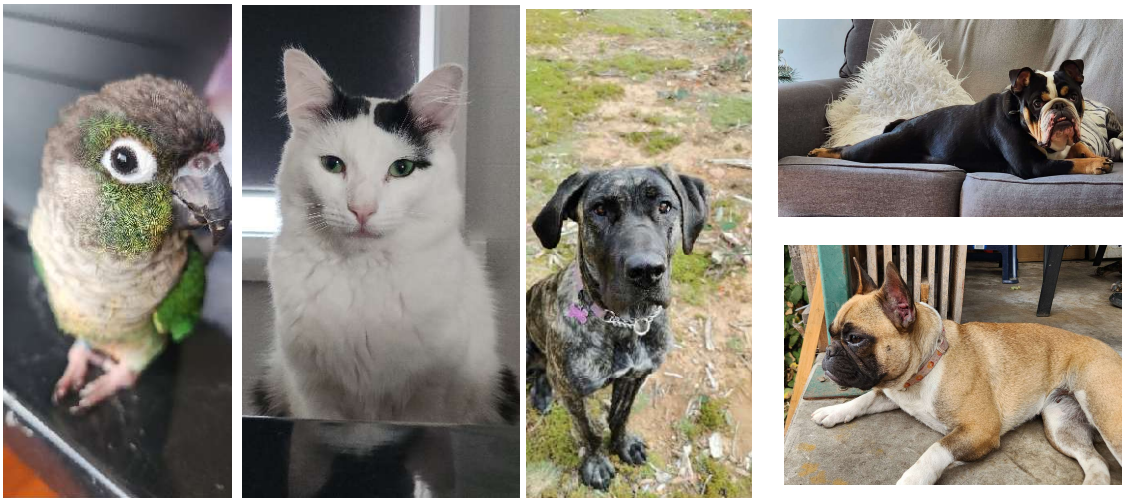
Jodi Baxter—menagerie maker

Apparently, arriving at the office to find Jodi caring for a lamb wearing a nappy is not considered an oddball event. An important thing to know about Jodi is that she is often rescuing and caring for lost, injured or unwanted animals. It says a lot about who she is and perhaps why she does what she does.

Jodi has a menagerie of pets at her home – three dogs, 'Wendy the Hellhound' (a beautiful but silly Great Dane/Neapolitan Mastiff), Barnie, a miniature Aussie bulldog she fostered when he was 10 weeks old and not expected to live – four years later he is still with her– and Pip, a French bulldog – who is the easy one. She also has cat called Bubbles and a green-cheeked conure parrot called Teeko, which she also brings to the office sometimes, where it wolf whistles and meows every now and then — when it is not screaming his name.

The lamb was a recent addition. She spotted it alone on the side of the road as she drove by. No other sheep were to be seen, nor were there any homes in the vicinity of where she found it. Leaving it to die on the roadside was not an option. Taking it home to try and save it was, so that's what she did. Sadly, after struggling to survive for a few days, the lamb didn't make it.



L-R: Teeko, Bubbles, Wendy, Top right, Barney, Bottom Right, Pip

Jodi has spent a lot of time around sheep, partly because of where she grew up in Condobolin in central NSW, and partly because for a number of years she worked as a roustabout in shearing sheds around the country. It was a job Jodi absolutely loved and a world she knew well from her childhood. Her dad was a shearer and as a child she spent time in sheds just to be close to him. As an adult she only worked once in the same shed as her father, but she had an affinity with the hard-working, hard-drinking ethos of the shearing crews she was part of, and she enjoyed the transient and living-in the moment lifestyle it offered.

Some of Jodi's childhood was spent in Wagga, living with her mum after her parents split up when she was ten. She and her brother went to boarding school near Griffith, but despite the arduous bus journey involved, she remembers they regularly caught the bus home at weekends when they knew their mother wouldn't be there. They would break into the house by lifting the tiles off the roof and enter through the manhole, stay the weekend and then be gone before their mother got home.

After leaving school at the end of year 10, Jodi worked in Wagga for a couple of years, cooking and being a barista at her mother's café called Billy's Café. At 17 she returned to Condobolin and began working in the office of her grandparents' engineering business. She neither liked nor wanted the job, but because it was a family business she felt she had no choice. Nevertheless, she couldn't wait to leave and become part of the shearing shed fraternity she had witnessed as a child.

Jodi first visited Tasmania in 2006 to see her mother who had relocated here, and she worked with a shearing team in a shed near Campbell Town and another on Bruny Island. However, her move here in 2008 was motivated by a desire to be far away from everyone she knew, and to be close to everything she wanted to enjoy- beaches, mountains, rivers- all of which Jodi felt were practically on your doorstep in Tasmania.

Although Jodi spent her first year working in a café in Latrobe run by friends, the move to Tassie also signalled a change of direction in her work life when she decided to work in the disability sector at Devonfield, a youth centre near Devonport. On her first day on the job, she knew it was a good fit, and she has never looked back. Jodi had grown up with a friend who had Turner Syndrome, but she never questioned what that meant for him as she had never felt he was any different to others in the group. It wasn't until later she thought about why he was different from her.

She met her partner Ed the same year and ended up basing herself in Launceston to be near him but continued to commute to her job in Devonport until a month before her son was born in 2014. She then spent five years 'doing the baby thing' and her daughter was born in 2016. It was an 'absolutely amazing time', says Jodi. 'I was determined not to go back to work until they started school,' despite the economic cost of this decision. By this time, they were living at Myrtlebank where they didn't have power and lived off a generator.

In 2020, Jodi resumed working as a disability support worker, and after her relationship with Ed ended in 2022, Jodi moved back to Launceston. Having previously worked with adaptCARE's founder Ben, she didn't hesitate in joining him when he started his own organisation in 2023, becoming one of the original 6 staff members.

Her shift from Support Worker to Care Coordinator at the beginning of 2024 was not something she had ever envisaged doing. She had come into the office to sign up for her Certificate IV in Disability when current CEO Alena told her to apply for the Care Coordinator role. She was both surprised at the suggestion and doubtful about her ability to do the job but did as she was asked, never thinking she would get the job. 'I had no faith in myself', says Jodi, 'and I never thought I could do this. But now I absolutely love it, and I now know that I can do it.' That is another important thing to know about Jodi.