

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Wednesday 31 May 2023**

### **Adelaide Airport Facility Dog Elmo turns 4 ... It's time to pawty!**

Adelaide Airport's Facility Dog Elmo is celebrating his 4<sup>th</sup> birthday in style, with a special tea pawty planned to recognise the milestone.

A Guide Dogs SA/NT graduate, Elmo was the first internationally-accredited Facility Dog at any Australian airport when he started in 2022.

Elmo will be joined by some of his fur-iends from Guide Dogs SA/NT, and will be tucking into a specially-made, dog-friendly birthday cake and pup-cakes from Adelaide's own dog bakery, The Woofery, as well as puppachinos. There will also be sweet treats and drinks on-hand for the humans in attendance and doggy bags to take home afterwards.

The celebration will be hosted by This Little Piggy - Adelaide Airport's latest and tastiest pitstop, with a menu featuring award winning smallgoods, artisan breads, unique cheeses and an array of specialty treats. This Little Piggy is one of six retail outlets at Adelaide Airport managed by Delaware North, a global leader in hospitality.

Already in his short career, Elmo has been a reassuring presence for thousands of passengers. Close to 30 individual calming walks have been booked by customers who would otherwise find the airport a busy and stressful place.

Adelaide Airport Managing Director, Brenton Cox, said the response from customers towards Elmo had been overwhelmingly positive

"Elmo has been a valuable addition to our team at Adelaide Airport, spending his working hours as a reassuring presence for people who may need some support that isn't immediately apparent," Mr Cox said.

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

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

Guide Dogs SA/NT Chief Executive Aaron Chia said Elmo was a great example of how Assistance Dogs could have a significant impact on a wide-ranging community.

"At Guide Dogs SA/NT, we train dogs not just to support people with vision loss, but to support people with all kinds of needs in their role as an Assistance or Facility Dog, just like Elmo," Mr Chia said.



# Guide Dogs.

“Elmo has a wonderfully calming effect on people, young and old, and he has been welcomed wholeheartedly and is much loved by the travelling community.”

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

Adelaide Airport launched its Hidden Disabilities program developed by A Spectrum Connected in 2021, a sunflower card and lanyard based system that 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.

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 underwent specific workplace training so that he could familiarise himself with the airport environment.

**-ENDS-**