

The "Living Well Together" handbook has been designed to assist local authorities and other interested parties tap into an often under-utilised avenue for building sense of community and social capital - the power of pets.

Living Well Together



How Companion Animals can help Strengthen Social Fabric



Living Well Together



A publication of



Edited by

Dr. Lisa Wood

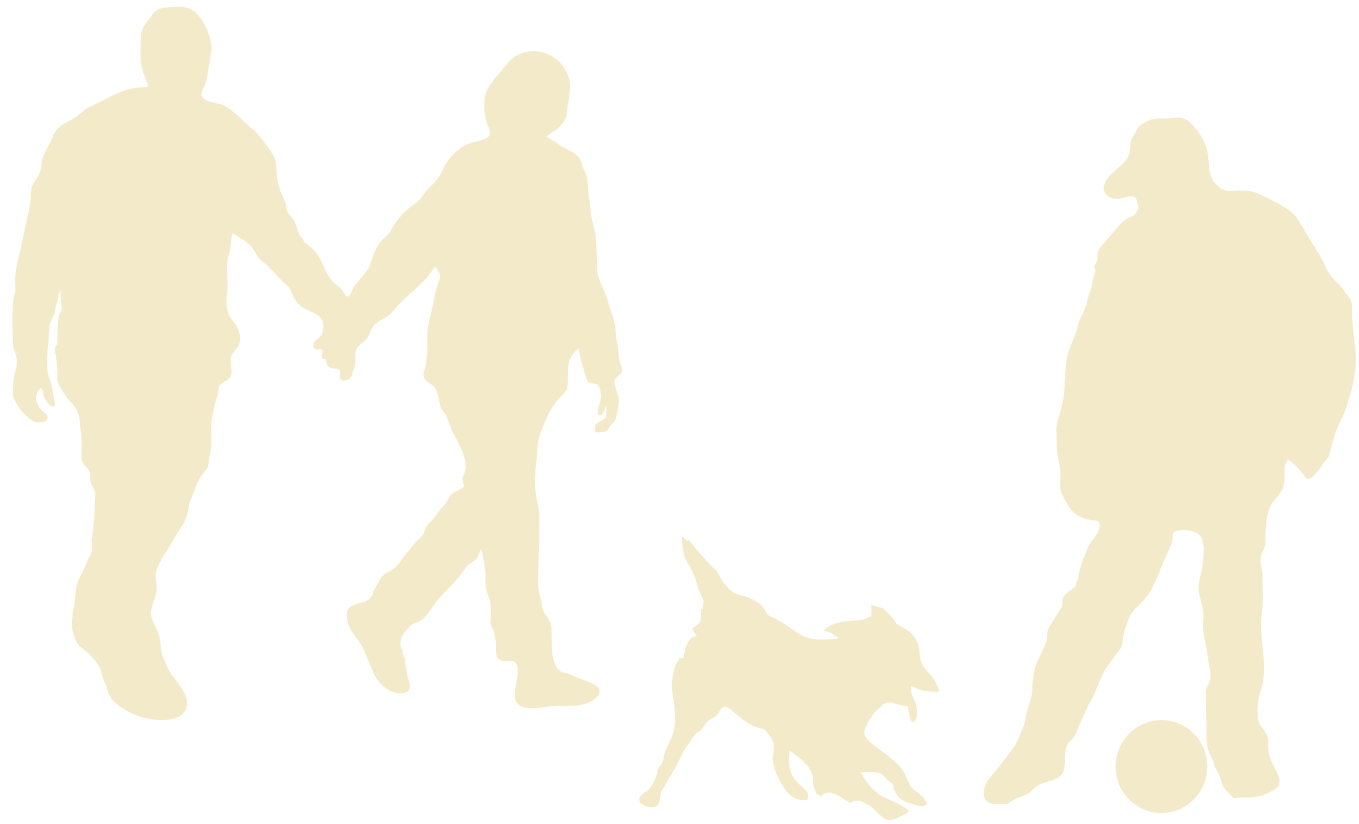
Centre for the Built Environment and Health

School of Population Health
The University of Western Australia



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Foreword

Living Well Together is part of what place making is about, and I have seen firsthand the ways in which pets can be part of our efforts to revitalise local communities.

Dogs are destined to play a role in the revitalisation of the main street of Wodonga.

Sixteen months ago I was employed by the City of Wodonga as their Place Maker, and my major challenge was to take a very tired, dysfunctional High St and turn it into the vibrant civic heart of the city.

In case you are wondering what a Place Maker does, it is very much like being a home maker. Homemaking turns a house into a home, while place making turns a space (such as a street) into a place. The art of place making, like the art of homemaking, involves creating an environment that nurtures both inhabitants and visitors. This is not primarily about the design of the space, because, just as the best interior design in the world does not necessarily result in a house becoming a home, the best architecture and design does not make a space a place. It's more about making people feel welcome and valued, or throwing a great party.

In trying to turn High Street into one of the great public spaces in Australia, the first thing I did was organise a weekly Friday night event during the summer called 'Lounging on High'. We put some old retro lounge chairs in the street, hired a jazz band and invited people to bring food and drink and 'lounge on High'. Because many people lounge at home with their pets, we put out dog drinking bowls to encourage people to bring their dogs. When we eventually rebuild High Street it will include dog drinking bowls and hitching rails.

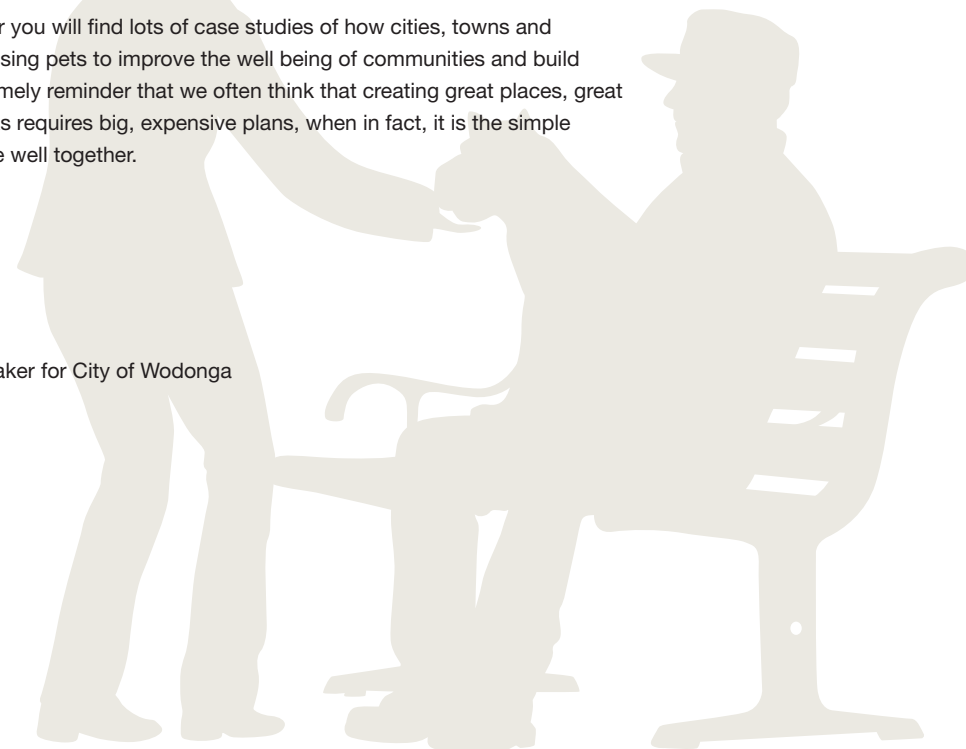
In place making, dogs play a much greater role than just 'conversation starter' or 'social lubricant'. One of the secrets of place making is to get people to slow down. If people take twice as long to get from A to B, the street will look twice as full, without attracting a single extra customer. A street full of people is more appealing than a street half empty. So when people stop to pat a dog or chat to the owner, they are actually helping to bring the street to life.

As a place maker, my job is to deliver a memorable experience. Dogs can help create that memorable experience for many people, especially for children.

In Living Well Together you will find lots of case studies of how cities, towns and neighbourhoods are using pets to improve the well being of communities and build social capital. It is a timely reminder that we often think that creating great places, great streets and great parks requires big, expensive plans, when in fact, it is the simple things that help us live well together.

DAVID ENGWICHT

Former CBD Place Maker for City of Wodonga



Foreword

This is a terrific publication. It should be recommended reading for everyone who can make a difference to the health and well-being of individuals and communities – so not just health professionals and community workers, but also planners, engineers, architects, developers, councils and governments, even individuals. Why? It shows what's possible when we work together with commitment, passion and a determination to make a difference.

The focus of the Handbook is pets and how they contribute to social capital. This emphasis on social capital goes to the heart of the Healthy Spaces and Places project. Healthy Spaces and Places is a national approach that recognises the influence the spaces and places we build for living, working and playing (the built environment) can have on our lifelong health. It is a joint initiative of the National Heart Foundation, the Australian Local Government Association and the Planning Institute of Australia (funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing). The project aims to get more of us being more active more regularly: walking, cycling and using public transport - active movement helps make us fitter and healthier lifelong.

This Handbook resonates with Healthy Spaces and Places not only because it shows how pet ownership gets people active and healthier (physically and mentally), but also because it is underpinned by sound research that shows the benefits of active, healthy lifestyles. Also, it is about partnerships. The case studies show many different approaches but the underlying theme is strong: pet ownership can readily make things happen at the community level. Pet ownership has many benefits. It gets many of us out walking. It also gets us talking, leading to spontaneous, neighbourly relations and, as this book shows, creative initiatives and progressive joint ventures. In essence, pet ownership leads to actions and activities that help people live well together.

Good quality built environments have a compelling role to play in facilitating such initiatives, as some of the case studies show.

We encourage you to dip into this Handbook and start making a difference, for yourself or for your community.

