

BENTLEIGH

# Eran's pet brings new freedom

## DOG THE KEY FOR AUTISTIC MAN

A TIGER-TAMER turned dog trainer has transformed the life of a young autistic man.

Yariv Ben Yosef trained Spot the collie to give Eran Picker, 23, independence his family never thought he'd have.

Until Spot entered his life, Eran couldn't go outside by himself, sleep alone or be trusted not to run off. The collie, who never leaves his side, has been trained to help him cross the street, calm him down when he gets agitated and stop him from running away if he panics.

"The dog became the key to his life," dad Kevin said.

Eran would often get so overwhelmed and anxious that he would lash out.

He couldn't even sleep alone.

### SPOT'S SKILLS

- If Eran tries to run away, Spot runs between his legs
- If he gets agitated she tugs on his pants leg until he calms down and is even trained to nibble on his ankle if that doesn't work
- Spot will lie on top of Eran until he is completely calm again

"When we started the program with Spot, we hadn't slept in our bed alone since he was born," Mr Picker said.

But now Eran sleeps in his own bed with Spot where they "fight over the covers", Mr Picker said.

Eran has grown calmer and more confident and can now even go to McDonald's by himself.



Eran Picker's life has been transformed by Spot, specially trained by Yariv Ben Yosef.

## Training canine carers

SPOT was flown over from Israel. Trainer Yariv Ben Yosef, who now lives in Bentleigh, has spent two years training Spot to recognise behavioural patterns in Eran that would alert her to changes in his mood as well as ways to deal with him if he became agitated.

Eran's dad Kevin was so delighted with what Spot achieved that he encouraged Mr Yosef to move to Melbourne. The pair now train various assistance dogs for people with autism, epilepsy and Alzheimer's.

Epilepsy dogs are trained to detect oncoming seizures and warn their owner to find a place to lie down.

The Alzheimer's dogs are trained to help their owner find their way home if they are lost. They can trigger a signal to alert carers if they are lost.

Mr Yosef said it took about two years to train a dog to be alert to an individual.

"I need to look at your house, your work, your school, your family, everything," he said.