



Justice
Juvenile Justice



MEDIA RELEASE

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ASSISTANCE DOGS GRADUATE FROM TRAINING AT FRANK BAXTER JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTRE IN KARIONG

Today marked the graduation of “General” and “Cossie”, two black Labradors that were trained by young offenders inside Frank Baxter Juvenile Justice Centre to become Assistance Dogs for people with disabilities, said Acting Executive Director of Juvenile Justice NSW, Denise Hanley.

“For 6 months, “General” and “Cossie” have undertaken Assistance Dog training inside our juvenile justice centre in Kariong. The dogs were trained by 3 young offenders as part of the Pups in Prison Program, a partnership between the NSW Government and Assistance Dogs Australia,” said Ms Hanley.

“The partnership with Assistance Dogs Australia first began in early 2009.

“At that time it was the first program of its kind to be run in a state-run juvenile detention centre anywhere in the world.

“The 3 detainees who helped to train these pups were carefully selected to be a part of the program.

“As a result, they have developed skills that will assist in their rehabilitation such as improved communication and team work.

“They have also improved their self-esteem and developed a sense of responsibility as well as patience, compassion and cooperation,” said Ms Hanley.

Richard Lord, Chief Executive Officer, Assistance Dogs Australia, said, “The Pups in Prison Program is beneficial to everyone involved.

“Raising and training puppies in prisons helps us to place more Assistance Dogs with people on our waiting list, while simultaneously helping the detainees learn new skills and changing the overall atmosphere in the prison setting.

“It is a win-win for everyone.”

ENDS

**MEDIA: Craig Wharton, Juvenile Justice NSW: (02) 8346 1355
Laura Catherall, Assistance Dogs Australia: 0401 508 407**

BACKGROUND

The puppies were named after Patron of Assistance Dogs Australia, and one of Australia's most senior military officers, Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove, in a ceremony at Admiralty House in Sydney with detainees and staff from Frank Baxter in attendance.

Assistance Dogs Australia created the Pups in Prison Program with Corrective Services NSW for adult inmates in 2002. The partnership with Juvenile Justice NSW started in 2009 as a way for Assistance Dogs Australia to train more dogs, while aiming to reduce re-offending behaviour by giving detainees the skills to assist with their rehabilitation.

Juvenile detainees must initially demonstrate their commitment and interest in the program and then undergo a rigorous interview process with both Assistance Dogs Australia and Juvenile Justice NSW before they are chosen to be part of the program. They must also keep a clean behavioural record while in the program.

Detainees have responsibility for the daily cleaning of the puppies living environments as well as exercising, feeding, grooming and obedience training the dogs. They also teach the puppies good social manners, walking on a loose lead, focusing on the handler and basic skills like fetching, dressing their cape and shaking hands.

The puppies are now being returned to Assistance Dogs Australia to improve their home manners and have more specific training at volunteer Educators' homes, under the close supervision of professional trainers. They will then go on to advanced training before being housed with someone who needs their help.

The strong partnership between Juvenile Justice NSW and Assistance Dogs Australia will see further puppies placed with detainees in the future.

Assistance Dogs Australia is a national charity which trains Labradors and Golden Retrievers to help people with disabilities, providing them with greater freedom and independence. Dogs are placed free of charge, to a wide range of clients, including families with autism, people living with post-traumatic stress and people with physical disabilities. It costs in excess of \$27,000 to train and place a dog, and Assistance Dogs Australia receives no government funding.