



# Dogs as catalysts for community participation of people with intellectual disability

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## Background

- 5,000 people with intellectual disabilities live in 900 shared supported accommodation services in Victoria.
- Many other people live in supported living options.
- One of the **consistent failures** is around the domains of **social inclusion and interpersonal relationships** (Bigby et al., 2016).
  - Few participants had close friends
  - Some felt lonely
  - People often experience negative community attitudes



## Background – Social Inclusion



- This “offers a way to modernize the concept of community participation, as many day-to-day interactions fall under the category of encounter” (Simplican et al. 2015, p.25).

## Background – Concept of ‘Encounter’ for people with intellectual disabilities

- Wiesel, Bigby and Carling-Jenkins (2013) identified different types of encounters which can occur;

### 1. Moments of conviviality





## Background – Concept of ‘Encounter’ for people with intellectual disabilities

- Wiesel, Bigby and Carling-Jenkins (2013) identified different types of encounters which can occur;

### 2. Fleeting exchanges



## Background – Concept of ‘Encounter’ for people with intellectual disabilities

- Wiesel, Bigby and Carling-Jenkins (2013) identified different types of encounters which can occur;

### 3. Service transactions



## Background – Concept of ‘Encounter’ for people with intellectual disabilities

- Wiesel, Bigby and Carling-Jenkins (2013) identified different types of encounters which can occur;



### 4. Encounters within a distinct social space

## Background – Concept of ‘Encounter’ for people with intellectual disabilities

- Wiesel, Bigby and Carling-Jenkins (2013) identified different types of encounters which can occur;



### 5. Unfulfilled encounter

## Background – Concept of ‘Encounter’ for people with intellectual disabilities

- Wiesel, Bigby and Carling-Jenkins (2013) identified different types of encounters which can occur;



### 6. Exclusionary encounter



## Background – Importance of Encounters

- Encounters are important and “contribute to a sense of recognition and of ‘feeling at home’ in a neighbourhood” (Bredewold et al. 2015, p.11).



## Background – Catalysts for encounters?

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



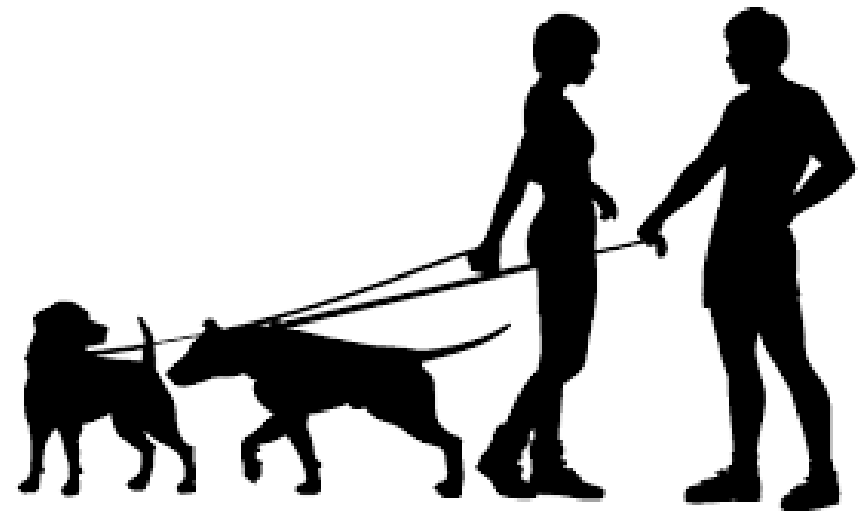
## Background – Catalysts for encounters?

