance dog through the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

He says there are strict conditions with having an assistance dog.

"When he's got his jacket on, he's in work mode. When he's got the jacket off, he can relax. Not so much that he can be a normal dog," he said.

"We can't play games with him. We can't do tug-of-war. He can't show any dominant traits or anything. Also, he can't bark, he can't go to the toilet in the backyard, because that can (be seen as) marking his territory."

Teddy cannot have human food and isn't allowed in kitchens, but he does sleep on the Reeves' bed at night.



Teddy the assistance dog has changed Craig Reeves' life in every way. Picture by Mark Jesser

Assistance dogs abide by the same laws that guide dogs do, however Mr Reeves finds that he is constantly pulling out his paperwork to prove that Teddy is one.

Taking Teddy out can sometimes be a challenge.

"I get questions all the time," he said.

"Bunnings is a big issue at the moment because they've just allowed dogs on lead in Bunnings. So I've got to avoid the dogs in Bunnings now because they're untrained. They could attack Teddy. And if Teddy gets attacked, that's his work life over."

Mr Reeves said assistance dogs should not be mistaken for emotional support animals and require extensive training.

"He has to pass the test every year, the PAT test, the Public Access Test. So they range between seven to 10 years in working life, and then I have the choice whether to retire him with us or retire him with another family," he said.

Dogs For Life provided the couple with extensive training during the handover process, and continue to be a point of call for any questions.

The soft and fluffy dog that is Teddy also has a cheeky personality.

**They want to give somebody a life. That's what it is. Giving somebody an opportunity of a life, somebody who can't do something, who is powerless. The dog enables them to become empowered**

Dogs For Life director Kevin Picker

"Normally he's very placid. Get the jacket off and he does get his zoom zooms on," Mr Reeves said with a laugh.

Mr and Mrs Reeves are grateful for the Dogs For Life program and the foster family that raised Teddy.

"Very appreciative of their work, obviously, that the person's done with Teddy and we appreciate how hard it would be giving him up

at 12 months old with the bond that they've created," Mrs Reeves said.

The Dogs For Life foster program involves receiving ongoing support from trainers on a regular basis. All training equipment, food and medical bills are covered.

Dogs For Life director Kevin Picker said the program was looking for foster families who were ready to make a difference.

"They want to give somebody a life. That's what it is. Giving somebody an opportunity of a life, somebody who can't do something, who is powerless. The dog enables them to become empowered," he said.

The foster families have the responsibility of socialising the puppy in its first 12 months of life, but most importantly, loving them.

"The puppy is the same as a baby. They cannot become afraid of children. They cannot become afraid of the sun. They cannot be afraid of a truck," he said. "If you think that this dog is going to go everywhere ... with their handler, that dog has got to be completely comfortable in all environments and has to have a very solid upbringing. And that's the role of the foster families."

For more information visit [dogsforlife.com.au](http://dogsforlife.com.au).

 Regional Angel  
Investor Network™

**Interested in early stage investing?** Become a member of Regional Angels

