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[Home](#) | [DPS News](#) | Yariv is a dog's best friend

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## **Yariv is a dog's best friend**



With Molly the Smooth Collie propped on his shoulder, enthusiasm and passion oozes from Yariv Ben-Yosef as he speaks of his love for man's favourite four-legged friends.

The Israeli-born certified dog trainer was in Australia last week when he stopped by the *DPS eNews* office to speak about his therapeutic dog-therapy work, which has seen global success in providing support to people diagnosed with conditions including bi-polar disorder, autism, epilepsy, and Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease.

With years of experience behind him, Yariv first founded the Centre for Service and Therapy Dogs in Israel in 1994. Since then, more than 500 dogs worldwide have been trained and placed in residential settings.

To meet the demand for service and therapy dogs in Europe, a branch of the organisation opened in Germany in 2002, and the centre's first Autism Assistance Dog was placed in Australia last year.

The passionate dog-trainer now has his sights set on introducing the Centres' Alzheimer's Aid Dogs program to aged care facilities in Australia, as well as to elderly people living independently in their own homes.

According to Yariv, the Alzheimer's Aid Dogs program provides a range of benefits to caregivers and those suffering with the cognitive disease. Some of these benefits include the dog's ability to return a wandering client safely to their home; improving social interaction among the elderly; and the dog's ability to identify threats to the client's health, such as breathing distress, falls and epileptic fits.

But perhaps the greatest benefit of all is the dog's ability to provide companionship and friendship to older people living with a debilitating medical condition.

"Dogs offer us unconditional love; they are always happy to see us," Yariv says.

"Rabbits can't behave, talk or guide you. Dogs are easier to train & they never say no to you. It's amazing," he says.

While pet-therapy has long been known to improve a person's health and happiness, Yariv's unique approach to helping those who cannot help themselves is inspiring.

He says many dogs "visit" residential aged care facilities for short-term stays, yet very few dogs are "live-in" residents that provide therapeutic benefits to the elderly.

The dog-therapy program goes beyond merely providing companionship to people with special needs; it encourages personal development & both mentally and physically.

Yariv's "hands-on" and passionate approach to his work is fascinating. *DPS eNews* was shown videos on the success of his program which showed aged care residents in Yariv's hometown taking a fond liking to the trained dogs.

In one video clip, Yariv re-enacts a situation which is all too familiar in the lives of elderly people. He falls to the ground, and within seconds the dog senses danger and runs towards a panic button located in the room and presses it to alert staff, or a carer, that a fall has occurred.

However, while many have a soft spot for the intelligent animals, there are others who simply don't; but Yariv insists he is always "up for a challenge".

"While 85% of residents in aged care enjoy having the dog around, the other percentage need time to get used to the idea and be exposed to it. But most of them come around," he says.

When it comes to choosing the breed of dog best suited to help those with Alzheimer's, Yariv says the smaller the dog, the better the results.

He says Smooth Collies, similar to Molly (pictured above) are ideal for people with Alzheimer's.

“They have a wonderful ability to smell stress and when a person is depressed. They can help act for that person; and they offer intelligent cognitive support. They are also patient, loyal, and vigilant and can pick up on a person’s mood,” he says.

It also seems female dogs are favoured over males when dealing with residents with cognitive impairment.

“Female dogs are best to train because of their nurturing instincts and caring nature,” Yariv says.

With big dreams ahead, Yariv hopes his program will be adopted and practiced across Australia.

“I can’t give too much of my [dog-training] technique away,” he laughs. “But I have a dream to teach aged care staff lots of different types of dog-therapies that will help their residents.”

Perhaps dubbed a new-age “dog whisperer” Yariv’s ability to connect with canines is fascinating; but he has a more humble attitude towards his success. “I do what I do to give quality of life back to a person. I always ask myself, what can I do to make tomorrow better?” he says.

## **Yariv’s dog-therapy program typically follows this procedure:**

- Assessment of the client’s physical and cognitive needs and abilities by a multi-disciplinary team.
- Assessment of the client’s ability to work with a dog.
- Identification of the appropriate breed and selection of a suitable puppy.
- Commencement of puppy fostering and basic training.
- Building the relationship between the client and dog (which starts during the fostering period).
- Handover and advanced training tailored to the client’s lifestyle.
- Ongoing support for two years and continuing development of therapy programs devised in collaboration with the client’s care team to ensure the best outcomes.

For more information about Yariv and the Centre for Service and Therapy Dogs, visit [www.dservicedogs.com](http://www.dservicedogs.com) or phone 0423 916 911.

What do you think of pet-therapy? Would you like to see Yariv's training in Australian aged care facilities? Let us know what you think by commenting in the box below.

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