



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

**Living with
Disability**
RESEARCH CENTRE
Supporting inclusion of people
with cognitive disability



“More people talk to you when you have a dog” - Dogs as catalysts for community participation of people with intellectual disability

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Background – Catalysts for encounters?

- One of the **consistent failures of supported accommodation and supported living options** is around the domains of **social inclusion and interpersonal relationships** (Bigby et al., 2016).
- What might be a catalyst for encounters in the community for individuals with intellectual disabilities?



Background – Catalysts for encounters?



- What might be a catalyst for encounters in the community for individuals with intellectual disabilities?



Background – Companion animals can be catalysts for social interactions

- Companion animals can be catalysts for incidental social interactions; becoming known and formation of new friendships in local communities.
- In an Australian survey, 58% of pet owners indicated they had got to know people and made friends through having pets.



Background – Companion animals can be catalysts for social interactions



- Few people with intellectual disabilities in supported accommodation and supported living have a pet

Background – Benefits of Service Dogs

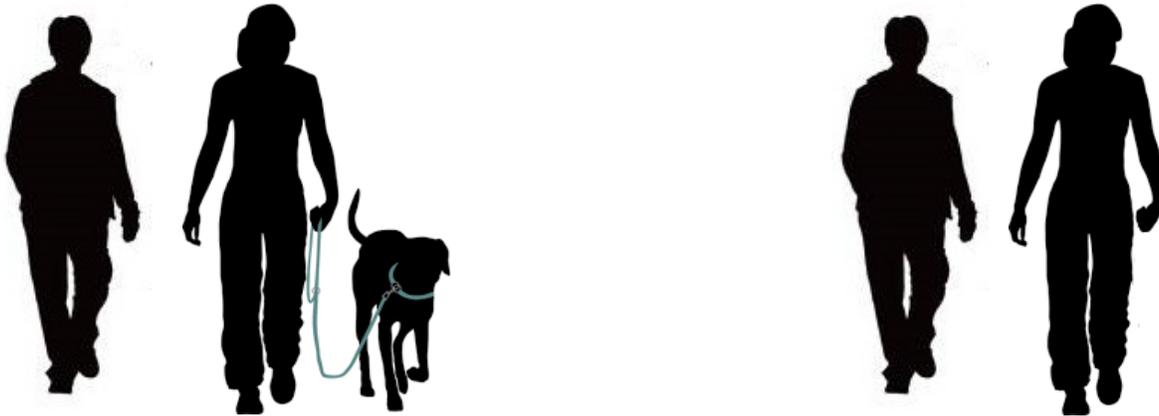
- Benefits of service dogs for adults and children with physical disabilities:
 - Increase the number of social interactions
 - Reduce the negative effects of social ostracism
 - Feel more secure and confident in public



- These studies provide support of the potential role of dogs to facilitate encounters

Aim of the Study

- Using the concept of ‘encounter’, we aimed to explore:
 - Differences in the types and number of encounters with other community members.



- Trialled a program in collaboration with Righteous Pups Australia to provide individual support to adults with intellectual disabilities to regularly go out into their local community with and without a dog.

Dog Walking Program



My name is: Joanne Baker



What people like and admire about me...

I love to listen and chat and really care about where people are at and what they want to do.

I have a caring heart and love to make people laugh and see that they are unique and significant in this world.

What's important to me...

Community: We all have our roles and abilities and when we work together, the community thrives.

I believe that every person has a gift that only they can share with the world...a gift of who they are, how they think, what they want to do in life. I see it as my job to help people get there.

It's not what you do but who you are that matters. I will share of my journey and love to share in yours.

I came from Sydney where footy is Rugby League. I am a **Cootah** Sharks supporter and love the State of Origin Games.

I love watching movies and TV series.

Bobby - I also still love playing with LEGO - it's not just for kids!

Important to know about me...

I grew up in Sydney and moved to Bendigo in 2000. When I first arrived, I wondered where all the people were! Bendigo is a lot smaller than Sydney.

After the initial shock, I fell in love with Bendigo and the country feel of this city. In 2002 I was involved in a head on car accident. Thankfully, everyone survived, but I have a life-long injury to one shoulder. I do what I can to not let this slow me down.

I am a workaholic! I see a need, build a team around it, and address that need.

I work with at-risk teens, helping them see that life has a future.

My name is: Jenny Atkins



What people like and admire about me...

I am a deep thinker and often see a situation from a different angle.

I am funny and see the best in everyone.

I work hard and give 100% to a task.

What's important to me...

COFFEE! I love going out for coffee and cake.

I love shopping...the bright lights, the busy center, the new purchase of clothes, jewelry... or something rather girly!

