

Canine Home Hero Medal 2026



Honey, Pug cross

Aligned Charity: Animal Therapies Ltd

Impact area: End-of-life care, comfort and emotional support

Role: Assistance dog providing companionship and calm in clinical settings

Community supported: Hospital and family environment

Years of impact: Several years

Why this matters: Honey's presence brought comfort, dignity and connection into moments of profound vulnerability, demonstrating the quiet but powerful role dogs can play in care and grief.

“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.” **Joel, Honey's human**

Honey's work as an assistance dog took place in one of the most emotionally challenging environments imaginable. During the final months of her human Vanessa's life, Honey accompanied her into an Intensive Care Unit, a setting often defined by fear, uncertainty and emotional distance. In that space, Honey provided something deeply human. Familiarity. Calm. Comfort.

Hospitals are not places where people expect warmth or connection, yet Honey's presence softened a clinical environment and created moments of tenderness during an incredibly difficult time. She offered reassurance through proximity and consistency, remaining close during long hours and providing emotional grounding when words were insufficient.

Following Vanessa's passing, Honey continued her role as a source of comfort, supporting the family through grief. This transition reflects the depth of Honey's service and her ability to respond not to instruction, but to need.

The Canine Home Hero Medal recognises dogs whose impact is felt most strongly in the quiet spaces of life. Honey's contribution was not public or performative. It was deeply personal, deeply present and profoundly meaningful. Her story highlights the emotional labour dogs perform every day, often unseen, and the extraordinary difference presence alone can make during moments of loss and transition.

“To bring comfort into an ICU, a place defined by fear, grief and uncertainty, is no small thing. Honey embodies the profound emotional labour assistance dogs perform, often unseen and always invaluable.” **Kate Opitz, Judging Panel**

Note from Awards Founder Kerry Martin: This medal was created in honour of my dog Keiko, whose life reflected the extraordinary impact dogs can have through everyday companionship, connection and love.