



# COMMUNITY

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Circulating in the municipalities of Gannawarra,  
Loddon, Wakool and Swan Hill.  
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### OFFICE HOURS

Monday: 8.30am - 4pm  
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### Booking Deadlines

#### Tuesday's Edition

Display: 5pm Thursday  
General Classifieds: 10am Monday  
Deaths: 11am Monday

#### Friday's Edition

Display: 5pm Tuesday  
Classifieds: 10am Thursday  
Deaths: 11am Thursday

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A Member of



AUDIT BUREAU  
OF CIRCULATIONS



# New recruit

## JENNY DENTON

"THEY call it SHARM in a book I'm reading at the moment - 'significant human animal relational moments'" says mental health clinician Helen McKay.

"Oxytocin, endorphins and dopamines are released from the experience of patting or cuddling a dog, having that close connection - for both humans and dogs."

Five-month-old Dill is in training to provide that positive feeling in a professional setting.

The labrador golden retriever cross will work with her owner, a credentialled mental health nurse and psychotherapist, as a therapy dog at Northern District Community Health.

"It's probably not something that's really out there yet. You don't hear about it a lot," Ms McKay says.

"There are a lot of different therapeutic options with them - just their mere calming presence and the benefits of patting can be huge. And they can see behaviours we can't see. They can alert you to things - 'sniff out' anxiety or stress a client hasn't shown you yet. There's evidence they can reduce blood pressure, anxiety, depression and stress."

Ms McKay first had the idea of using a therapy dog after hearing from a colleague at NDCH about a young dog, Champ, she had bred, who is working at the Family Court in Melbourne.

A program to provide support dogs to victims of crime and vulnerable witnesses in the court system has been running in Victoria since October 2017, with very positive results.

Not only are the people who are interacting with the animals usually greatly reassured, but court productivity is improved due to their increased capacity to give evidence, according to the program's managers.

"When children have to testify in another room, they put the dog in there to cuddle and pat," Ms McKay says.

"A lot of the time people in distress will tell their story straight to the dog."

She was also aware that a col-



**MAIN:** Dill in attentive mode. **Picture — HELEN MCKAY.** **INSET:** Northern District Health mental health clinician Helen McKay with her trainee therapy dog, Dill.

league in Boort, psychologist Dr Naomi Malone, was using a trained dog specifically in mental health treatment, and spoke to her about her experiences.

Ms McKay, an animal lover who had lost a pet 18 months earlier, was ready to have a dog again, and at the time Champ's mother was expecting another litter.

So she did some research and approached her employers with the idea.

"Work were quite on board with it. They're very forward thinking and always working outside of the box," she said.

With clients across the NDCH region, the mental health nurse is likely to be taking Dill to consultations in Pyramid Hill, Kerang, Cohuna, Koondrook and Boort.

"She'll be working within the office space at our offices across the region," Ms McKay says.

"She'll meet and greet the cli-

ent and then be put into a resting position and we'll just let the interaction unfold."

Though Dill's therapeutic capability is not in dispute, getting an appointment with her is still a few months away.

The young dog recently finished a five-day certification course at K9 Support near Benalla with former vet nurse Tessa Stow, one of the pioneers of the court dog program.

"It was more like training the handler and assessing the dog," Ms McKay says. "We did a lot of theory and walking around the streets to get her used to noises and see how she reacts."

At the moment Dill is wearing a service dog coat marked with L-plates, along with her NDCH name tag.

She is not, in fact, a service dog - which is an animal such as a guide dog, trained to assist a single owner with mobility or

health problems - but Ms McKay wasn't able to get hold of an L-plater therapy dog coat.

Dill is still easing into the job, spending two hours a day, two days a week getting used to the office environment.

After that Ms McKay plans to start introducing her to clients who are comfortable with the idea to help with her training.

It's likely to be six months before she is on the job full time.

Meanwhile "getting a work/play balance" is important, her owner says.

"People are really respectful of the coat. They always ask if they can pat her," Ms McKay says.

But when the coat is off Dill enjoys chewing, digging and action in the park as much as the next pup.

"She does lots of fun stuff," Ms McKay says. "We go out fishing and paddle boarding and she sits on the front of the board."

## Weather

### Temperatures

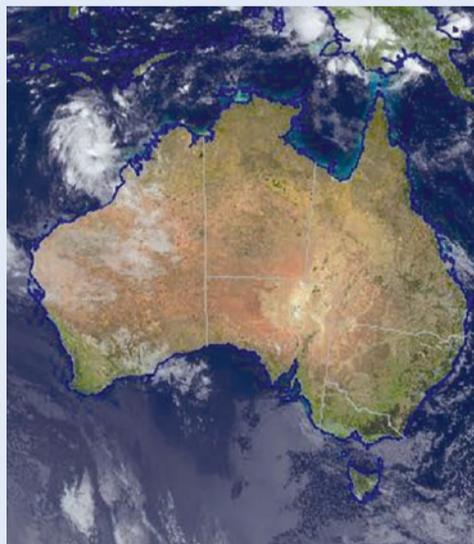
Monday: minimum 11.7 degrees, maximum 25.3 degrees.  
Tuesday: 12.0, 18.9  
Wednesday: 5.8, 19.2  
Thursday: 6.3,  
April minimums: lowest 5.8 degrees [10th], highest 16.5 degrees [4th] average 11.7 degrees [long-term average 9.9 degrees]. Lowest on record: 0.8 degrees [30th, 2009]. Highest on record: 22.1 degrees [3rd, 2005].  
April maximums: lowest 18.9 degrees [9th], highest 31.8 degrees [5th], average 26.1 degrees [long-term average 23.0 degrees]. Highest on record: 37.0 degrees [10th, 2005]. Lowest on record: 12.8 degrees [7th, 1977].

### Rainfall

Month to date: 0mm [long-term average 25.2mm]. Year to date: 14.8mm. [long-term January-April average: 99.1mm]. Last year to April: mm. Highest on record: 114.0mm [1891]. Lowest on record: 0.0mm [1906, 1910, 1945, 1975].

### Stream salinity

Loddon River at Kerang from Friday, April 5: 86us/cm, 85, 86, 85, 86, x, x. Barr Creek at Capels Flume: Not available due to low water level.



Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

### Forecast

**Today:** Sunny, 6-26  
**Saturday:** Cloudy, 9-22  
**Sunday:** Partly cloudy, 10-25  
**Monday:** Mostly sunny, 11-26  
**Tuesday:** Partly cloudy, 13-29  
**Wednesday:** Sunny, 16-31

### Daylight

**Today** sunrise 6.46am sunset 6.05pm  
Saturday 6.47am, 6.03pm.  
Sunday 6.47am, 6.02pm.  
Monday 6.48am, 6.01pm.  
Tuesday 6.49am, 5.59pm.

### Ultra-violet index

Sun protection recommended from 9:50 am to 2:50 pm, UV index predicted to reach 5 [moderate].

### Fire danger

Mallee: Low-moderate. The Shire of Gannawarra is within the Mallee fire district for fire bans and restrictions. Northern Country: High. The Shire of Loddon is within the Northern Country fire district.  
• Fire danger ratings and restrictions information is available from www.cfa.vic.gov.au