I LOVE to read...novels and fiction. I love how a book takes us to a different world and for the time we are reading, we live in that world with all it's magic and possibilities.

Family and Friends. These are the meaning of life. Sharing my journey with others makes it count.

I also love Teddy bears, being active (not so much watching sports) and seeing new places through travel.

SLEEP! Is so important to me in order to have energy for the next day.

Important to know about me...

I grew up in Bendigo, but lived my teenage years in Canberra - brrr - super cold up there!

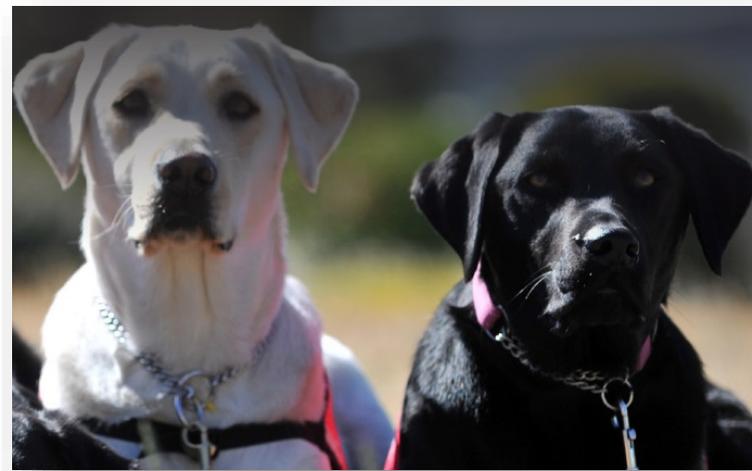
My first career was as a primary school teacher and I loved seeing the grade 5/6's get excited about learning and what life holds.

I am expressive and feelings are really important. Sometimes I can change the whole dynamics of a situation by changing the way I feel about it!

Sometimes I can be really smart and some times I can be really 'not' smart...and this makes it funny for my friends...they never know which Jenny they will get! At least I'm happy regardless 🐾

2 Handlers from RPA –

Both received additional training prior to the program



6 RPA Labrador dogs

What we did

Recruited 16 participants



Group 1
($n = 8$)



Group 2
($n = 8$)



14, one hour outings with an RPA handler
and a dog



14, one hour outings with a handler alone
(i.e. minus the dog)

What we did



Group 2
($n = 8$)