ANNE MORONEY

Project Manager

Healthy Spaces and Places Project

Living Well Together

“Social capital is the social glue, the weft and warp of the social fabric which comprises a myriad of interactions that make up our public and private lives.” (Eva Cox, Boyer lecture, 1995)

What Is This Thing Called “Social Capital”?

While there has been a lot of discussion around social capital over the past five to ten years, there is no single or agreed definition. Most simply, it has been referred to as the glue that holds society together¹ or the raw material of civil society that is created from the everyday interactions between people.² More specifically,

Social capital consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible.³

The theme of most definitions is that social capital is about networks of people getting some common benefit from interacting with each other. Importantly, social capital does not have to be either defined or confined by geography. Instead, it can be created within any number of the smaller communities that people belong to, such as recreational or interest groups, workplaces, families and even virtual communities.

Like other core features of humanity such as love and goodwill, social capital is difficult to see and measure directly. Instead it is measured more indirectly through its traits, such as community involvement and participation, trust, the extent to which people do things for each other, and the informal and formal networks between individuals and groups.

So What’s The Big Deal?

The word “capital”, coupled with “social” seeks to convey that ‘social capital’ has a value; a value that is on par with economic and human capital as foundations of a civil society. Like other forms of capital, it can either grow and be invested in, or be depleted.

Robert Putnam, one of the earliest and most prominent thinkers on social capital, alerts us to the economic benefits that accrue in places and regions rich in social capital⁴ by raising levels of human capital and forging civic engagement and trust.⁵

Trust is a distinct hallmark of social capital and one seen as essential to collective and individual wellbeing. As articulated by Eva Cox, “without trusting the goodwill of others we retreat into bureaucracy, rules and demands for more law and order”.⁶ The absence of trust can also breed fear and intolerance to differences. Such an absence was powerfully depicted in Michael Moore’s provocative documentary style film on American high school massacres, whereby lack of trust, tolerance, and the dominance of individualism over collective goodwill were investigated as part of the complex web of possible causes for this terrifying scenario.

What Benefits Does Social Capital Bring?

One of the most prolific areas of social capital research and interest is in the health field, with lower mortality rates,⁷⁻⁹ higher self-rated health,¹⁰ better general health¹¹ and decreased common mental illness¹² all positively associated with social capital. Other research indicates that higher levels of social capital are associated with a lessening in violent crime,¹³ positive child development¹⁴ and good community governance.¹⁵

As an example of social capital in action; the risk of dying as a consequence of a major Chicago heat-wave in July 1995 was found to correspond strongly to social capital. Socially isolated elderly persons experienced the highest mortality rates during this heat-wave, while those with links to community groups such as clubs and churches experienced much lower rates.¹⁶ Similarly, the death rate among socially isolated elderly people was higher in communities characterised by low levels of interaction in public places and higher crime rates.¹⁷

Social capital has caught the interest of researchers and policy makers in fields as diverse as health, education, business, agriculture and family psychology. National surveys of social capital are also being conducted in an increasing number of countries, including Australia, on the premise that social capital is a marker of individual and community wellbeing. It is now not uncommon for social capital to ‘pop up’ in government policy documents, as well as in not for profit and corporate programs.

This is occurring not because social capital is a totally new concept but rather because it gives a name and value to those human aspects of community, organisations and family life that are sometimes overlooked, but are nonetheless vital to individual and community wellbeing.

What Have Pets Got To Do With It?

Social capital can stem from many sources; for example it is being created and applied when people (individually or as groups and organisations) lend a helping hand, get involved in community issues, interact with local residents, volunteer, share useful contacts and skills, work towards a common goal, overlook someone’s differences and more.

With concerns growing both within Australia and around the globe regarding the erosion of community and social capital, and accumulating evidence of the impact of social and psychosocial factors on health and wellbeing, pets are emerging as valuable and positive features in community and neighbourhood life.

Scientific Research On Pets And Pet Ownership

In our own research,¹⁸⁻¹⁹ pets were found to act as a lubricant for social contact and interaction and pet owners had elevated perceptions of suburb friendliness. Even among people who didn’t own pets themselves, pets were seen as a conversation ice-breaker and to contribute positively to people getting out and about in their community. Pet owners were more likely to exchange favours with neighbours, to be involved in community issues and to have higher levels of social capital. Pets also appeared to ameliorate some determinants of poor mental health, such as loneliness. The connection between pets and social interaction and social capital suggests that the domain of a pet’s influence can extend beyond its immediate owner and home turf, to have a positive ripple effect on the broader community. Research undertaken by colleagues also demonstrates the role that dogs play in motivating their owners to be more physically active,²⁰ which in turn has a flow on benefit to health and reduced burden of disease at the community level.

There are also pet related examples of social capital traits such as volunteering, community involvement and programs to support people with special needs. Even when pet related problems arise, social capital can ‘kick in’ to help identify mutual ground and build community-based solutions. Moreover, including the needs of people with pets in communities can benefit everyone, as noted by Walljasper in a guide to building great neighbourhoods:

“When you create a neighborhood that’s friendly to dogs, it’s friendly to people, too. The traffic is not speeding and dangerous. There are green places to hang out and walk. So dogs are a good indicator species.”²¹

This handbook and the case studies within it provide examples of the ‘power of pets’ at work across a diverse range of community settings and issues. Importantly, most of the initiatives described in these case studies have evolved at the community or local government level, and the ideas can be readily adapted to suit differing circumstances and places.

While not everyone has the desire or capacity to have a pet of their own, communities that embrace pets for their positive and tangible contribution to human health and well-being, have much to gain.

Lisa Wood

Centre for the Built Environment and Health
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has been designed to assist local authorities
and other interested parties tap into an often
under-utilised avenue for building sense of
community and social capital - the power of pets.*

This handbook has grown from pioneering Australian research that has revealed how pets and their owners make measurable social contributions to our communities.

While pets in the community can sometimes cause a degree of nuisance, studies demonstrate that the closer the bond between animal and owner, the more responsible the owner is likely to be, with pet nuisances less likely to arise.

The benefits of building happy, healthy and active communities are well recognised; this handbook demonstrates how companion animals can play a part in plugging people back into their community, be it through getting people out volunteering, exercising or interacting socially with others.

There are a multitude of things that can contribute positively to social capital - involvement in sports and schools are common examples. But not everyone plays sport and not everyone has children. Yet two thirds of households own pets and more than half of all households own a dog and/or a cat.

Dr Lisa Wood, a research fellow with the Centre for the Built Environment and Health (School of Population Health) at the University of Western Australia has been involved in research looking at the connection between pets and social capital. The Petcare Information & Advisory Service has worked side by side with Dr Wood to create this handbook which provides examples and case studies of ways in which pets can play a part in creating healthy neighbourhoods and strengthening sense of community.

Pets are right under our noses and available to help us, all that is required is a little concerted thought in discovering the best ways to utilise them and reap benefits for the whole community.

The contents of the handbook are actual case studies drawn from around Australia, ranging across a broad range of topics from community building to utilising volunteers.

All are examples of ways in which pets are effectively enhancing social capital. Some are simple and require little organisation or funding, others are more complex. Some of the case studies may appeal, others may not. The ideas in these case studies can be readily adapted to different communities and circumstances.

You may find that these pet related case studies fit into a suite of other community development strategies or that just one will address a particular problem that your council has been wrestling with for a while.

You can pick and choose from the ones that are most appropriate to the needs of your residents and to the environmental, budgetary and social requirements of your council.

Benefits of each example are clearly outlined. Tips are provided to demonstrate how such concepts might be replicated. Web links and an appendix are included to make further investigation easy.

Pets don't just make people who own them feel good, they can create a positive ripple effect that extends into the broader community.

Petcare Information & Advisory Service, March 2009



Building Community



A good sense of community is an aspiration most people have for their neighbourhoods and is not just something associated with a “warm fuzzy feeling”.

Instead, sense of community has been shown to influence perceptions of community safety, neighbourhood attachment, community involvement, and improved community problem coping skills.²²

Until recently, the role of pets in building a sense of community has gone relatively unnoticed in the scientific literature, although it is often recognised anecdotally.

Recent research however, demonstrates the role that pets can play in building a strong sense of community and developing active social capital; two cornerstones vital to any vibrant, healthy community.



In a recent Australian study, pet owners scored more highly on the social capital scale than those that did not. Furthermore, the research went on to show that pet ownership was positively associated with social interactions, favour exchanges, community involvement and increased feelings of neighbourhood friendliness and sense of community;¹⁸ attributes not to be sneezed at.

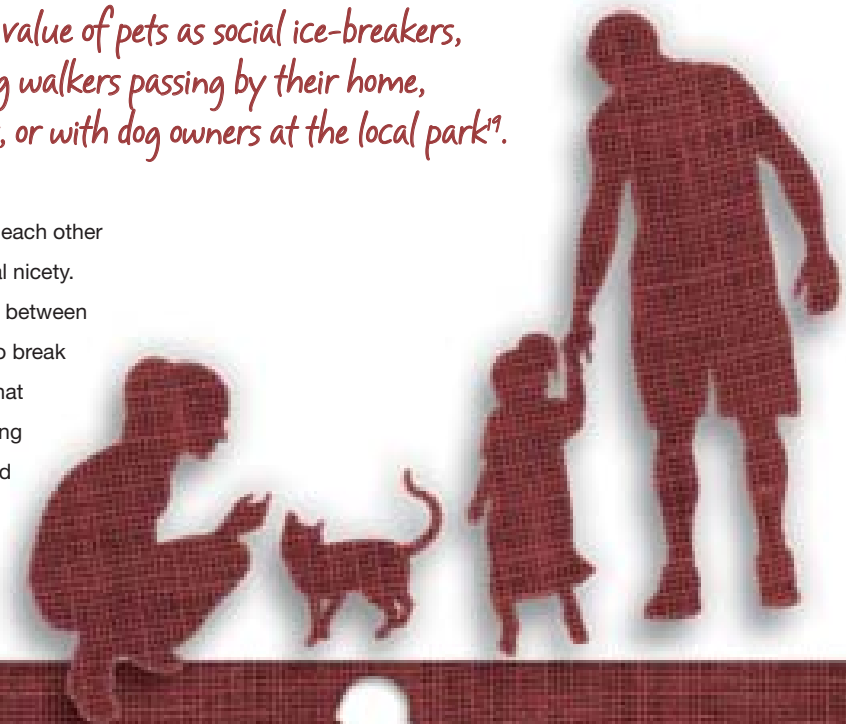
With around 63% of Australians owning a pet, these benefits, when aggregated across the whole community, are of significant interest to local Councils and others concerned with building healthier, happier neighbourhoods. In addition, these benefits create a ripple effect that extends beyond pet owners into the broader community, with pets helping to smooth the way for social interaction and general ‘out and about-ness’.

