

This boy's best friend



MATES TOGETHER: Tyler has developed a great bond with his service dog Sefton. Picture: CHRIS KIDD

Sefton's arrival has transformed life for little Tyler, writes Hannah Martin

SEFTON the collie is more than a mate to two-year-old Tyler Grimson; he's a life-changer.

Tyler has autism and Sefton is an assistance dog.

Tyler's mum Shiralee Grimson said her son had made many significant advances in his development since the pair met two months ago. He's now able to perform basic tasks many autistic children struggle with.

"He's learning more words, he's more sociable, he's learning more life skills, he eats more and interacts with more people," Mrs Grimson said.

Sefton is in training and will eventually be able to keep Tyler away from roads, find the youngster if he gets lost and alert his parents if he is injured or needs help.

The family used to live on King Island but moved to Wynyard early last year to be closer to an autistic day-care service.

"We wanted to get a service dog too, but when we looked into it the cost was just way too prohibitive," Mrs Grimson said.

The family discovered there was a seven-year waiting list and a fully trained dog would cost \$28,000.

So they investigated the possibility of training their own dog and a renowned Melbourne trainer pointed them towards Canine Utility and Service Partners (CUSP) in South Hobart.

The not-for-profit organisation was launched two months ago and is believed to be the first organisation specifically breeding dogs for use as service animals.

Amendments to the Disabilities Discrimination Act last year allow accredited assistance dogs to have the same privileges as guide dogs for the blind, which means they are allowed to



PIONEERS: CUSP's Michelle Jones, Mim Bester and Di Rowe with, in front, Charlotte and Mackenzie Truscott.

travel on public transport, go to restaurants and travel in the passenger area of planes with their owners.

CUSP has a team of breeders, vet nurses and even a geneticist helping it breed the best service dogs. It also has trainers who begin teaching dogs within days of their birth.

CUSP trainer Mim Bester said the organisation hoped to cut dramatically the wait for service dogs and make them available for as little as \$1300.

Geneticist Dr Di Rowe is working with CUSP to determine inheritable characteristics of good service dogs. "This will help us start selecting puppies [for certain roles] a lot earlier," she said.

The bond between Tyler and 18-month-old Sefton was instant. "They love each other," Mrs Grimson said.

"Tyler gives Sefton a kiss good-night every night. With Sefton, it's like they're on the same page.

"He gets hugged and dragged around on the lead, and they sit together in the lounge room and watch TV."

Sefton has already had basic training through CUSP, but the family is corresponding with a Melbourne trainer to tailor the dog's abilities to Tyler's needs.

Focus on speeding in bid to lower road toll

By **CHARLES WATERHOUSE**

THE State Government's road safety focus will be on speeding this year following the deaths of 31 people in 2010.

Infrastructure Minister David O'Byrne said statistics made it clear where the Government needed to concentrate its efforts.

He said drivers either exceeding the speed limit or travelling at an excessive speed for the conditions were a factor in 33.1 per cent of serious injuries and 45 per cent of deaths last year.

"We cannot afford to be complacent - too many people are still not taking

their responsibility to be safe on the road seriously enough and it's costing lives," Mr O'Byrne said.

"We have a responsibility to do more because every life lost on Tasmania's roads is an avoidable tragedy."

He said the Government's Road Safety Strategy would work towards eliminating fatalities and serious injuries.

The aim would be to provide roads which accommodated human error and minimised the severity of crashes which occurred.

"However all road users are still responsible to abide by the rules," he said.

"It is incredibly sad and disappointing to see that irresponsible behaviours such as speeding, inattentiveness, alcohol and drugs are still major contributing factors in serious crashes."

In 2010 speed was a factor in 51.6 per cent of road deaths, inattentiveness 25.8 per cent, inexperience 22.5 per cent, alcohol 19.4 per cent and drugs 16.1 per cent.

About a third (32.3 per cent) of people killed were less than 29 years old, 38.7 per cent were 30-49, 6.5 per cent were between 50 and 64 and 22.5 per cent more than 64 years old.

Just over half of those who died were drivers.

Midwives cleared to prescribe

MIDWIVES working in collaboration with medical practitioners will now be able to prescribe some drugs.

Health Minister Michelle O'Byrne said the changes had come into effect yesterday.

The amendments to the Poisons Act followed a report which recommended expanding the role of midwives in a collaborative care environment.

Ms O'Byrne said the change complemented national initiatives which added midwives as a new prescriber group.

Midwives would need to do a course to be allowed to prescribe drugs.

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