

# ARAS (All Rescues Are Special) Medal 2026

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**Willow** Bull Arab cross, Bittern VIC

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

**Impact area:** Deaf dog advocacy, education and inclusion

**Role:** Ambassador and community education dog

**Community supported:** Hear No Evil – Australian Deaf Dog Rescue and the Deaf community

**Years of impact:** 10 years

**Why this matters:** Willow has changed how deaf dogs are understood, adopted and valued, challenging misconceptions and saving lives through education and advocacy.

*“The impact Willow has had with people, has demystified deafness, showing that deafness is a difference, not a deficit, regardless of human or dog.”* **Joanne Heyman, Willow’s human**

Willow entered her human Joanne’s life in 2015 after being rescued by Hear No Evil – Australian Deaf Dog Rescue. At the time, Joanne and her family were navigating a period of significant personal challenge. What followed was not only a bond, but a shared language. Living with a Deaf human and an Auslan interpreter, Willow learned to communicate through Auslan signs and gestures, forming the foundation for her future advocacy work.

In 2016, Willow became an official Ambassador for Hear No Evil, a role she has proudly held for a decade. Through her calm nature and gentle presence, she has attended hundreds of events across Australia, including school visits, Deaf community festivals, public expos and major pet events. Willow’s work has helped educate thousands of people about deafness, demonstrating that deaf dogs are intelligent, capable and highly trainable.

Willow’s impact extends well beyond in-person appearances. She has featured in national media and educational programs, helping challenge long-held assumptions that have historically led to deaf dogs being overlooked or euthanised. Her advocacy has directly influenced adoption outcomes and improved understanding within both the rescue sector and the wider community.

A defining part of Willow’s legacy is the connection she creates. Deaf children instinctively sign to her, recognising a shared way of communicating. Through these moments, Willow bridges the human Deaf community and the rescue world, creating understanding through lived example. Now approaching retirement from her ambassador role and managing health challenges, Willow’s recognition is deeply meaningful. Her work has saved lives, changed minds and left a lasting imprint on how deaf dogs are seen across Australia.

*“Willow’s advocacy has reshaped how deaf dogs are seen across Australia. Through education, public appearances and lived example, she has challenged harmful misconceptions and changed outcomes for deaf dogs nationwide. Her work has saved lives systemically, and her legacy proves that disability does not limit capability.”* **Kate Opitz, Judging Panel**