- 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

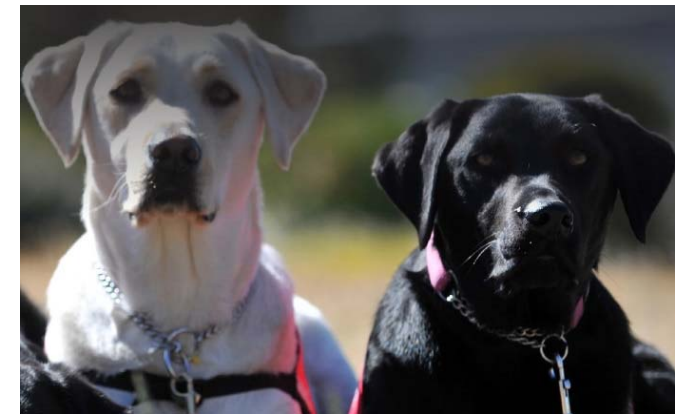


6 RPA Labrador dogs



2 Handlers from RPA –

Both received additional training prior to the program



# What we did

Recruited 16 participants

Group 1  
(n = 8)



Group 2  
(n = 8)



*Please send completed forms to the research officer*

**The People We Support Questionnaire**

Participant ID Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

Name of keyworker/member of staff completing the survey: \_\_\_\_\_

Date completed: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Please tick which best describes the person's ethnic (CALD) background:

Yes ☐ No ☐

State please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Does the person wish to be identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Additional impairments (Tick all that apply)

Physical disability ☐ Mental health problems ☐

Hearing impairment ☐ Autism ☐

Visual impairment ☐ Epilepsy ☐

Speech impairment ☐ Other (please specify) ☐

**Q1 - Use of Table Utensils (Tick all that apply)**

Uses table knife for cutting or spreading ☐

Feeds self accurately with spoon and fork (or appropriate alternative e.g. chopsticks) ☐

Feeds self causing considerable spilling with spoon and fork (or appropriate alternative e.g. chopsticks) ☐

Feeds self with a spoon without spilling ☐

Feeds self with a spoon causing considerable spilling ☐

Does not feed self or must be fed ☐

**Q2 - Toileting (Tick all that apply)**

Lowers appropriate clothing at the toilet without help ☐

Sits on toilet seat without help ☐

Uses toilet tissue appropriately ☐

Flushes toilet after use ☐

Puts clothes back on without help ☐

Washes hands without help ☐

**Q3 - Eating (Tick highest level)**

Prepares and completes bathing independently ☐

Washes and dries self independently ☐

Washes and dries self with verbal prompting ☐

Attempts to eat and wash self ☐

Participates when being washed and dried by others ☐

Needs total support to be washed and dried ☐

**Q4 - Dressing (Tick highest level)**

Dresses self independently ☐

Dresses self with verbal prompting only ☐

Dresses self by putting or putting on all clothes with verbal prompting and help with fastenings e.g. zip, buttons, velcro ☐

Participates in dressing self by putting or putting on most clothes and fastenings ☐

Participates when being dressed by extending arms or legs ☐

Needs total assistance when dressing ☐

**Q5 - Shoes (Tick all that apply)**

Puts on shoes correctly without assistance ☐

Ties shoelaces without assistance ☐

Unties shoelaces without assistance ☐

Removes shoes without assistance ☐

Attaches or detaches Velcro on shoes ☐

**Q6 - Walking and Running (Tick all that apply)**

Walks alone ☐

Walks up and down stairs alone ☐

Walks down stairs by alternating feet ☐

Runs without often tripping ☐

Hops, skips or jumps ☐

Page 1 of 6

## 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

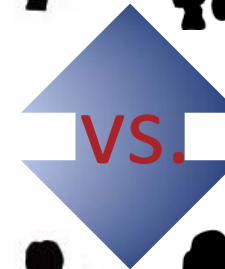
		Group 1	Group 2	<i>p</i>
	<i>N/n</i>	8	8	
Part 1 ABS score	<i>M</i>	178	171	<i>p</i> =0.674
	Range	130-234	81-241	
Percentage with autism	( <i>n</i> = 1)	13%	13%	<i>p</i> =1.000
Percentage socially impaired	( <i>n</i> = 2)	25%	38%	<i>p</i> =0.590
Age (years)	<i>M</i>	47	43	<i>p</i> =0.462
	Range	21 to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