Both anecdote and research suggests that pets are well recognised ice-breakers. Dogs, for example, can stimulate conversation and contact between strangers²³⁻²⁵ and trigger positive social interaction.²⁶

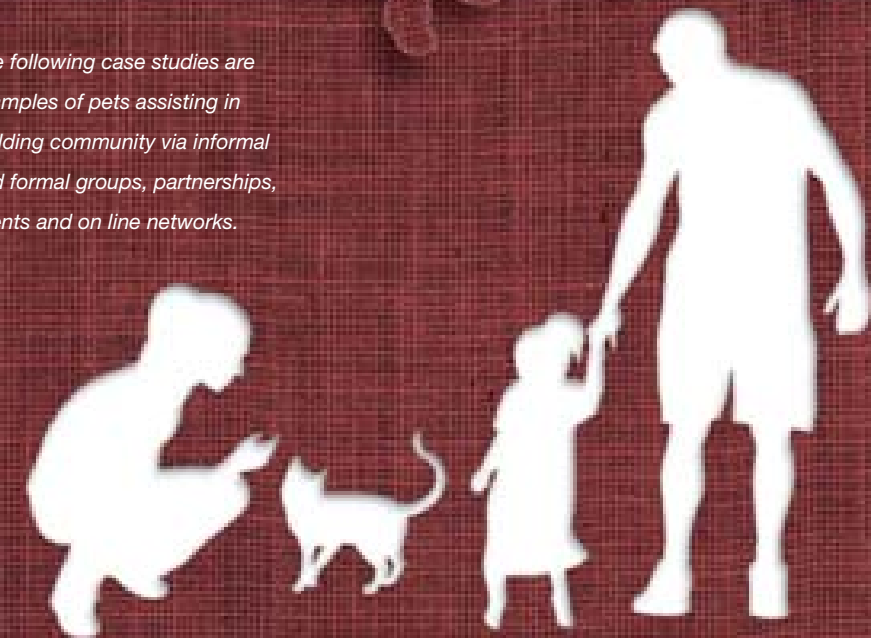
Dog walkers are also more likely to experience social contact and conversation than those that walk alone.²³ Similar findings have been demonstrated in an Australian study where half of all dog owners indicated that they had come to know locals in their suburb as a result of their dog.¹⁸

Even non pet owners recognise the value of pets as social ice-breakers, be it in their experience of speaking to dog walkers passing by their home, with neighbours who own a pet, or with dog owners at the local park¹⁹.

Residents or neighbours chatting to each other as a result of a pet is not just a social nicety. Such community-based interactions between people have the very real potential to break down the barriers and stereotypes that separate us from ‘others’ while playing an important role in building trust and a deep sense of community at the neighbourhood level.



The following case studies are examples of pets assisting in building community via informal and formal groups, partnerships, events and on line networks.



Community comes together and educates through fun family activity

Benefits of holding an educational community pet event

- Brings broad scale community together using a positive message and theme
- Creates an opportunity for Councils to educate local residents on specific pet related issues
- Normalises responsible pet ownership by creating a forum attended by many community members

Pets help keep individuals healthy, teach responsibility and provide companionship. When a council decides to bring pets and people together on a large scale, those benefits can flow on to help build community.

Frankston's Pets Day Out is possibly the biggest pet event in Victoria, whereby pets and owners can attend together. It is held annually in Frankston City, a regional capital located an hour's drive from Melbourne on Port Phillip Bay.

The event, now in its ninth year, began in a small way as a microchipping event, with a few hundred people attending. It has now developed into an event which attracts crowds of approximately 10,000.

While the day's main goal is to promote responsible pet ownership, Sheree McClelland, Council's Senior Animal Management Officer says, "One of the overarching goals of the day is to connect the community of Frankston. With current social implications of rising petrol and day to day living costs, the event is about providing something locally to the people of Frankston that is fun, free and for the whole family."

Such community events can play an important role in building a sense of community²⁷, which in turn can have positive flow on benefits for residential turnover, community safety and the social fabric of an area²⁸.

The day makes the most of the community connection by educating and informing people on a host of pet ownership issues the Council's Animal Management Officers have identified throughout the year.

At Pets Day Out, demonstrations of dog sporting activities like flyball, herding and agility courses are run, presenting owners with healthy, fun ways to accommodate and improve the quality of their dog's lives.

It is also an event with activities appealing to the broad community, including live music, pet parades, competitions, demonstrations and children's activities.

"We have approximately 21,000 dogs and 9,000 cats registered in Frankston. Council recognises pet ownership is a significant contributor to a healthy and vibrant community and budgets for around \$60,000 towards the Pets Day Out each year. Through the event we try to educate and encourage, rather than enforce." Sheree McClelland, City of Frankston

The success of events like Pets Day Out is obvious; similar days are now being held regularly all over Australia. They can be run anywhere, on a small or large scale, and are a positive way to foster sense of community as well as promoting responsible pet ownership.

Web Links

Frankston City Council - www.frankston.vic.gov.au

Dog park interaction creates community links

It's a regular weekday afternoon at Britannia Reserve in Leederville, WA; dogs of all shapes and sizes are socialising with their canine buddies. Equally social are the dog owners.

For many it is much more than just a casual park encounter. They know each other's names, time their dog's walks to coincide, and hold a Christmas get together at the park, complete with a Kris Kringle for the dogs.

Deeper still is the social support and antidote to isolation that some regulars have experienced as a result. This was the experience of Lee Cheah, "Some days I thought I would die of loneliness and the only thing that would get me through was knowing that I could go to the park and talk to real adults that had an interest in me as a person; an interest that had started because of our mutual love of dogs. Thank goodness for the dogs, they were my ice-breakers and gave me a bond with total strangers who I soon called my friends."

For some, the social support of the fellow dog walkers has extended to helping one another out in practical ways. Britannia Reserve regular John Bettles recalls, "When I was coping with a family crisis to do with ageing parents, I was offered help to look after Dino, legal and medical advice, insights from other's similar experiences, and just generally had people prepared to listen."

The off leash area applies to only half the reserve, and dogs are required to be on leads if sporting or other events are taking place. It's a good example of the way in which an area can cater to the needs of different user groups, including dog walkers. But as John explains, there was a time when their access to the reserve as an off leash area was under threat.

"A few years ago the Council was planning to discontinue offleash access. Regular dog walkers rallied to defend it, but right from the start, we were conscious of not turning it into an 'us and them' debate."

John Bettles, Local resident

"We couched our argument around the need for resident convenience and stressed the importance of engaging the support of all residents, not just dog lovers."

As the Britannia Reserve experience highlights, off leash areas provide convenient access to residents, value to dogs and significant flow on benefits associated with people getting out and about.

The Town of Vincent also runs the Paws on the Path program which promotes dog walking and incorporates free dog training. Residents sign up for one week training with their dog and on successful completion form social walking groups.



Benefits of Local Government and dog owner partnerships

- Creates better relationships and outcomes between Council, dog owners and residents
- Provides new network and physical activity opportunities for newcomers and marginalised groups
- Encourages responsible dog ownership



Tips

- Involve the local community by creating an organising committee or working party assisted and overseen by Council staff
- Encourage local experts such as veterinarians, dog trainers and pet shop owners to be involved in organising the event and to be present on the day to provide information and advice
- Seek sponsorship from the pet industry and/or local businesses

Tips

- Encourage formation of a dog owners social group and provide facilities, services and assistance
- Develop a sound working relationship and work together to resolve issues and deliver positive outcomes

Web Links

Town of Vincent - www.vincent.wa.gov.au



Local support networks, activities and advice developed online

Benefits of an on-line community

- Connects people who may otherwise be isolated in the physical community
- Delivers immediate network of pet friendly people and activities to the community's fingertips
- Provides a myriad of other social and pet related activities through network links
- Owners can overcome nuisance behaviours resulting from bored pets by providing animals with companionship throughout the day



A community doesn't have to be defined by geographical boundaries. The internet has spawned a growth of virtual communities that connect people with a shared common interest or need while helping to build community. Such groups can play a particularly important role for people who are isolated, don't have the opportunity to meet like-minded others in their day to day life, or who want to exchange information or services.

An Australian website, created by Diane Hackett three years ago, is a unique example of an online doggy friendship service; an active online community which helps connect pet lovers locally and nationally. The site assists people in making and meeting new friends through their dogs while helping each other with dog minding, dog walking and even domestic doggy day care.

Diane saw a gap in the market for people who enjoyed the benefits of dog ownership and wanted to meet likeminded people while having a simple, on-line way to hook up with people willing to swap dog care favours or facilities.

Before the site existed, such relationships could only be found with "pot luck", or by asking people in the local street whether they might be able to help out; a confronting scenario for the majority of people.

But once Diane had built the website and it became populated with members enthusiastic for "petworking", the site created a comfortable way for both pet and non pet owners to use the site and initiate face to face meetings and find solutions to their problems and answers to their questions while meeting new friends.

"Some Councils have found the site to be very helpful when it comes to dealing with nuisance dog behaviours at the coal face," says Diane.

"Problems like barking and whining that commonly occur when dogs are bored or lonely can be substantially reduced if you have the opportunity to get support by linking into a community network of pet friendly people."

