



## ***2026 Australian Dog of the Year Winners Announced***

**The good news Australia needs right now: a reminder of hope, kindness and humanity, led by dogs**

From conservation, therapy and assistance dogs to military, search and rescue, athlete and advocacy heroes, the [Puppy Tales Australian Dog of the Year Awards](#) celebrate everyday dogs who have brought comfort and joy through good and challenging times, and helped to restore independence, confidence and safety for people across Australia.

"The Australian Dog of the Year Awards began six years ago, and since then it can feel as though the world has moved from one moment of heaviness to the next. In that time, dogs have become emotional anchors for so many of us, offering comfort, connection and quiet strength," says Awards founder Kerry Martin, international award-winning pet photographer, author and creator of [Puppy Tales](#).

"These Awards intentionally shine a light on what is good and hopeful. They celebrate dogs, particularly our winning dogs, who remind us that kindness and care still matter, and that there is still hope, heart and humanity in the world. This year they honour remarkable canine companions whose impact reaches far beyond their own homes, and whose presence continues to lift Australian lives."

This year's stories were deeply moving for the new judging panel, which include:

- Awards Founder **Kerry Martin**
- The Saltiest Dog's Founder **Kate Opitz**
- ABC's Muster Dogs TV star **Frank Finger**
- 2025 Winner Elle's human, **Robyn Adair**
- Australian Dog Lover publisher **Agnes Beugnon**
- **Georgia Gardner** - human to Valerie the Dachshund, known for one of Australia's most remarkable dog reunion stories

**Winners, nominees and voters received prizes worth \$20K**, including \$1,000 donation by Puppy Tales to the Australian Dog of the Year Award winner's preferred charity, and \$250 to the nominated charities of the recipients of the People's Choice Award and ARAS (All Rescues Are Special) Medal.



### **Australian Dog of the Year 2026**

**Louie, Border Collie, Gold Coast QLD** ([STORY LINK](#))

*Nominated Charity Recipient: Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence*

Louie is a therapy dog who supports survivors of sexual violence through calm, grounding companionship. Certified with Therapy Dogs Australia, he regularly visits the Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence, helping people feel safe and regulated during highly vulnerable moments.

Working alongside his handler, trauma survivor and breathwork facilitator Caroline Brunne, Louie's quiet presence highlights the powerful role dogs can play in trauma recovery and healing.

Louie's human, Caroline Brunne: "Louie has an instinctive ability to meet people exactly where they are, without judgement or expectation. He brings gentleness to difficult conversations and reminds people they are not alone. Louie doesn't seek attention; he simply shows up, offering comfort and healing one soft moment at a time."

Awards Founder Kerry Martin: "The judging panel were deeply moved by Louie's story and the quiet strength of his work. Louie stood out for the profound yet gentle way he changes lives. His work is a reminder that healing does not always need words. Sometimes it looks like presence, gentleness and a dog who simply shows up."



### **People's Choice Award**

**Isla, Labrador Retriever, Sydney NSW** ([STORY LINK](#))

Nominated Charity Recipient: Guide Dogs NSW/ACT

The People's Choice Award is a celebration of community spirit and love for our incredible dogs.

Isla is a guide dog whose partnership has transformed her human Karlee Symond's life, restoring independence, confidence and freedom. Before Isla, everyday tasks such as leaving the house alone felt overwhelming and isolating. Since being matched, Isla has supported Karlee to pursue university study, gain employment and relocate independently to a major city for the first time. Through her calm guidance and unwavering reliability, Isla has removed barriers, opened doors and helped her human build a life once thought out of reach.

Isla's human, Karlee: "Prior to being matched with Isla, my world was very dark, and I felt extremely isolated and limited.... It's safe to say I am no longer afraid of bin day or navigating crowds, as I know Isla will keep me safe. Isla is my eyes, my best friend and my other half."



### **ARAS (All Rescues Are Special) Medal - Proudly sponsored by The Saltiest Dog**

**Willow, Bull Arab cross, Bittern VIC** ([STORY LINK](#))

Nominated Charity Recipient: Hear No Evil – Australian Deaf Dog Rescue

Willow is a deaf rescue dog who has changed perceptions and outcomes for deaf dogs across Australia. Adopted in 2015, she was taught to communicate using Auslan signs and became an ambassador for Hear No Evil – Australian Deaf Dog Rescue. Through school visits, Deaf festivals, expos and media appearances, Willow's calm, gentle presence has helped thousands understand that deaf dogs are intelligent, capable and deeply bonded companions — proving that deafness is not a limitation, but a different way to connect.

Willow's human Joanne Heyman: "The impact Willow has had with people, has demystified deafness, showing that deafness is a difference, not a deficit, regardless of human or dog! She has changed hearts, saved lives and left the world kinder than she found it."

### **Canine Home Hero Medal**

**Honey, Pug, Redbank Plains QLD** ([STORY LINK](#))

Canine Home Hero Medal recognises the dog whose courage, intuition, work, companionship or life-saving actions have significantly impacted their human or family (and other pets), including medical or safety alerts, essential emotional support, farm working duties and so much more.

Honey is an assistance dog whose quiet devotion brought comfort during the final months of her human Vanessa's life. Visiting ICU every day for



three months, Honey offered calm, loyalty and grounding companionship in a place of uncertainty and fear. Once a timid rescue, she became a steady presence for Vanessa, her husband Joel and hospital staff, offering grace and strength even when she was never asked or expected. Honey now continues supporting Joel, carrying forward a legacy of love in Vanessa's memory.