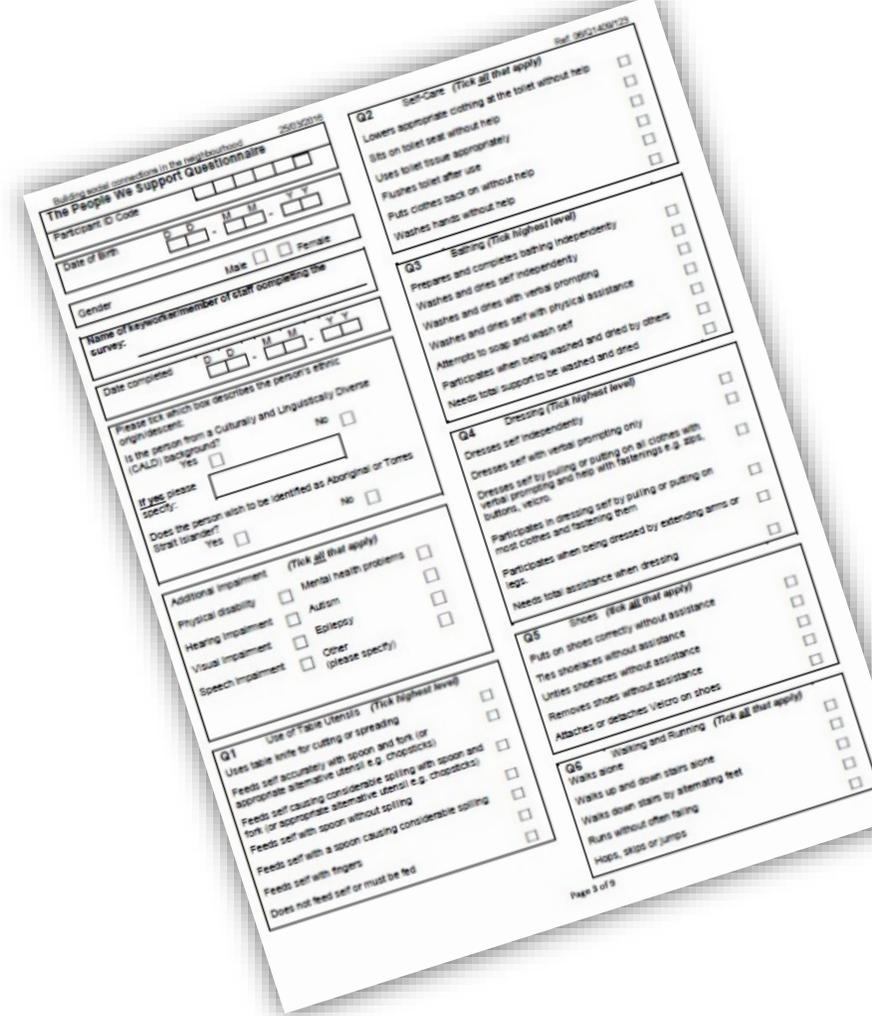


5, one hour outings with an RPA handler and a dog

Analysis – Group 1 & Group 2 Characteristics

- No statistically significant differences between the two groups

		Group 1	Group 2	<i>p</i>
Part 1 ABS score	<i>N/n</i>	8	8	
	<i>M</i>	178	171	
	Range	130-234	81-241	<i>p</i> =0.674
Percentage with autism		(<i>n</i> = 1) 13%	(<i>n</i> = 1) 13%	<i>p</i> =1.000
Percentage socially impaired		(<i>n</i> = 2) 25%	(<i>n</i> = 3) 38%	<i>p</i> =0.590
Age (years)	<i>M</i>	47	43	
	Range	21 to 64	32 to 56	<i>p</i> =0.462
Percentage male		(<i>n</i> = 2) 25%	(<i>n</i> = 3) 38%	<i>p</i> =0.590
Total score on the ABC	<i>M</i>	21	24	
	Range	2-42	3-62	<i>p</i> =0.793
Percentage with a physical impairment		(<i>n</i> = 4) 50%	(<i>n</i> = 3) 38%	<i>p</i> =0.614

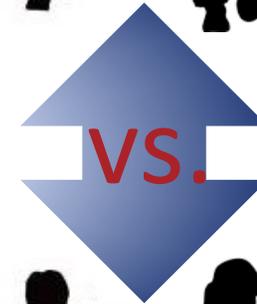


Analysis

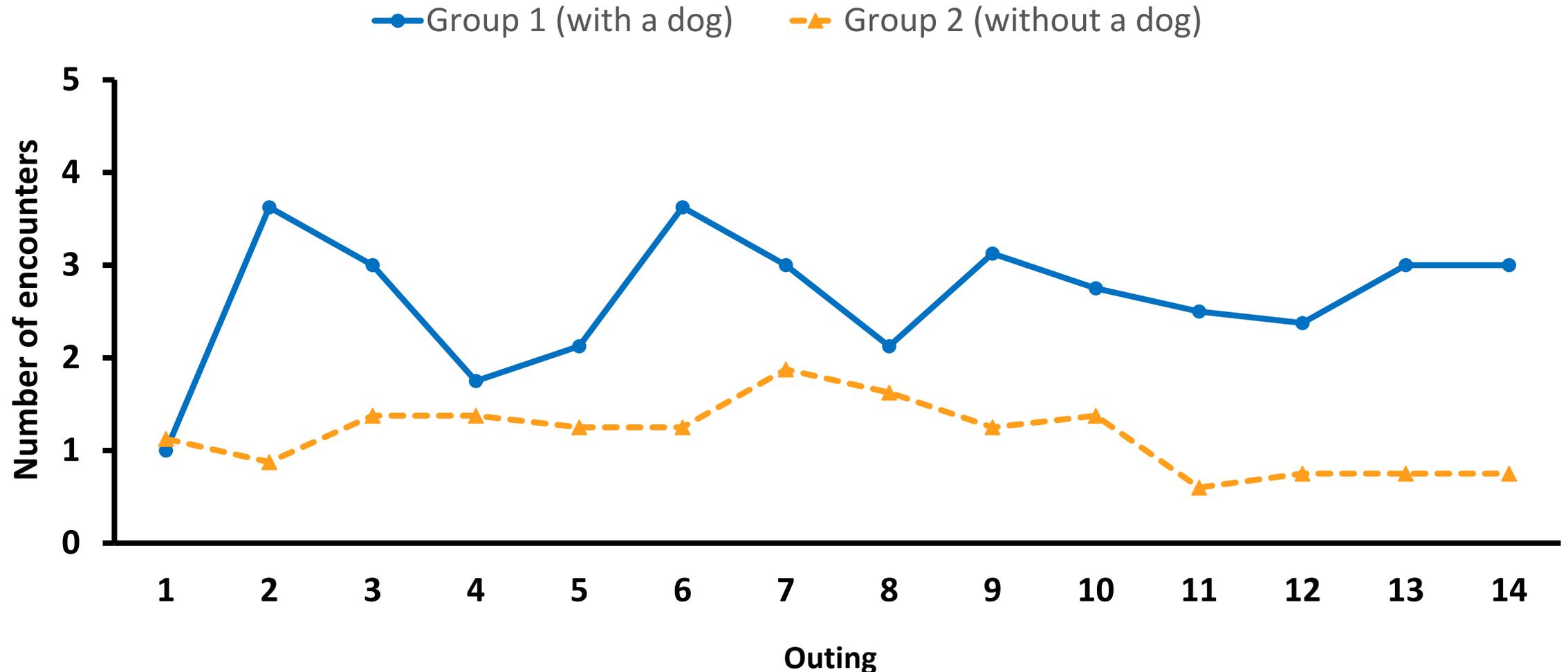
Group 1
($n = 8$)



