

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Monday 28 March 2022**

### **Hello Elmo!**

#### **Adelaide Airport welcomes its first Guide Dogs SA/NT Facility Dog**

Guide Dogs SA/NT has today welcomed Elmo to his first day of work at Adelaide Airport, as the first internationally accredited Facility Dog at any Australian airport.

Airports can be a busy and stressful place, especially if people are unsure of what to expect on the day. It can be even more stressful when a travel companion has a hidden disability, health condition or disorder that is not immediately obvious to airport staff.

From today, Facility Dog Elmo will be on-hand to greet people and ensure that every journey through Adelaide Airport is as easy and seamless as possible.

Elmo, who has been trained by Guide Dogs SA/NT, will be a valuable addition to the staff at Adelaide Airport, spending his working hours as a reassuring presence for people who may need some support that isn't immediately apparent.

Guide Dogs SA/NT Chief Executive Aaron Chia said the loveable yet calm Labrador had spent several weeks undertaking on-the-job training, and was ready for his first shift today.

"Elmo will be a calming influence on many people travelling through the airport, and we know he'll be a fantastic addition to the team at Adelaide Airport," Mr Chia said.

"At Guide Dogs SA/NT, we train dogs not just to support people with vision impairment, but to support people with all kinds of needs in their role as an Assistance or Facility Dog. We know from experience how much of a calming effect our lovely Labradors can have, and Elmo is already being welcomed wholeheartedly."

As a Facility Dog, Elmo will be directed by qualified staff within a designated facility – in this case Adelaide Airport. Elmo will be wearing a Guide Dogs jacket each day, and when having breaks or not on duty, if wearing his bandana, administration staff can also give him a pat or a cuddle.

Adelaide Airport Managing Director Brenton Cox said the airport placed significant value on having a Facility Dog to add a little bit more joy to travel, especially for those who need it most.

"Many people have hidden disabilities, and we're conscious of also serving their needs among the thousands of people who are increasingly flowing through our doors every day," Mr Cox said.



# Guide Dogs.

“Research has shown that the presence of a Facility Dog can help people control anxiety, regulate emotions, and improve mood.

“Elmo will be an invaluable part of our airport family. Sometimes it might be that he sits next to an anxious traveller. Other times he will no doubt be there for a reassuring pat and an alternative focus, or as a calming presence for others.”

Adelaide Airport launched its Hidden Disabilities program developed by A Spectrum Connected last year. A sunflower card and lanyard based system which offers customers a discreet way to indicate to Airport staff that extra assistance is required. More than 40 Adelaide Airport staff and 300 stakeholders have already undertaken training, coming together in a shared commitment to improve the airport experience for customers with special needs.

Adelaide Airport’s Special Assistance services include airside and landside Assistance Animal Relief Areas; Changing Places facilities offering more space, a ceiling hoist and adult size change table; a Volunteer Ambassador program; a meet and assist program; hearing loops installed throughout the terminal; and a dedicated security special assistance lane.

Elmo will play a significant role in the airport’s Hidden Disabilities program and will be working at the airport daily from 9am to 5pm weekdays. He will travel to work daily with his primary handler, Justine, who also works at Adelaide Airport. He will have meal and toilet breaks – like we would at work – but he won’t work or be paid overtime!

It takes more than \$50,000 to breed, raise and train a Guide Dog or Assistance Dog, with training taking place over a two-year period. Elmo has also had specific workplace training so that he could familiarise himself with the airport environment.

Elmo is the fourth Guide Dogs SA/NT Facility Dog to be employed in South Australia like facility dog Zero, who worked at making a difference in South Australia’s court system.

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