*Honey's human, Joel: "When the chips were down, and everything turned, and Vanessa desperately needed Honey, she showed us in every possible way the incredible assistance dog she had become. She gives me reason to keep going. Breakfast. Dinner. Routine. Purpose. Life. Honey is now my rock."*



### **Paws-itive Change Award**

**Gus, Labrador Retriever, Perth WA** ([STORY LINK](#))

The Paws-itive Change Award recognises inspiring stories of transformation brought about by dogs in our society.

For almost a decade Gus has brought comfort to thousands of families at Ronald McDonald House WA, helping them navigate the tough times and celebrate the good times. Known as the "Director of Hugs and Pats," he offers calm companionship to parents and children facing long hospital stays and life-altering uncertainty. Through his gentle presence, Gus brings comfort, warmth and a sense of normality during life's hardest moments.

*Tamma Kirkby, Ronald McDonald House WA: "As a serving member of the Ronald McDonald House WA for almost a decade there are countless Gus moments. From sitting beside parents receiving challenging news, playing gently with siblings who don't understand what's happening, and curling up with children who just need a friend. Gus has an extraordinary ability to sense when someone needs a little extra support."*



### **Dog of Talent Medal**

**Puck, Saluki, Perth WA** ([STORY LINK](#))

Recognising the talented pooch who loves to excel, entertain or perform – from the sporting star or trick dog to the theatre or TV performer, the clever canine with show-stopping 'party tricks' or the dog who can paint, surf or pose with paw-fection. This category celebrates every unique doggo talent!

Puck is the definition of versatility in motion. A Saluki with extraordinary focus and drive, he is one of the first dogs of any breed in Australia to achieve champion titles across four disciplines – conformation, lure coursing, tracking, and track and search – proving that true talent comes in many forms. Beyond competition, he also serves as a wellbeing dog, offering calm, grounding support to students at school. Talented, thoughtful and kind, Puck is a powerful ambassador for his breed and for canine sport.

*Puck's human, Danielle Simpson: "Puck is my constant companion, my teammate, my teacher, and my safe place. What we share isn't defined by titles or ribbons, but by a partnership built on trust, patience, and a shared love of doing life together."*

### **Special Mentions**

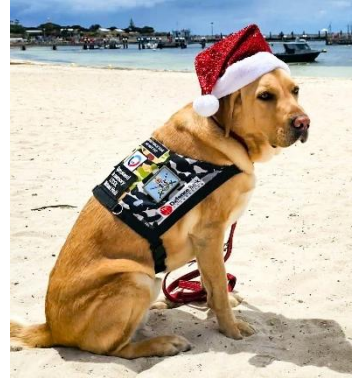
The judging panel found all the finalists to be extraordinary dogs, and choosing just one winner was no easy task. From an exceptionally strong line-up, the judges would also like to give a Special Mention to finalists **Daisy** and **Wil**.



*Daisy*

“**Daisy**’s story was one that stayed with the judging panel. What stood out was not just her longevity of service, but the breadth of roles she fulfils with equal calm and care. From therapy and education to highly specialised detection work, Daisy exemplifies the extraordinary impact one dog can have across many lives,” says Kerry.

“**Wil** carries a quiet strength that supports not just one, but many. In veteran spaces, his presence helps break down barriers, allowing connection, understanding and trust to grow. His work reflects the life-changing role assistance dogs play in veteran wellbeing.”



*Wil*

You can read about the WINNERS [here](#) and the incredible canine Finalist panel [here](#).

**\*\* Nominations for Australian Dog of the Year 2027 are [OPEN NOW!](#) \*\***

**## END ##**

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For interviews of 2026 Winners and Finalists, please contact Caroline or Kerry.



### **About Kerry Martin & Puppy Tales**

PhotoDOGraphy™ you'll adore; Pet Travel & Adventures you'll Dig

Kerry Martin of Puppy Tales considers pets very much part of the family so lives this adage to help and inspire fellow pet parents to create incredible memories of a most pawsome life together!

Kerry is Melbourne-based but on the road throughout Australia offering her award-winning dog photography. She's known for her seasonal photography experiences, most notably Snow Dogs, and her studio-based Project Dogalogue. Of the many national and international photography awards she's received over the past 16 years, the highlights have been Master of Photography, Australian Pet/Animal Photographer of the Year, and the winner of the category Pets and People in the 2024 International Pet Photography Awards.

As she travels with her own adored four-legged companions, Kerry writes to share her knowledge and experiences of all things dog, photography and travel. She creates content for the Puppy Tales website, a social media community of over 500,000 and other publications to promote the wonderful relationships between dogs and people. This includes encouraging dog-inclusive activities and lifestyles, telling of her travels & adventures, providing resources for keeping dogs happy & healthy, sharing dog photography how to and recounting heartfelt dog stories. All accompanied by her stunning photography!

Puppy Tales is a business for good with a mission to make a paw-sitive difference. Puppy Tales operates as carbon negative; supports many local charities through photography, fundraising and more; and plays a part in the global community's effort to protect the planet, take action on climate change and care for animals and

wildlife. She founded the Australian Dog of the Year Awards in 2021 to recognise the incredible contribution of dogs to people, communities and society. To discover more, visit <https://puppytales.com.au>