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'She's seen a lot of violence and was bullied because of her skin colour'

Jake helps troubled girls

KAT ADAMSKI

JAKE the labrador has survived cancer and now he is helping to brighten the lives of teenage girls from disadvantaged backgrounds.

His owner, Susan Kitchener, of North Sydney, said her lovable labrador used to be a therapy dog in nursing homes.

But more recently he has accompanied her to SISTER2sister events, where Ms Kitchener, 42, was a mentor to an at-risk teenage girl.

"I became a 'big sister' two years ago after one of my friends had joined the program," she said.

"It was something I wanted to do because you may be the only constant they have in their lives, compared to what they're facing at home or school."

SISTER2sister is a 12-month mentoring and personal success devel-

opment program which matches successful women mentors with at-risk teenage girls who are in need of support, inspiration and opportunity in their lives.

But about the same time as Ms Kitchener joined the program in 2008, Jake, 11, was going through chemotherapy.

"He had a mast cell tumour in his mouth and he had surgery, then radiation and chemotherapy before getting the all clear," she said.

"I remember taking Jake along to one of the little sister sessions and a six-year-old girl, who was also just about to have chemotherapy, started playing with him.

"She was telling him not to be scared, that he would be sick afterwards, but that it goes away - it was really moving."

Ms Kitchener was paired with a Sudanese girl, 18, who was born in a refugee camp in Ethiopia. She had lived in camps her whole life until moving to Australia when she was 15.

"She has seen a lot of violence and was being bullied at school in Sydney due to her skin colour," Ms Kitchener said.

"She had to find a way to channel her feelings and the program helped her. She's just moved to Victoria to study childcare and hospitality management."

Ms Kitchener is a volunteer at the Life Changing Experiences Foundation which runs SISTER2sister.

For further information see lifechangingexperiences.org.



TOP TEAM: Susan Kitchener and her labrador Jake.

Picture: PAUL MELVILLE -PP390213