Diane Hackett, Founder, doggymates

The site also provides a multitude of links and information on other social dog related activities like Council Pet Days, dog sports and regular social dog walking groups.

Many of Diane's personal friends have been made through the site or through the outdoor dog activity events listed. "I get out every second weekend to join in on a relaxed social dog walking group and I've made some wonderful friends there," she says.

"People from different walks of life that I know in my heart I would never have met otherwise."

Diane Hackett

Web Links

Doggymates website - www.doggymates.com.au

Tips

- Dog owners help each other out, saving money on doggy minding and day care, promote 'petworking' in your local area through events and Council publicity tools

An opportunity for community joy and connectedness through Blessing of the Animals



Celebrations, special occasions and community events play an important role in building a sense of community. They acknowledge diversity and bring people together in an increasingly fragmented and busy world.

An important celebration in both the spiritual and animal calendar is the "Blessing of the Animals Day" on October 4, also known as World Animal Day. It celebrates the feast of St Francis, a 12th Century saint who had a famous affinity with animals and the love of all creatures.

Lorraine Hawkes has been organising the Blessing of the Animals Day at the Anglican Church of St James the Great, East St Kilda, Melbourne for the past 15 years.

"When we first began the service, we had a total of 25 people and six animals. I believed that we needed to be outward, rather than inward looking so I began to advertise the Blessing and looked at ways to expand it. It's gone from being a church based event to a community one."

Lorraine Hawkes, Organiser, Blessing of the Animals event

The Blessing of the Animals begins with a brief church service after which people and their pets parade through the streets to the churchyard gardens where they are met by two priests. Each animal receives an individual blessing and a St Francis medal for their collar.

"It's like a carnival!" Lorraine says. "People and their pets have been coming for years. There are lots of activities, scones, tea and a sausage sizzle. People arrive from everywhere. This year we've had visitors from Dimboola, Victoria; Townsville, Queensland and Penola, South Australia and many attendees from local and country areas. It's lovely because everyone is enjoying their pets together." Subzero, winner of the 1992 Melbourne Cup, has presided over the event on four occasions since 1995 including 2008.

Port Phillip Council, also hosts a Blessing of the Animals ceremony. Councillor Janet Bolitho said that modern lifestyles can create loneliness, isolation and a sense of vulnerability. The Council and local groups were keen to promote the power of pets in improving residents' health and wellbeing.

"This is particularly the case in Port Phillip. According to the 2006 census statistics, lone households comprise 40.8 per cent of all households, slightly down from the 42.1 per cent recorded in 2001, but still a remarkable number and much greater than the Australian average."

"That's why pets provide such essential companionship to so many people. The Blessing of the Animals ceremony is just one of the ways this can be publically acknowledged and celebrated."

Cr Janet Bolitho, Port Phillip Council



Benefits of organisations that celebrate pets

- Establishes new and positive connections between divergent community organisations and individuals
- Confirms importance of socially responsible pet ownership through a celebrative reminder of the human companion animal bond

Tips

- Identify whether any local community groups or churches are celebrating World Animal Day and support and promote their activities

Web Links

St James Church - www.stjamescommunity.org.au

Port Phillip Council - www.portphillip.vic.gov.au



Community connections created through local parties for owners and pets

Benefits of informal groups and social functions that incorporate pets

- Provides a fun opportunity for members of the community to connect in an informal way
- Is a celebration of the relationships formed by social dog walking in the neighbourhood throughout the year
- Facilitates newcomers to the neighbourhood feeling part of the “community family” at potentially isolating times of year

Annual events commonly celebrated with family and friends, such as Christmas and Easter can be lonely times for some, particularly if they have family living overseas or interstate or have simply lost contact. A festive Doggy Party in the local street or park is a simple event that can act to build community by bringing local residents together to socialise and form friendships through the event’s festive nature and with happy dogs helping to break the ice.

The Edinburgh Gardens Christmas Party in North Fitzroy, Victoria has been running for many years and attracts around 80 or more people and around 100 dogs. Similar events are held around Australia with some going even further to provide a Santa for the children and presents for pets.

Jonathon Bray, a natural therapist, had moved from his home town of Adelaide to Melbourne with his Schnauzer Phyllis just a few months before Christmas 2007. And he wasn’t looking forward to spending the season alone.

Having Phyllis in his waiting room however, prompted a number of Bray’s clients to invite him to the local Christmas Party. Living just a few minutes’ walk from the off-leash area meant that Jonathon had already met a number of the doggy residents and their owners.

“But it wouldn’t have mattered if I hadn’t. Everyone was so friendly. What was surprising to me though was that so many dogs could be around food and still get along.”
 Jonathan Bray, Local resident

The parties are a team exercise driven by the inspired effort of community nurse, Sally Martin. “I’ve lived in the area for around 16 years,” says Sally. “But it wasn’t until I got Susie (her demure Scotch Collie) 10 years ago that the community really opened up for me. Until then I’d vaguely known my immediate neighbours, but after Susie I got to know so many more.”

Nearby residents wheel barbeques across the street and attendees bring salads for two legged attendees and treats for the four legged ones. Word of mouth and a positive reputation for informal fun, help pull the crowds.

“It’s a social highlight for both the dogs and their owners, many of whom also meet up at the park regularly while walking their dogs.”
 Sandy O’Connor, WA doggy party regular

Tips

- Provide off leash areas where these kind of activities can take place ie: water, shade, benches, lighting, poo bags and in a pleasant environment
- To really get on side with local residents, consider dressing up one of your more outgoing rangers as Santa and handing doggy treats out to well behaved dogs



Healthy Communities



Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

(World Health Organisation)

Obesity, poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyles have been described as a 21st century plague in developed countries. In addition, depression and anxiety are estimated to effect one in four people during their lifetime²⁹ and it is predicted that these will be a leading cause of disability around the globe by 2020³⁰

Although the US is often stereotyped as the most overweight nation on earth, Australia is not far behind with about 2.5 million Australians obese (1 in 5 males and 1 in 6 females aged over 18) and another 4.9 million overweight.³¹ Energy imbalance (in other words eating more than we burn up in energy) contributes to this, with another survey reporting that 70% of Australians (aged 15 and over) did either no or low levels of exercise.³²

While not negating the role of individual choices, the environments in which we live and work play a critical role in shaping our health opportunities and behaviour. Mounting attention has therefore recently turned to the role that the built environment and local community can play in determining our health.

Physical activity for example, can be influenced by the availability and quality of local parks, shops and other walkable destinations, road networks, footpaths, traffic and road safety, street lighting, and the presence of nature.³³ Many of these elements also impact on mental health, for example the social connections that are generated through the use of parks, open space and public places.

Communities and councils around Australia are recognising the impact that they can have in fostering active living, strong social connections and sound quality of life for all residents.

The Hobart City Council and the City of Stirling Council case studies demonstrate the utilisation of pets as an existing resource to encourage physical and social activity.



DOG WALKING AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Walking and physical activity is strongly linked to improved general health and lower risks of obesity, heart disease and blood pressure problems. Many studies now associate pets, and particularly dogs with increased levels of physical activity. Australian research indicates that not only do dogs motivate their owners to walk more often and meet recommended levels of physical activity;³⁴ but also that children who own dogs are less likely to become overweight or obese³⁵ With obesity also a growing problem among the pet population³⁶ dogs themselves stand to benefit.

In the "Dog Ownership can address obesity epidemic" case study, Dr Jo Salmon reports on studies the physical benefits that children harness from owning dogs.

MENTAL AND SOCIAL HEALTH

There is increasing evidence of the benefits that physical activity has on mental health and wellbeing.³⁷ Walking for example, can provide contact with nature which can be restorative, provide stress relief and be beneficial to mental health.³⁸ Similarly, it also provides opportunities for informal contact with others.

More people and dogs out walking, combined with an increase in regular walks, can further a sense of safety in the community³⁹ while well exercised dogs are less likely to behave anti-socially.⁴⁰ All of which is critical in building and maintaining community cohesion, pride, and social capital. This in turn has been linked to better general health¹¹, lower mortality rates,⁸ positive child development¹⁴ and less violent crime.¹³

The "A Sense of Safety..." case study explores the way in which dogs and dog walking promote a sense of safety in the community.





Dog ownership can address obesity epidemic

Benefits of pets and physical activity

- Research suggests that pet ownership may increase physical activity and reduce health problems such as obesity
- Walking a dog may act as a buffer against stress

A growing body of research shows that pet ownership confers physical health benefits. Dog owners in particular may be more likely to engage in regular physical exercise through walking or playing with their dogs. In addition, dogs may offer some protection from the onset of obesity in young children.³⁵

With around 20 to 25 per cent of Australian children estimated to be overweight or obese, the impact of dog ownership on community health is potentially very important.

Associate Professor Jo Salmon, Senior Research Fellow in the School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences at Deakin University said that obesity causes problems in respiratory and gastrointestinal functioning as well as contributing to long term health issues such as orthopaedic problems and increased risk of impaired glucose tolerance which can lead to diabetes.

“Obesity also causes enormous psychosocial distress, with overweight children being described by their peers as the least desired friends.”

Dr Salmon, Deakin University

“Increased physical activity is obviously one of the keys to reducing a person’s weight and studies in both Australia and overseas have shown that owning and walking a dog can substantially increase the amount of walking a person does.”

Previous research found that young girls who own a dog spend 29 minutes more per day in physical activity compared to those without a dog.⁴¹

“This means that they are achieving half the recommended level of physical activity for children just through the activities they undertake with their dog,” said Dr Salmon.

The subsequent study looked at over 1100 children aged from five to twelve. Researchers found that children were in better physical condition if they owned a dog.

The greatest benefit was seen in five to six-year-olds, who were 50 per cent less likely to be overweight or obese compared with those who did not own a dog.

Interestingly, the benefits flowed even if the dog was not walked regularly; suggesting incidental activity, informal ‘backyard’ play and regular interaction with the dog had a calorie-burning effect.

