



EARLY LEARNING CENTRES

MACARTHUR | ORAN PARK | COBBITTY



CANINE ASSISTED LEARNING PROGRAM
EXPLORING TREE EARLY LEARNING SERVICES



WELCOME



At Exploring Tree Early Learning Services, we are passionate about creating environments where children feel safe, confident, and ready to learn.

As part of this commitment, we are proud to partner with Cornerstone Companions, integrating Canine Assisted Learning into our early years program.

This unique program introduces specially trained learning companion canines into the learning environment to support children's:

- Emotional regulation
- Confidence and resilience
- Empathy and kindness
- Engagement in learning
- Positive relationships

The program works alongside educators, supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of children while strengthening the learning environment.

We are excited to share this beautiful initiative with our Exploring Tree community.





Cornerstone Companions is supporting Exploring Tree Early Learning through our Cornerstone Companions Canine Assisted Learning Program designed to assist children in building confidence, regulating big emotions and connecting in a calm and supportive environment.

Our elite teams bridge the gap between clinical theory & neurodivergence facilitating regulation, task persistence & educational support. Evidence-based and purposeful, we are committed to supporting every child.



TEAM



TABITHA & REMI

**CSC Learning Companion Canine
Assisted Learning Therapist**

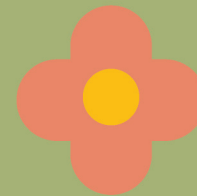
Tabitha and her learning companion canine Remi work with educators and children to support emotional regulation and wellbeing within the learning environment.



SAMANTHA & COCO

**Early Years Learning Educational Leader,
CSC Learning Companion Canine
Assisted Learning Therapist**

Samantha works alongside her learning companion canine, Coco, to support children within the Exploring Tree learning environment. Together, they help create calm and supportive moments where children can regulate big emotions and reconnect with their learning.



MAGGIE & SAIGE

**CSC Learning Companion Canine
Assisted Learning Therapist**

Maggie works within the Cornerstone Companions Learning Companion Program, supporting children through guided canine assisted learning experiences alongside her learning companion canine, Saige.



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CANINES

These special canines are part of the Cornerstone Companions Learning Companion Program and work alongside their handlers to support children's wellbeing and learning.



REMI

Learning Companion Canine Working alongside Tabitha

Remi supports children through calm and guided learning experiences.

Remi has a friendly and curious personality and enjoys helping children feel confident when interacting with animals.

Through interactions with Remi, children learn about gentle touch, patience, and how animals communicate.

Remi's favourite things:

- Meeting new friends
- Gentle pats and quiet attention
- Walking around the learning spaces
- Listening to children talk and share stories

Special interest:

Remi has a cheeky side and is known to hang back just a little longer to sneak in an extra pat from her friends.

Remi loves being part of the learning community and helping children feel calm and connected.



COCO

Learning Companion Canine Working alongside Samantha

Coco is a calm and gentle learning companion who supports children at Exploring Tree Macarthur. She enjoys spending time in quiet learning spaces where children can sit with her, talk with her, or simply enjoy her peaceful presence.

Coco helps create moments where children can slow down, regulate big emotions, and reconnect with their learning.

Coco's favourite things:

- Gentle pats
- Sitting quietly with children during learning time
- Calm classroom visits
- Watching children read stories

Special interest:

Coco has a curious nature and especially enjoys exploring the garden, taking in all the different smells and peaceful outdoor moments.

Coco's kind and patient nature makes her a wonderful companion for children learning about empathy, kindness, and respectful relationships with animals.



SAIGE

Learning Companion Canine Working alongside Maggie

Saige is a thoughtful and calm learning companion who works alongside Maggie supporting children through guided canine assisted learning experiences.

Saige enjoys peaceful interactions with children and often helps create moments where children can pause, breathe, and reset when emotions feel big.

Through experiences with Saige, children build confidence, empathy, and an understanding of respectful relationships with animals.