Group 2
($n = 8$)

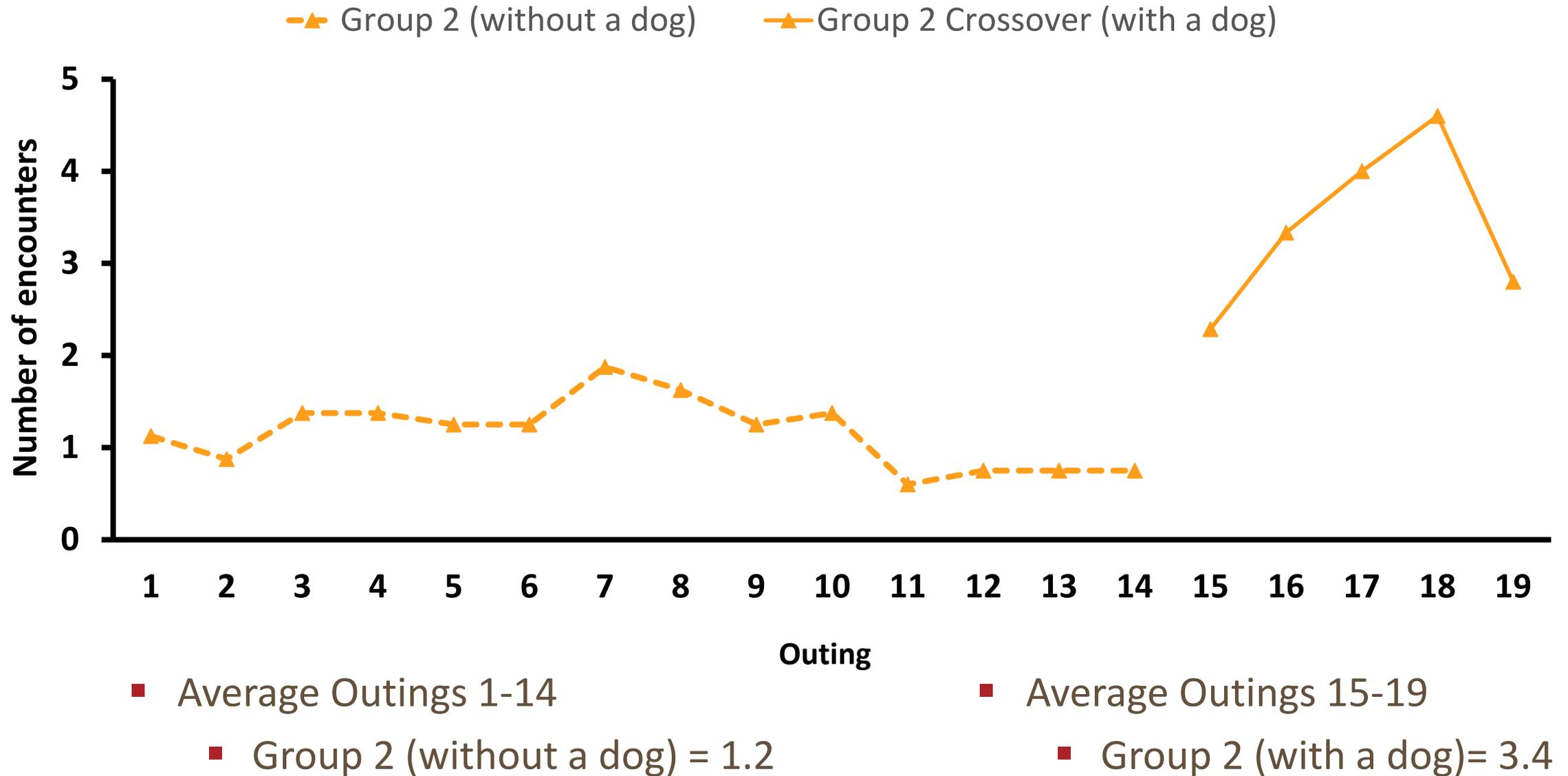


Results – Average number of encounters each outing for participants in Group 1 and Group 2