It isn’t just the young that benefit from walking the dog. According to Dr Salmon, dog walking is a low-cost, low-impact, low-risk activity suitable for people of all ages.

Another recent study by Dr Hayley Cutt at the University of Western Australia found that dog owners reported that their dog was a strong source of motivation, companionship and social support that encouraged them to walk.

National Heart Foundation Physical Activity Manager Trevor Shilton argues that “While dogs are very good social support, they’re also a good social lubricant. If you’re walking your dog and interacting with people there is a reasonable prospect you’re benefiting your heart in several ways.”

Tips

- Raise awareness of the health benefits of happy, healthy pets
- Start a dog-walking group in your local area
- Engage qualified dog trainers to hold obedience classes in pet-friendly parks

Web Links

The Heart Foundation - www.heartfoundation.org.au

Physical activity and responsible dog ownership promoted through Council walking group



Many Australians are insufficiently active despite the fact that physical inactivity is a major risk factor for many diseases and poor health conditions. Increasing physical activity not only benefits the health and quality of life of individuals, but contributes to a healthy and vibrant community while reducing the cost burdens associated with poor health.⁴² Walking groups are a simple and inexpensive way to foster community spirit and encourage local residents to exercise.

Prior to the “Follow my Lead” program launch in February 2006, the City of Stirling identified that seniors, women and young people were not being catered to in community programs, leading to high levels of inactivity.

The Council designed “Follow my Lead” to encourage and promote physical activity, general health and well being, establish sustainable walking groups, promote the use of City of Stirling resources and endorse socially responsible dog ownership.

One of the significant features of the program is that while dogs are welcome, residents do not have to be a dog owner to get involved, they just need the drive to get active by joining one of the many “Follow my Lead” walking groups.

The walking groups encourage new friendships and companionship along with giving dog owning residents the opportunity to exercise their dog at the same time.

“Follow my Lead” Project Coordinator Kelly Yates of the City of Stirling reports that the project has gone from strength to strength in its three years of operation. There are currently 17 walking groups which meet regularly, with two more in the process of getting established. The groups differ in size but on average have about eight people in each group. The “Follow my Lead” program is overseen by one coordinator and 11 volunteer group leaders who run the groups. All volunteers are trained by the City of Stirling.

When reflecting on the benefits of the program Kelly says, “The benefits include creation of volunteer led self sustaining community walking groups and an increase in the recreational use of public open spaces and parks.”

Overall, the “Follow my Lead” program benefits not only participants, but the community as a whole. “It has deterred graffiti and antisocial behaviour while providing a safe and friendly environment for the community,” she said.

Participants also view the program positively.

“The main benefits they perceived were an increase in motivation to exercise.... an increase in fitness levels, general well being both mental and physical, increased feelings of community and safety and an increase in social activities.”

Kelly Yates, City of Stirling

Benefits of Council based walking programs

- Combines encouraging physical activity with pet responsibility and community connectedness
- New friendships created through walking group participation
- Provides new volunteer positions that come equipped with professional training opportunities



Tips

- Recruit and train walking group leaders and members
- Promote the program through the local paper, brochures, community exhibitions, local vets and pet stores, Council website and newsletters
- Provide maps for suggested walking routes
- Outline guidelines for appropriate exercising and owning of pets

Web Links

“Follow my Lead” at Stirling Council
- www.stirling.wa.gov.au

Planned event promotes benefits of walking for dogs and people

Benefits of Council hosted walking events

- Creates opportunity for human and animal physical exercise
- Promotes Council's health and wellbeing policies
- Develops and enhances local social networks
- Forms partnerships between local, state and federal agencies to create healthy programs for communities

Walking is great exercise for the health of both humans and dogs. It is one of the best and easiest forms of physical activity and can help to address obesity which can be responsible for a host of related health problems in humans and animals. Regular exercise also has a positive effect on dog behaviour, with research also demonstrating that dogs can play an important role in motivating their owners to be physically active.⁴³

Hobart City Council's "Dogs on the Domain" annual event is held as part of the Premier of Tasmania's Get Walking Tasmania Campaign, coordinated by the Heart Foundation. Get Walking Tasmania Week is the largest event held in Tasmania and each year promotes walking as a readily accessible form of physical activity. Dogs on the Domain taps into the mutual needs of people and pets for exercise.

"Last year, hundreds of people, families and their pets took advantage of a day out in the domain. This event is designed to get people active by providing a series of walking options across the Queens Domain."

Alderman Rob Valentine, Lord Mayor, City of Hobart



Partnerships between different organisations help to underpin the event's success. The Hobart Dog Walking Association, the Dogs' Home of Tasmania and the Hobart Canine Obedience Club assist in the running of the event, with the Dog Walking Association designing the walk and the Obedience Club demonstrating dog activities like flyball, agility and herding.

"It's great to see members of the public join in on the fun. It certainly gets them fit as much as the dog!" said the Lord Mayor.

For many people, walking a dog is more fun and more rewarding than walking alone. Some people go for a walk mostly to keep their dog healthy and fit but in the end, both dogs and their owners benefit from the physical activity, fresh air and sunshine that a good walk gives them.

"Dogs on the Domain also recognises that many people find it's nicer to walk in a group rather than alone, it's a different kind of experience altogether," said the Lord Mayor. "It becomes a social occasion where people can come out with the whole family, dog included!"

"The Hobart City Council continues to support an active community through events such as Dogs on the Domain, involving people with likeminded interests who have a desire for a healthy lifestyle."

Alderman Rob Valentine

Such events also provide an avenue for social contact and getting to know others, which in turns contributes to the overall sense of community.

Web Links

Hobart City Council - www.hobartcity.com.au

The Heart Foundation - www.heartfoundation.org.au

Tips

- Contact a federal health organisation to enquire into event opportunities
- Partner with local dog associations to enable their expertise and networks for the event

Sense of safety strengthened through dogs at home and on the street

Pets can play a vital role in home security and be a visible presence of people 'out and about'. Dog walking, for example, is viewed as a positive marker of community safety with perceptions of safety and crime having a significant spill-over effect onto neighbourhood interactions and sense of community. If people are fearful they may be less likely to leave their home, use local facilities or attend activities, particularly at night.⁴⁴

In the 2006 National People and Pets survey, 88 per cent of dog owners agreed that having a dog around the home deterred burglars. Over a quarter of a million Australian homes were broken into at least once in the 12 months prior to the survey being undertaken, with a similar number being the target of an attempted break-in.

Leading insurance companies also agree that dogs can be an effective deterrent to burglars. Daniel Fogarty, head of personal insurance with a major insurance agency said that owning a dog was one of the measures that could help reduce the chance of theft.

"There are numerous precautions home-owners can take to minimise the chance of being burgled, from ensuring they have secure locks on all doors and windows through to installing alarms or owning a dog." Daniel Fogarty, Leading insurance company

Anecdotal evidence suggests that thieves are less likely to target homes where dogs are obviously on the premises. Research also shows that they heighten people's perceptions of safety and provide owners with important peace of mind.

One of the main benefits of having a dog on your property is its ability to alert neighbours if an intruder enters the property. A dog's bark is actually more of a deterrent than its size or ability to physically protect a site.

Residents on the Japanese island of Hokkaido have harnessed this dog safety capacity in an innovative way. They approached local police with the idea of combining their nightly dog walks with some neighbourhood watch. The "Wan Wan Patrol" (or "Woof Woof Patrol in English) keeps an eye out for anything suspicious in the area. It seems to be working, with police reporting a 48% drop in crime since the citizen patrol began.

This type of thing can happen more informally.

As noted by one resident in qualitative Australian research, "It was originally Neighbourhood Watch, but now it is just an old man with a big dog that keeps a big note pad and runs around checking on everyone."

Another resident commented, you feel happier and safer when "there's a few people walking around, walking their dogs and stuff like that"⁴⁵



Benefits of pets as a natural burglar deterrent

- Research indicates that dog ownership can prevent burglary
- There is potential to increase safety in the community with police and citizen partnerships
- Owning and/or walking with a dog improves feelings of safety



Tips

- Encourage dog walkers to report suspicious occurrences to their local police station

A Place for All



Over two thirds of Australian households have a pet, with many considered to be important members of the family. The extent to which communities include pets and their owners is therefore an issue that affects a substantial slice of the population. In Australia, pubs, cafes and apartments are still viewed as primarily 'people only' zones, yet Europe and the US provide countless examples where pets are welcomed in such venues. However the scattered examples that do occur within Australia suggest that the benefits of embracing pets within the community far outweigh the surrounding tensions and concerns.

A Place For Pets In Housing

Traditional patterns of Australian housing are changing. The single house on a ¼ acre block is not only less common, but less sustainable. Renting is increasingly becoming the only affordable option for many, while longer life expectancy and declining fertility rates have led to more people living alone and more childless couples.⁴⁶

This social phenomenon is producing an increased community desire for residential options that allow for companion animals. To date, public housing acts, body corporate documents and tenancy agreements have often defaulted to a blanket "no pet" rule, usually determined well before full consideration is given to the options and opportunities of pet friendly housing.

The case studies relating to pet friendly accommodation, retirement communities and vouching systems for renters highlight some of the win-win accommodation solutions for people with pets.



A Place For Pets In Our Socialising

Places where people can meet informally to chat and socialise contribute greatly to community vitality and sense of community. As noted by Oldenburg⁴⁷ without such places, the urban area fails to nourish the kinds of relationships and the diversity of human contact that are the essence of the city. Deprived of these settings, people remain lonely within their crowds. In the UK, the presence of dogs in 'third places' (a term coined by Oldenburg) such as pubs and cafes is commonplace. While a number of pet-friendly places where people can eat and drink are beginning to emerge in Australia, they are few and far between, a somewhat ironic factor given our alfresco, pet-friendly climate.

As highlighted by several of the case studies, pets can add to the social ambience and conviviality of cafes and pubs and be good for business in the process. Neither do they have to take an 'all or nothing' approach. The allocation of outdoor areas or the addition of 'pet friendly' nights can help to address the needs of various patrons.

