

# Hills to Hawkesbury

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**pets making  
a positive  
difference**

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# positive paws

by BEV JORDAN

**POSITIVE PAWS VOLUNTEERS:**  
Ann and her dog Alfie,  
Leanne with Klea and  
Steve with Ava.

Alfie, Klea, Daisy, Marley, Oliver and Frank are four-legged volunteers who are making a huge difference to the mental well-being of residents in local aged care homes.

Positive Paws dogs and owners have been running regular visits to residents at three aged care facilities and now the Hills-based Positive Vibes Foundation is looking for more dog owners to take part so that the program can be expanded.

Foundation director Mario Rodrigues, who takes his dog Daisy, for fortnightly visits and says residents "cherish" the visits. He said one member of staff said: "A resident might only spend 2 minutes with the dog, but that's all they talk about for the rest of the week."

The Positive Vibes Foundation started the Positive Paws program about five years ago with just one dog, a 10 year old bichon frise called Hazy, to Arcare in Oatlands.

"The residents loved her and so did the staff. We saw the positive effect Hazy had on everyone and decided to expand the program, to get more volunteers and their pet dogs into more aged care homes."

While COVID did put a stop to the program for over a year there are now 12 volunteers spread across three aged care homes being visited including Arcare in Glenhaven with visits happening on the first and third Saturday of each month.

"One of our dogs, Alfie, performs tricks to the residents' delight and all – residents, their families and staff – cherish these fortnightly visits," said Mario.

"The residents love cuddling the dogs and talking to them. Some had dogs before but cannot have them at the care home so these visits are very special to them."

He said volunteers get to speak with the residents too giving the residents an opportunity to socialise.

Ann (pictured) says she and Alfie have a lot of fun volunteering.



Zawadi the golden Labrador



Frank loves his visits



**COVER:** Volunteers Rochelle with her dog Nelson, Mario with Daisy and Kerry with Murphy, outside Arcare Glenhaven.

"It is great to see the excitement of residents during our visits. Alfie loves the attention and we enjoy the residents' stories.

"One visit in particular stands out. As Alfie stopped beside one lady for a pat, her eyes lit up and she started chatting away to him. The staff got really excited, one with a little tear in her eye, as apparently that was the first time they had ever heard that lady being verbal."

Leanne (pictured) who has volunteered with Klea for four years said research has shown the benefits of "fur babies and good mental health".

"Visits to aged care are an absolutely fabulous activity and to experience the joy, laughter, chats with residents are in its self-rewarding and knowing I'm paying it forward each visit is gratifying," she said.

An aged care worker at one facility said: "Pets are a big part of people's lives and it is so hard when they move into care to not be able to have their pets with them. Our residents really love visits from Positive Vibes as it gives them a chance to interact with the animals, bringing back that feeling even if only for a short time. They are always looking forward to the next visit."

## GET INVOLVED

\* Positive Vibes would like to hear from dog owners interested in volunteering with the Positive Paws program and from aged care facilities interested in joining the program.

Mario said dogs need to be at least 18 months old (so they're past the nipping stage), up to date with their vaccinations, not an aggressive breed, and have a good temperament.

If you are interested in taking your dog to an aged care home, write to [info@positivevibes.org.au](mailto:info@positivevibes.org.au) or call Mario Rodrigues on 0414 747 603.

Positive Vibes runs a range of programs including The Hills Women's Shed and the Young Healthy Minds Forum. The aim is to make deeper connections and increase the conversation around mental well-being.

The Positive Vibes Foundation has an information stall at the UpMarket at Castle Hill Showground on Sunday October 23rd. The Hills Women's Shed meets at Balham Hills on Thursdays 10am to noon and every other Saturday 11am to 1pm.

To find out more visit [positivevibes.org.au](http://positivevibes.org.au)

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