- Average Outings 1-14
 - Group 1 = 2.6 vs. Group 2 = 1.2

Results – Average number of encounters each outing for participants in Group 1 and Group 2



Qualitative Results

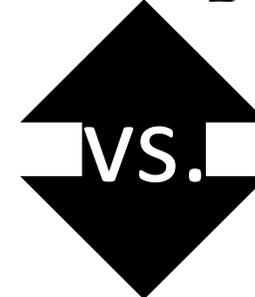
Group 1



Encounters



Group 2



Qualitative Results



Presence of a dog helps avoid unfulfilled or negative encounters



I am noticing an interesting pattern in the outings where there is no dog present. Only shop attendants' initiate conversation. Some say hello to me, but they try not to look at the person with the disability. (P8, without a dog, outing 8).

Three high school kids were making fun of Lyle as we were having a drink today. **They were laughing and giggling**, and when Lyle looked over, they covered their mouths, and **it was clear they were making Lyle the subject of their jokes.** (P5, without a dog, outing 4).

Presence of a dog helps avoid unfulfilled or negative encounters



Presence of a dog helps becoming acknowledged in regular places more quickly



- It took until outing 13 for Mark in Group 2 to be acknowledged

We have been coming to the same café each week, and **we now have a waitress that remembers our orders and how Mark likes things.** (P15, without a dog, outing 13).

- This occurring by outing 4 for Frankie in Group 1

When Frankie walked into the café today, he was greeted directly by the staff, by name, with, 'Hello Frankie'. The other shop attendant commented to him that that was Seraphim wasn't it (he had remembered from the week before). (P3, with a dog, outing 4).



Presence of a dog helps becoming acknowledged in regular places more quickly

- A neighbour also begun to acknowledge one participant

At the start of the program Michelle had spoken about not liking any of her neighbours because they never talk to her. She had said “they just ignore me”. However, today one smiled and said hello to Michelle, and Michelle smiled and said hello back. (P1, with a dog, outing 3).



Presence of a dog helps initiate convivial and fleeting encounters



- No interactions without a dog

For Lauren, no one talks to her, and she talks to no one other than the staff at the cafe where we get afternoon tea. No one thinks to say hello to two people having coffee. Nor does Lauren seek interaction with anyone other than me - unless there is a purpose to it, i.e. a transaction of some kind. (P14, without a dog, outing 13).

- Two outings later when she visited the same café with a dog,

People came up to Lauren and myself today and asked if they could pat the dog. Lauren said to me “People are friendlier when you have a dog, I have seen people look and smile”. (P14, with a dog, outing 15).



Dog acts as a catalyst for convivial encounters with strangers



We were walking and a man yelled out “I love your dog” and Claire thanked him with the biggest smile on her face. (P7, with a dog, outing 1).



One of Michelle’s neighbours seems to like dogs, so she has started coming over to Michelle and I when we are out walking. Today the neighbour began talking about her dogs in the past and then Michelle started talking about how she loves Ivy. The neighbour’s cat then appeared from nowhere and Michelle started talking about the cat, and the two continued to talk for about ten minutes. (P1, with a dog, outing 5).



Rachael was excited to see Murphy, and wanted to take him out for a walk. Whilst out walking, a lady and her young sons wanted to meet Murphy, and Rachael told the mum about her two young nieces. I cannot get over the transformation with Rachael. I struggled to get her to go out before, as she can be incredibly shy, but she is really coming out of her shell. (P9, with a dog, outing 16).

Discussion

- With a dog participants had significantly more encounters of a different and more convivial nature.
- Our findings support research with non-disabled individuals and individuals with physical disabilities demonstrating a dog:
 - Acts as a social stimulant. Members of the community often initiated contact to ask questions about the dog
 - Helps to reduce some of the negative effects of social ostracism
 - Increases individual's confidence in public



Conclusions

- The study highlights the potential for a dog walking program to help people with intellectual disabilities build a sense of identity and belonging in the community.
- It is a timely project, given the heightened awareness of people with disability in the community due to the launch of the NDIS.
- Limitations
 - Methods of data collection
 - Sample size
- Further research is required!



Key Question

- How do we increase the size of this research?



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Thank you

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