A Place For Pets At Work

In Australia the dog on the back of the tradesman's ute is the most iconic form of pets in the workplace, but other less visible examples include the nursing home with its visiting cat, the hairdressing salon with the sleeping dog in the corner, and the garden nursery with its wandering parrot. While not always possible or practical, with a bit of lateral thinking, it can be both feasible and positive to include pets in the workplace.

As illustrated by the pets in the workplace case study, the reasons and benefits can vary; ranging from meeting the needs of employees with pets, providing an 'ice-breaker' that helps with client interactions, or simply helping to create a friendly atmosphere.





Progressive pet friendly developments

Benefits of catering to pets in high density residential communities

- Encourages responsible pet ownership through community discussion and self regulation
- Brings residents together through pet related activities and communal spaces
- Addresses and delivers to the real accommodation demand of Australian pet owners
- Potentially increases the value of apartments

The wave of high and medium housing development in Australian cities over the last five years has been remarkable. What was once an unpalatable policy of the government is now a development reality with the effects of higher densities being visible across Australia.⁴⁸ Successful developments utilise practical, clever and attractive design solutions to cater to both pet and non pet owners.

With more than 2,600 people on 11.7 hectares, a new residential community created by Vivas Lend Lease at Pyrmont Point has become one of Australia's largest pet friendly, waterfront developments.

Almost 200 dogs live at the development, which hosts plenty of open parkland and special doggy-do bins. Residents have even formed a group called the 'Pyrmont Pooch Party', which meets regularly to hold parties for their pets and owners in one of its harbour front parklands. Some people even move to the Pyrmont Peninsular development and in a short time find themselves enjoying the lifestyle so much they become owner of their first dog.

"The great cities of the world have pet-friendly apartments, and we have followed their example."

Des Surleff, Vivas Lend Lease, Pyrmont

The pet-friendly approach has been a great success, and is fast becoming a model for other residential developments.

The residential community has been taking shape for the past 12 years and has regular campaigns devoted to attracting residents with pets, and runs an annual Dog's Breakfast. An estimated 1,800 dogs and their owners attend these free events, which are headlined by internationally regarded vets, trainers and animal organisations, pet fashion shows, dog sports, contests, plus many stalls and demonstrations.

"Being pet-friendly certainly adds to the appeal and has helped convince many people to buy here. We also believe our pet-friendly policies and features increase the value of the apartments when it comes time for vendors to sell," says Des.

The developers have ensured their apartments and open spaces are pet friendly by having:

- Large safe balconies
- Good insulation and soundproofing
- Floor-to-ceiling windows so pets can also enjoy the view

The innovative examples of high and medium density housing now evident in the major capital cities around Australia is testimony to the potential scope for using good design to accommodate pets.⁴⁸

Web Links

Jackson's Landing:
www.vivaslendlease.com.au/jacksonslanding



Photo by Blue Print Studios

"These events are a practical way of showing dog owners that our residential community is a great, pet-friendly place to live with plenty of space to exercise animals and enjoy the lifestyle."
said Des.

Tips

- Seek to integrate pets into your community and discuss residential development opportunities with health policy analysts, urban planners, Animal Management Officers and open space/recreation professionals

Dog friendly policies can be good for business

In many countries it's common for dogs to be present in social settings. In Australia however, we're only just beginning to appreciate this concept and the rewards that can flow from it. Dogs are a natural "icebreaker". They encourage people to get out and about and facilitate conversations amongst strangers.

"A dog friendly business in pubs can boost business and if dog and owner are kept happy they stay loyal for life."

- the Guardian July 31, 2004

It can also make good economic sense for business.

When Mike and Clare Flanagan bought their hotel in Prahran, Victoria in late 2007, they were surprised by the number of dogs and owners walking in the nearby parks and gardens.

Initially, the couple followed in the footsteps of the previous owner who had banned dogs outright from the premises, but after repeated and persistent requests, the young couple gave it some thought. "There was proven customer demand and there's no doubt that winter has its slower nights," said Mike.

The hotel's beer garden has a gate that opens onto the street, allowing owners and their dogs to enter and exit the garden without going into the hotel itself, in compliance with local council legislation.

So began the now popular "Mad Dog Mondays" where dogs and owners can pop in for a drink, a meal, friendly conversation and fun and games. The couple have not experienced any nuisance behaviours from the dogs or their owners.

"Most people are aware of how their dog should behave in public. We haven't had any fights or dog mess. The owners don't want to be embarrassed by their dog's actions, so everyone puts on their best behaviour."

It's a behaviour that gets rewarded with a regular prize for the evening being awarded to the "Best Behaved Dog" on the night. "The dogs provide a common bond for people here," Mike said. "Monday nights tend to be a very social night with the dogs providing an ice breaker for conversation and a relaxed atmosphere. We have a lot of regulars that come in now, and of course quite a few singles who come in with or without their dogs."

"What better thing to do with the family on a Monday night but walk the dog down so they get their exercise, have a good pub meal, meet some people and wander back home. It ends up being a good fit for all."

Mike Flanagan, Flying Duck Hotel



Benefits of pets in business

- Develops friendly social networks amongst locals
- Creates a boost to local business by developing a loyal clientele
- Helps form "walkable neighbourhoods" by creating accessible destinations



Tips

- Target any local businesses that have a tendency to attract dog owners
- Review Council regulations relating to dogs and eating places
- Encourage business to come up with a doggy theme i.e. "Spot for Coffee" or low fat treats given to dogs on arrival
- Promote in local papers, by word of mouth etc

Web Links

Flying Duck Hotel - www.flyingduckhotel.com.au

Animal shelter vouches for adoptee pets in rental accommodation

Benefits of a pet vouching system

- Assists shelters in reducing pet entry and subsequent euthanasia numbers
- Assists prospective real estate agents in being able to assess viable pets and pet owners

With stories emerging nationally on the rental crisis, pet owners are finding it tough to find rental accommodation that will house both their pet and themselves. Tenants are not the only ones struggling in the current crisis; animal shelters are being flooded with an increasing number of pets being reluctantly surrendered by their owners because they cannot find suitable accommodation.

The RSPCA is looking to help address the crisis with a scheme that allows the organisation to 'vouch' for pets that come through its system.

"The animals the RSPCA re-home are given a very thorough evaluation before we adopt them out," says Gail Lane, the Shelter Manager for the RSPCA Townsville centre. The rehomed dogs need to be desexed, heartworm tested, fully vet checked, have passed a comprehensive behavioural assessment, be clean, microchipped and vaccinated.

"Well adjusted behaviour in the shelter lends itself to well adjusted behaviour in the home, which is why the RSPCA feels it can readily vouch for the pets that come through our system to prospective real estate agents and landlords."

Gail Lane, RSPCA Townsville



The RSPCA vouching system also takes care to ensure that hopeful pet adoptees have been given the authorisation from their rental agent or landlord to accommodate a pet on the premises.

"The situation is very difficult and we want to do all we can to address it from our end," continues Gail. "Many people, who find they need to surrender their pet because of the rental crisis, feel as if they're giving up a much loved member of the family. Many of the pets are 12 or 13 years old

and you can't blame the families. It's either a roof over their family's head or a roof over their pet's head. They have to make their family a priority, but it doesn't mean it's not breaking their hearts."

Gail's personal experiences have led her to believe that pets contribute not just to the immediate family, but to the cohesion of the neighbourhood. Gail lives in a street where eight out of ten houses have dogs which the majority of owners walk regularly together and catch up at the nearby off-leash park while their dogs play.

"It's a highly used park and I've met many of the people I know through there. Pets make it so much easier to talk to each other. There are many people that meet across Townsville through off-leash parks, hold "Bark BBQs" and some even marry!"

Gail Lane

"Life is getting expensive and stressful," she continues. "People are working longer hours and in this crazy world it's nice for people to come home to unconditional love, someone they can tell their problems to and not be judged. It's because of these benefits that I firmly believe it should be the right of all people to own and care for a pet."

Web Links

RSPCA Queensland - www.rspcaqlld.org.au

Tips

- If your Council's shelter uses behavioural assessments and vaccinations etc, consider vouching for the animals that pass through the system

Community contact promoted through dog parks and coffee culture

Cafes and coffee are now a big part of the social life of many Australians. So when a cafe and an off-leash dog park get together, it can be a great way for local residents to exercise themselves and their dogs while meeting other members of their community.

A café dedicated to dogs and their owners sits in the middle of the Hawthorne Canal Reserve, in Leichhardt, NSW. While owners relax and enjoy a coffee, dogs run free and play with the others in the area. The park is very popular with around a quarter of a million dogs and people moving through it in a year.

While dogs are not permitted in the food preparation area, they are welcome to scamper amongst the outdoor table environment while owners order from the kiosk counter.

The owners of the cafe, Michael and Chaka Lloyd Jones have had the opportunity to see how well the atmosphere caters to those with social difficulties, allowing them to feel comfortable in a public place. Similarly Michael is able to watch the elderly and the odd traveller come down for the simple companionship that the café provides.

"All status goes out the window. Dogs are an instant way to bond with someone without all the trappings of social mores. Many people that have met here become life-long friends and quite a few have even become partners. We've had people come through who have hooked up to start successful dog walking and training ventures together."

Michael Lloyd, Hawthorne Canal Reserve Cafe

The park is Council operated and the couple have struck up very strong relationships with the rangers, one of whom is Ronnie Busuttill, an advocate for the strong role that the café plays socially in the local community.

"Because dogs are so social, it automatically means that a place like this particular cafe becomes very social," said Ronnie. "Whenever we [the rangers] come down here, we find people smiling and interacting positively. I don't see that same kind of communication in your average café in the city."

Ronnie sees that the cafe owners also provide council with a unique advantage.

"In many ways, Michael and Chaka have become a third eye for us down at the Hawthorne Canal Reserve; only responsible owners who do the right thing are welcome at the cafe so they enforce the local dog laws in an informal way. It's a functioning three way street whereby the council, the community and the cafe all win."

