

ASPENDALE GARDENS

Bid to get Olivia a pooch pal

Parents put on concert to fund disability service dog for teen

Emma Watson

AT TIMES, Olivia Patten simply cannot talk.

The 15-year-old from Aspendale Gardens has autism, an intellectual disability, severe anxiety and selective mutism, which means she cannot talk to most people outside of her family.

But when a dog is around, Olivia's communication ability improves 10-fold – and so her family's on a mission to get her one of her own.

"Liv's wanted one for ages and we figure at 15 she has now reached a level of maturity where she can largely take responsibility for the dog as well," mum Erica Patten said.

Ms Patten and Olivia's dad, Russell, want Olivia to be as independent as possible.

AT A GLANCE

- It costs \$30,000 to train a disability service dog.
- It will take two years to get Olivia ready for a dog.
- Fundraiser on December 16 at St Louis de Monfort's PS.

"A disability service dog is the first step towards achieving independence," she said.

But at \$30,000, a trained dog does not come cheap.

Olivia's family has signed up to the Centre for Service and Therapy Dogs Australia program, which works with Olivia and a trained dog for two years before she is ready for a pup of her own.

The program aims to help Olivia access her local community, meaning eventually she'll feel confident to go to

a supermarket by herself.

"That's something she can't do at the moment, because she'll clam up and won't talk," Ms Patten said.

"With a dog there by her side, it just makes her so much at ease."

Olivia's anxiety can sometimes cause her to run and hide, and a service dog is trained to sense her anxiety and calm her down.

The Pattens have set up a crowd-funding account and will hold a fundraising concert. INXS tribute band INXSIVE will perform at St Louis de Monfort's Primary School on December 16. Food trucks will be on site and drinks will be available at bar prices.

Go to ticketebo.com.au/inxsive4liv for tickets and visit gofundme.com/OliviasServiceDog to donate.



Olivia Patten with Tazzi. Her parents aim to get her a service dog of her own. Picture: WAYNE TAYLOR