

New Zealand's first court dog helps calm victims

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New Zealand's first court dog has had a warm welcome from Justice Minister Amy Adams at the Tauranga Court house.

Louie, an eight year old black Labrador, has joined the team as part of a new initiative to help young victims and witnesses minimise the trauma of giving evidence in court.

Louie started in his role after his owner Gail Bryce, who is a victims advisor at the court, looked into what additional support could be given to two young victims who were about to give evidence in court.

Louie has prior experience visiting children in hospitals and working with the elderly.

The court environment can be intimidating and overwhelming for victims and witnesses. By making a dog available, the goal is to help keep them calm and make the court process less stressful.

Louie can stay with victims in the crown waiting room during a trial and during the familiarisation visit to the court pre-trial. This relaxes the victim and makes it easier for them to give clear and accurate testimony.

Minister Adams, who visited Louie at the Tauranga Court house praised the initiative. "I can see what an amazing difference it makes," she said, and mentioned that she will be looking into the possibility of introducing dogs into more courts around the country.

"I am really excited by the potential of court dogs. I am looking at a whole raft of ways to make it easier for child witnesses," she said.