Ronnie Busuttill, Leichhardt City Council

Benefits of pets in public open space kiosks

- Dogs in social settings help to break down barriers and encourage interaction
- Outdoor cafes in an off-leash park provide a comfortable venue where people and their dogs can meet
- Café environments encourage responsible dog ownership by owners making sure their dog is able to join in the fun in a well-mannered way



Tips

- Where dogs are unrestrained, guard against hostilities by not selling dog meals
- Clear signage can remind patrons of their obligations and responsibilities

Web Links

Cafe Bones - www.cafebones.com.au

Leichhardt Council - www.leichhardt.nsw.gov.au



Pet friendly policies for the workplace foster happy staff and happy pets

Benefits of a pet friendly workplace

- Improves employee morale, productivity and reduces stress
- Reduces incidence of barking and other nuisance dog behaviour in the community because dogs are not home alone and bored
- Builds and strengthens relationships among associates by breaking down barriers

Australian companies are discovering a new strategy that improves employee morale and work productivity, lowers stress, decreases employee absenteeism and boosts employee's willingness to work overtime; it's simple - bring pets into the workplace.

Recent surveys in both America and Australia reveal that pets in the workplace can be positive for organisations, employees and pets⁴⁹ Companies benefit from improved staff performance, staff no longer feel guilty about pets left at home alone and pets are less likely to become bored and a potential nuisance.

A busy inner city office in Sydney is one pet friendly workplace where several dogs can be found in the office on most days. Mullet is a staffy-lab cross who has been accompanying her owner to the office since she was a pup. Mullet's owner Paul sees her as part of his family.

"It's easy enough having her here and other people enjoy her company as well. I think it's a good stress release." Paul, Pet owner



Lisa also takes her Jack Russell Terrier into the office. "When I first started working here I was told by colleagues that I should bring Jack in. It's fantastic! I don't have to rush home to feed him, so I can stay at work for longer hours if I need to," explains Lisa. "I also feel it heightens the morale in the workplace and that people are happier which then feeds back into the happiness of the workplace."

Mars Petcare Australia is another pet friendly organisation and has a 'Pets in the Office Policy' to help ensure that everyone, including the pets, are happy. Policy guidelines cover topics such as health and safety of both people and pets on site.

Employees who want to bring their pets to work need to register them at reception, complete forms relating to their pet's health, review company expectations and receive a complimentary pet I.D. card. The office is a large, open plan design, so pet I.D. is useful in case pets become separated from their owners. The organisation has also applied a practical limit of ten dogs in the office on any one day to ensure everybody's enjoyment and this means that all pets visiting the office receive lots of attention throughout the day.

"The company believes the "Pets at Work Policy" helps create a strong sense of community and brings to life the magic of pet ownership. Being a pet related company means that free treats are readily available. Owners are invited to bring their pet's beds to work but squeaky toys are not encouraged!"

Amanda Fisher, Mars Petcare Australia

Tips

- Gauge staff interest and consider implementing a pet friendly policy
- Check if workplace hygiene regulations and building tenancy agreements allow for pets
- Promote the concept to local businesses through media and Council newsletters
- Utilise existing Pets at Work protocols and policies to ensure a harmonious and successful workplace

Pet friendly accommodation

Although more than two thirds of Australians are pet owners, many are routinely banned from rental accommodation. Yet experience shows that pet owners can make responsible and reliable long-term tenants, with a well managed pet friendly policy actually helping to improve profitability, broaden the pool of prospective tenants, lower vacancy rates and reduce tenant turnover.

Few rental agreements in Australia even mention pets with the unfortunate default position being that pets are not admitted. Although landlords and managing agents cannot discriminate against prospective tenants on the basis of race, religion or family relations, bans are often imposed on pets with relatively few tenants permitted to keep them as a result.

Clear guidelines and policies on the keeping of pets can assist in screening out irresponsible owners while not penalising responsible pet owners.

The brochures 'Tenants with Pets' and 'Renting with Pets' have been developed for use in all States and Territories and provide information that will help landlords, managing agents and pet owners overcome the issues associated with owning pets in rental accommodation. The brochures are available for free download on the Australian Companion Animal Council website www.acac.org.au.

Ryan Blunden created the website "Pet Friendly Rentals" once he recognised the lack of pet friendly accommodation that was advertised. It was Ryan's own experience as a tenant that provided the initial inspiration.

"A few years ago I nearly had to give Tonka (his dog) up because I was finding it so hard to find somewhere suitable for the two of us to live," said Ryan. "It was such a distressing and worrying time (for both Tonka and I) that I swore I would do whatever I could to prevent other people from having to experience the same kind of stress."

"In June 2008 I developed and released a small but significant piece of software which allows pet owners to quickly and easily search for pet friendly rental listings on various real estate websites such as Realestate.com.au."

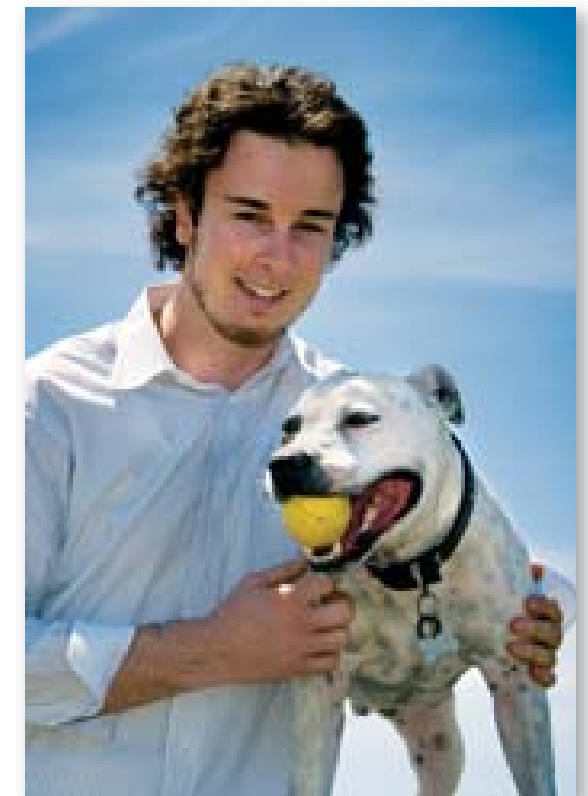
Ryan Blunden, Founder, Pet Friendly Rentals

The website gives pet owners Australia-wide the ability to search for pet friendly rentals across several suburbs in minutes instead of hours, greatly increasing their chances of finding a suitable property.



Benefits of pet friendly rental accommodation

- More access to the companionship and other social networks and supports that pet ownership brings for responsible local residents
- Less surrenders of dogs and cats at pounds and shelters due to difficulty finding suitable accommodation permitting pets



Tricia Wiles - Purrfect Pawtraits

Tips

- Distribute the free brochures 'Renting with Pets' and 'Tenants with Pets' through your Council office and local Real Estate Agents
- Publish information supporting the need for pet friendly accommodation in local newspapers and Council newsletters

Web Links

Pet Friendly Rentals - www.petfriendlyrentals.com.au
 Australian Companion Animal Council - www.acac.org.au



Retirement accommodation successfully plans for pets

Benefits of pets in retirement communities

- Pets provide a range of benefits to owners and the public – in particular companionship and increased communication and mobility
- Many people are reluctant to enter retirement communities unless they can bring their pets
- It is well established that responsible ownership of a pet improves quality of life

Retirement can have repercussions on many aspects of life, including pet ownership, particularly if it entails moving to a different type of residence that does not cater for pets. Ironically however, many retirees find that they have more time to spend with a pet and would enjoy animal companionship.

Unfortunately, few Australian retirement communities have strategies in place to successfully integrate residents' existing pets, let alone plans to cater for new ones. An exception to the rule is the Halcyon retirement community located at Hope Island on Queensland's Gold Coast.

The company involved in managing the community believed that existing retirement community pet policies were in need of an update.

From a business perspective it was obvious that the company could potentially lose sales to people that own pets. But more importantly, they recognised how important pets are in bringing health to individuals and communities.

After conducting research and speaking with animal organisations like the Australian Veterinary Association and Delta Society Australia, and consulting with veterinary behaviourist, Dr Gaille Perry, a workable policy was finalised.

"It was found that many of the retirement communities accepting pets were overly focused on size and breed restrictions to determine permissibility, despite the fact that little dogs can often be very energetic and noisy compared to some larger dogs."

Dr Gaille Perry, Delta

With assistance from Gaille a remodelled pet policy was developed, making it more suitable for medium density communities. Size restrictions were stripped and new standards placed emphasis on responsible pet ownership and animal behaviour determined by professional behaviour assessment.

Please refer to the Appendix for the pet policy printed in full.

Tips

- Encourage permissibility of pets in special facilities by promoting the use of holistic pet policies
- Ensure benches are present in parks near retirement facilities, thus encouraging the residents to walk with their dogs

Web Links

Halcyon - www.halcyondays.com.au



Doing the Right Thing



Shared use of public space and the needs of different user groups is a common issue that arises in communities and falls within the remit of local councils. When rules about who can use what areas and when are simply imposed from 'top-down', there is a risk of some community resistance and loss of goodwill.

More 'bottom up' alternatives focus instead on engaging with the community, whether this be through a formal consultation, a needs assessment process or plain old fashioned talking to those people impacted.



Fundamentally most people want to 'do the right thing' by others and their community, but sometimes may not be aware of the issues or the consequences of their current actions, or feel that their voice can be heard.