# Analysis

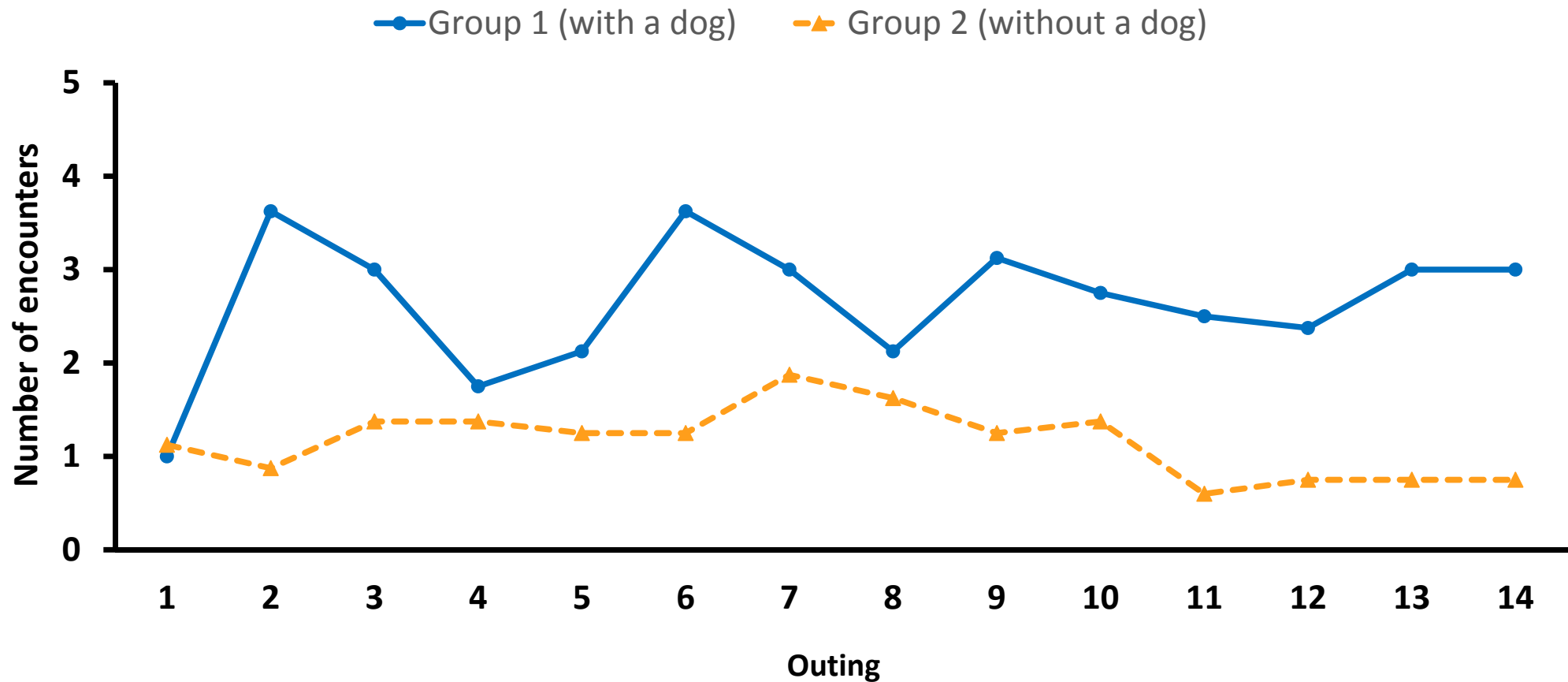
Group 1  
( $n = 8$ )



Group 2  
( $n = 8$ )



