

Friendly giant brings calm to psychiatric patients in Berwick

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Casey Adult Psychiatric Unit patient Jonathan with Clinton the giant mastiff. JANE OLLERENSHAW.

THIS 109kg pooch will make you paws for a smile.

Clinton, the purebred mastiff, brought laughter to Berwick last week when he visited patients at Southern Health's Casey Adult Psychiatric Unit as part of Dogs Victoria's Therapy Dogs Program.

His Emerald owner, Dogs Victoria volunteer Gabrielle Simmonds, said it was the first time the program had been tried in a psychiatric ward.

"Traditionally the dogs visit patients in aged-care homes but we branched out and the response has been wonderful," she said.

"The patients really interact with him and he loves the attention."

Patient Jonathan, 40, said Clinton made him feel "calm and happy".

"He has a rough calmness about him but he's very placid and he doesn't judge anyone, he just loves our company," he said.

Nurse unit manager Kristy-Lee Alan said the program brought a positive energy to the ward.

"Some patients are often fearful to come out of their rooms but animals seem to relax them, triggering happy childhood memories and bringing them out of their shell," she said.

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