

## Mate@theGate School Information

We are thrilled to introduce you to this wonderful program designed to provide support and assistance to children as they navigate the transition from home to school. One of our friendly teams comprising a caring handler and their loving dog can greet a designated child/children near the gate of the school or in the office, offering a comforting presence and a helping paw as they make their way to class. Mate@theGate aims to alleviate anxiety, foster positive social interactions, and ease the transition into the classroom environment. With a focus on calming techniques, gentle distraction, and positive reinforcement, our program is particularly well-suited to assist children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other conditions, offering valuable support in adjusting to changing circumstances. We look forward to creating a welcoming and supportive environment for all students as they embark on their educational journey!

The program was created with the aim of assisting young individuals in schools who are dealing with a variety of mental health challenges and social anxiety issues:

- Assistance with transitioning from the car to the school gate and into the classroom environment.
- Support for children experiencing anxiety, which may manifest as symptoms such as loss of appetite, stomach upsets, or difficulty sleeping.
- Helping children overcome social interaction challenges, allowing them to reach their full learning potential.
- Providing aid for those struggling to engage effectively with peers.
- Addressing school avoidance and increasing school attendance through gentle encouragement and companionship.
- Managing sudden emotional outbursts, tantrums, or 'meltdowns' with calming techniques and positive reinforcement.
- Supporting children who are preoccupied or find it challenging to concentrate, fostering a conducive learning environment.
- Offering support for children with a range of mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Conduct Disorder (CD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Tourette Syndrome, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), and Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

### Who is the program designed for?

- The program is primarily tailored for children of primary school age.
- Referrals to the program mainly originate from teachers, support staff, or healthcare professionals engaged in a child's education.
- The program is beneficial for children and young people who may be experiencing disability, mental health conditions, or changes in personal circumstances, including trauma.
- While our primary focus is on primary school-aged children, we recognise that each young person is unique, develops at their own pace, and has evolving needs. Therefore, we can accommodate individuals of other ages, understanding that needs and circumstances may change over time.

## Financial details

- You can enjoy the benefits of visits by a therapy dog team tailored for student's needs, where you only pay \$88 per visit, GST included, for the visits you schedule. Visit duration is one to one and half hours at the volunteer's discretion based on their dog's wellbeing.
- Visits are invoiced monthly. Please let us know if an alternative arrangement is required.

## Paperwork

Our volunteer teams:

- Have completed the Paws Pet Therapy Course and successfully passed at a PAWS assessment and training day.
- Include PAWS dogs who have been vet approved for health and temperament.
- Have a current Police Check (3-year renewal).
- Have a current WWCC Check (5-year renewal).
- Have been double COVID vaccinated.
- Include dogs who are on a current health regime, are washed within 24 hours of their visit and have current vaccination to the highest standard for their state.
- Are covered by current Public Liability Insurance.
- Will display PAWS signage at the office during visits to denote the presence of a dog.

## On enquiry

Much of the success in the program comes from careful planning. On enquiry you will be asked to:

- Complete a Facility Application Form where you are invited to provide any information that will help us meet your student's learning needs. Please provide as much information as possible including your preferred days and times for visits.
- We will then endeavour to find a suitable team for your school.

## Prior to commencement, once we have matched a suitable team to your school we will:

- Confirm details of the visit including organising a suitable start date.
- Provide a Statement of Documentation for the volunteer team verifying currency of required paperwork.
- Provide a team photo, Visit Commencement Summary and the PAWS document, Visits to Children's Services for you to read.
- Provide a risk assessment for you to approve and sign.
- Provide our volunteer with specific details relating to your goals and requirements.
- A PAWS representative will give you a call to discuss visit protocols.

## Before commencing the visits, we kindly ask that you consider the following guidelines:

Please note all interactions are controlled by the volunteer handler. These visits are suited to small groups with interactions occurring on a one-to-one basis. The volunteer handler will provide participants with guidelines regarding interacting with their dog safely.

- It is essential to plan specifics. Please designate a consistent contact person and establish a sign-in procedure.

- Determine the location for visits, ensuring supervision by a school staff member with continuous line-of-sight during interactions.
- An ideal starting point for visits would be slightly away from the gate or at the office, where a supervising staff member can oversee all interactions.
- Select participating students and communicate their needs to the volunteer team.
- Consider how the program could integrate into other school initiatives such as reading programs.
- Determine how to communicate the presence of the team to all students, staff, and parents.
- Establish ground rules with all involved students, including guidelines for interacting with the dog, ensuring dog safety, and explaining the purpose of the therapy team's presence at the school. Our document, "Guidelines for PAWS Pet Therapy Visits to Children's Services," provides assistance in this regard.
- Prepare for managing crowd control. Handlers will promptly remove themselves and their dog if they feel overwhelmed.
- Children will be offered hand gel before and after interactions with the dog. Please inform the volunteer if this is not suitable for individual participants. They will be requested to wash their hands instead.
- Coordinate visit timing considering assembly schedules, breaks, and other scheduled activities.
- Inform about any allergies, fears of dogs, or other pertinent information that volunteers should be aware of.

### Coordinated children's programs

- We have noticed that school-based children's programs frequently share objectives, with no single program fully addressing all student or group needs. Within school settings, Mate@theGate might be integrated into broader initiatives like Paws'n'Tales or overall wellbeing sessions. In such cases, PAWS will offer support and guidance to the school on how to effectively integrate these elements to achieve more comprehensive goals or to fulfill specific requirements.

Let's make school a 'pawsitive' experience with our furry friends leading the way!