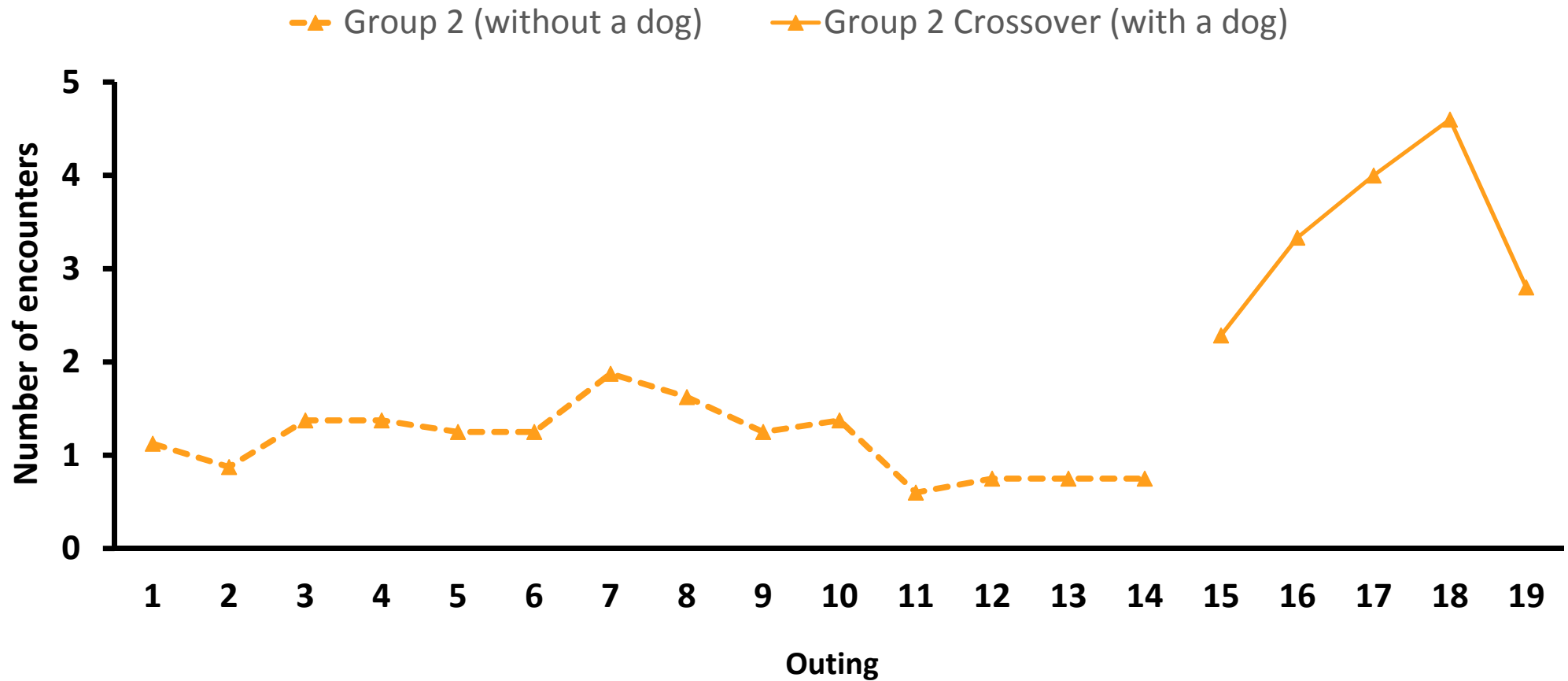
## Results – Average number of encounters each outing for participants in Group 1 and Group 2