Saige's favourite things:

- Calm classroom visits
- Gentle pats
- Sitting quietly beside children
- Being part of story time

Special interest:

Saige has a soft spot for chicken treats and will happily focus her attention when a tasty chicken snack is nearby.

Saige's calm nature helps children feel safe and supported as they build confidence in their learning environment.

WHAT CHILDREN EXPERIENCE

The Cornerstone Companions program supports children in ways that are both intentional and developmentally appropriate.

Interactions with the learning companion canines help children:



Regulate big emotions



Develop confidence & resilience



Practice empathy and kindness



Build respectful relationships



Feel calm and ready to learn

It is important to note that the canine program is not used as a reward.

Instead, it is used as a supportive strategy to help children anchor big emotions, reset their nervous system, and re-engage with their learning environment.



WHAT CHILDREN EXPERIENCE

Children may engage with the program through:

- Small group wellbeing experiences
- Calm classroom visits
- Guided interactions with the canine
- Learning about responsible pet ownership
- Discussions about animal communication and body language

All experiences are carefully supervised by educators and the canine handler.

SAFE INTERACTION GUIDE

To ensure positive experiences for both children and the learning companion canines, we teach children to follow the **SAFE** approach.

S

STAY CALM

Children move slowly and avoid loud voices or sudden movements around the canine.

A

ASK PERMISSION

Children always ask the handler before approaching the canine.

F

FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS

Children listen carefully to the handler's guidance when interacting with the canine.

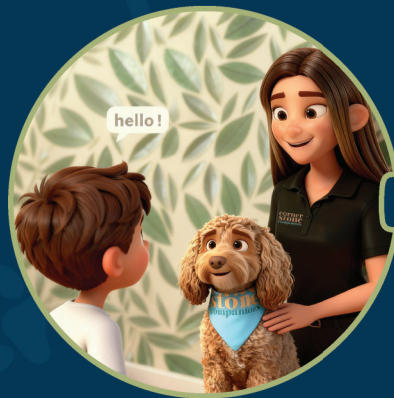
E

ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE

Children enjoy positive and respectful interactions with the canine.

GREETING THE CANINE

When children interact with the learning companion canine they are encouraged to:



Say hello to the handler first



Ask permission before approaching



Approach the canine from the side



Gently pat the canine from the collar toward the tail

These steps help children learn respectful and safe interactions with animals.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are the canines trained to work with children?

Yes. The learning companion canines are specially trained to work in educational environments and are always accompanied by their trained handler.

Are children required to interact with the canine?

No. Participation is always optional. Some children prefer to observe from a distance, which is completely respected.

What if my child is nervous around canines?

Children are never pressured to interact. Educators support children to engage at a pace that feels comfortable for them. Often children build confidence simply by watching and learning about the dog.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How are interactions supervised?

Interactions are always supported through:

- educator supervision
- handler guidance
- calm and structured interactions

If supervision changes or the environment becomes too busy, the canine team may pause or leave the area to maintain safety.

What about allergies?

Good hygiene practices are followed, including hand washing after interaction. If your child has allergies or specific concerns, please speak with your service leadership team.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What qualifications and training do the Learning Companion Practitioners have?

All Cornerstone Companions practitioners are trained Canine Assisted Learning Therapists who have completed specialised training in working with children in educational environments.

Practitioners have knowledge and experience in:

- child development and early years learning
- trauma-informed and neurodiversity-affirming practices
- emotional regulation and wellbeing support
- safe and ethical canine-assisted interactions

Each practitioner works alongside a carefully trained learning companion canine and follows clear guidelines to ensure all interactions are safe, supportive, and developmentally appropriate. On-going professional learning and reflective practice are also an important part of maintaining the quality and integrity of the program.



COME AND SAY HELLO

When you see the Cornerstone Companions team visiting your service families are always welcome to say hello and learn more about the program.

Through the Cornerstone Companions Learning Companion Program, children learn that animals, just like people, deserve kindness, patience, and respect.

These special interactions help children develop empathy, confidence, and emotional regulation skills that support their learning and relationships.

We look forward to the many positive experiences this program will continue to bring to the children and families of Exploring Tree.