■ 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



■ Average Outings 1-14

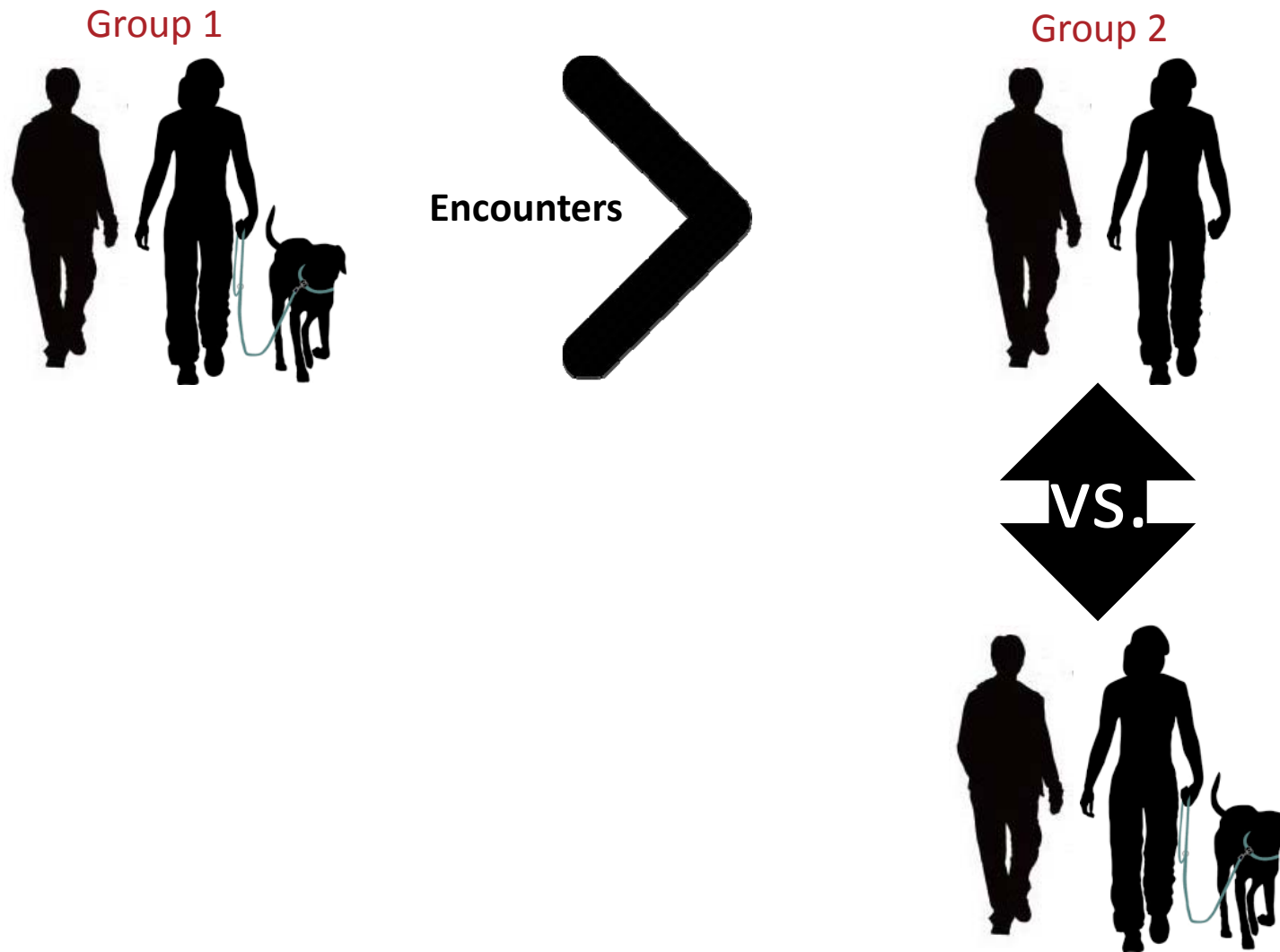
■ Group 2 (without a dog) = 1.2

■ Average Outings 15-19

■ Group 2 (with a dog)= 3.4



# Qualitative Results



## 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 neighbours’ 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!



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**Thank you**

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