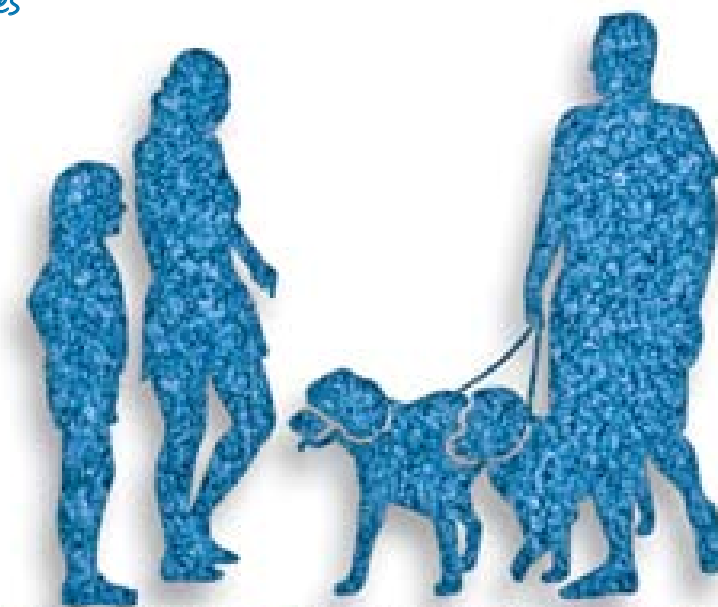
The role of social norms in facilitating cooperation and mutual benefit for community members is one of the platforms of social capital.⁵⁰ This can apply to a range of community issues, from the way in which we respond to climate change, resolve disputes with neighbours, care for those who are disadvantaged, and cooperate when shared use of space or amenities is required.

Social norms can also change over time; societal attitudes and behaviours in relation to smoking in public places and use of plastic shopping bags are two pertinent cases in point.

Sometimes just giving residents a chance to contribute can be empowering in its own right, and enhance their views of their local community. Engaging with the community can also produce creative lateral solutions, and support and cooperation is more likely.

It has been said that 'the good community' is not created through singular reliance on formal controls, but rather it achieves social order through mutual engagement and negotiation among residents, mediating institutions, and agencies of law enforcement.⁵¹

While Australia is sometimes seen as being over-regulated and 'nanny state-ish' relative to some other countries, there in fact is a growing number of examples of voluntary and collaborative solutions to community based issues.



Public open space can facilitate social interaction

Benefits of planning for dogs' use of public open space

- Enables public open space to be used for multiple purposes simultaneously and harmoniously
- Provides an opportunity for people to meet and interact
- Encourages people and dogs to exercise
- Can help Council's achieve improved outcomes in responsible pet ownership

Planners have not traditionally focussed on planning for dog owners, but it is becoming increasingly common. Councils that ignore the needs of dog owners may also miss out on the many benefits that inclusive planning affords.

Virginia Jackson is not a traditional town planner, being the first in the world to concentrate specifically on planning for pet owners. This includes planning for dogs and their owners to use public open space. Her guidelines, first developed in 1995 in association with the University of Queensland's Animal Behaviour and Welfare Group, have been implemented by Councils around the world. At that time, dogs were being increasingly excluded from public places. Jackson was convinced there had to be a better way of providing for dogs and their owners whilst reducing risk and nuisance.

However, she very quickly noticed the common incidence around the world of dog owners meeting and getting to know one another in the park. It works like this: when the same people meet at the same park at the same time on a regular basis they get to know one another – some will even structure their day around going to the park at the "right" time.

"I've seen countless examples of friendships being formed, people holding functions in the park, walking groups being created, people moving in with one another and people helping each other out." Virginia Jackson, Town Planner

"One of the more interesting things is that dogs can break down social barriers – dog owners come together regardless of age, gender, race and social economic status. The dog is the common denominator. And even better, it requires no membership, no formal meetings and no exchange of money. It can be done anytime and take place pretty much anywhere."

These are all examples of positive social capital.

However, encouraging dog owners to meet and talk to one another might also contribute to higher levels of responsible pet ownership - mainly through peer group pressure amongst dog owners in the park. One Council

in Melbourne has taken this a step further by tapping into local dog owner networks in their off leash parks as a vehicle for delivering the responsible pet ownership message.

"Providing dog owner facilities is such a straightforward way of building social capital and improving responsible pet ownership." Virginia Jackson

She hopes more Councils will start to investigate the opportunities that exist in their area.

Web Links

Public Open Space and Dogs Planning Guidelines
- www.petnet.com.au

Tips

- Look to the edition of Virginia Jackson's "Public Open Space and Dogs Planning Guidelines" published on www.petnet.com.au and implement the designs most suitable to your area/s

Alliance between local government and dog owners delivers long-term benefits to both

Community members and groups that are able to identify shared objectives and work together provide an excellent model of social capital in action. Outcomes are also more likely to be sustainable if the processes have been 'owned' by the various interested parties.

An alliance between The Holdfast Bay Dog Owners Association (HBDOA) and the Holdfast City Council in South Australia resulted in strong social capital and community benefits for all.

When the City of Holdfast Bay Council revised its by-laws to close beaches previously open to dogs, there was an unhappy response from the dog owning community. However, the outcry resulted in a surprisingly positive outcome for all parties.

Doug Kenny became a member of the dog owner's association after the by-law revision and soon recognised that taking positive action would result in Council and public support.

"We got members to take extra plastic bags when they were dog walking. If we saw a person that didn't pick up their dog's poo, we would offer a bag. It meant we were helping the Council and not being a bunch of whingers."

Doug Kenny, Local resident

The Council and the HBDOA developed a working relationship with the Council assisting the Association's dog training classes move to a better facility at a disused bowling club. Originally dog training classes were conducted on a local oval where usage times were restrictive and facilities poor. The bowling club offered unlimited use, a fenced training area, an indoor puppy training area and inexpensive doggy day care.

Doug says that other initiatives have been developed to complement the dog training and day care such as the "Three Cs – Canines, Coffee and Conversation", a gathering of people and dogs for those who are already enrolled in or have completed basic training but don't necessarily need or want to undertake further training.

"The Dog Association is a place that we can send people to if we have any behavioural issues with the dogs," says Ken O'Neil the Regulatory Services Manager of Holdfast City Council. "We find that about 70% to 80% attend and respond positively."

"It's a combined effort and a brilliant idea. Our area has a population of 35,000 with 4,000 registered dogs. We're right on the coast and have had a lot of unit development. The partnership between the Council and the Dog Association means that we can cater to those dogs and dog owners effectively."

Ken O'Neil, Holdfast City Council



Benefits of partnerships and voluntary compliance

- Enables Council contact to owners of new puppies and dogs
- Forges better relationships between Council and dog owners
- Encourages fewer dog complaints on the foreshore
- Decreases dog attacks
- Provides a mechanism to resolve dog behavioural issues

Tips

- Encourage formation of a dog owners group and provide them with facilities, services and assistance
- Develop a sound relationship and work together to resolve issues

Web Links

Holdfast Bay Dog Owners Association
- www.holdfastdogs.org.au
Holdfast City Council - www.holdfast.sa.gov.au



Combined Councils' watch-dog project reduces dog waste

Benefits of environmental programs

- Reduced environmental impact of dog faeces
- Reduces complaints about dog faeces by members of the community
- Encourages responsible dog ownership



With evidence mounting about the fragile state of the environment, Australians are increasingly thinking about the consequences of their day to day activities. Teaching dog owners about the environmental impact of doggie-doo on our waterways is important in encouraging responsible ownership while promoting the wider community benefits of a cleaner environment.

It is estimated that 1000 tonnes of domestic animal waste is produced in Sydney alone each day. This not only triggers complaints about dogs from residents, but the waste can be washed into stormwater drains after rain, creating an environmental hazard.

This problem is avoided when dog owners take responsibility for their dog's waste and dispose of it properly.

The Community Watch-Dog Project was launched in 2002. It is managed by Warringah Council in partnership with the former NSW Stormwater Trust. Other Councils on board included Pittwater, Manly, Mosman, North Sydney, Willoughby and Ku-ring-gai.

The three objectives of the program are: to inform dog-owners of the harmful effects of uncontrolled dog faeces; to encourage behavioural change; and to provide tools to make disposing of dog faeces easy and safe.

The project uses a systemic education program to ensure dog owners understand the benefits of cleaning up after their pet. The Council recruits volunteers who are trained to raise the issues with dog owners in a non-confrontational manner and to encourage positive change and actions. Warringah Council, says it is important to recruit the right volunteers.

"A lot of our volunteers are dog owners. We're after people who are both passionate about their pet and doing the right thing."

Damien Thiele, Team Leader Regulatory Compliance, Warringah Council

Volunteers provide owners with a resource kit containing a POOch Pouch which attaches to the dog's lead, biodegradable bags and an educational brochure. The Council also sells bio-degradable dog litter bags.

As part of the program, the Council provides "POOch Pouches" to every owner who registers a dog. Other Council initiatives include placing dog litter bins in dog-walking areas. Awareness is spread through local media, and on pet-friendly days including the Council's annual "Dog's Day Out."

Since the program began, the number of droppings in these areas plummeted, in some cases by over 66 per cent.

"It has been very successful," Warringah Council said. "The majority of residents love their neighbourhood and do the right thing. Those who don't usually change with education, and the knowledge that others in the community expect pet owners to be responsible."

Such reshaping of the norms relating to acceptable behaviour demonstrates social capital in action.

The project won the inaugural NSW Companion Animals Management Award for Best Innovation in Companion Animal Management. It also won awards from Keep Australia Beautiful NSW and the Local Government and Shire's Association's Excellence in the Environment Awards.

Web Links

Warringah Council
- www.warringah.nsw.gov.au

Tips

- Recruit passionate volunteers and provide training
- Provide owners with educational resources, poo bags and a place to deposit these

Opportunity to build community through free dog training

Pet ownership makes an enormous difference in people's lives, and free dog training in parks where members of the public can gather with their pets helps to draw people together, while breaking down social isolation.

The City of Sydney Council leads the way in animal friendly policies and programs. One way it is achieving its goals in this area is through partnering with community to promote equitable access to parks and open spaces.

The Council has created 36 off leash parks over the last few years, in acknowledgement that they improve the lives of the area's dog and human residents. Council is also installing signage and dog litter bag dispensers in all parks.

Further, Council Officers are working actively with the community to promote responsible dog ownership, with the Council rolling out free dog obedience training in parks across the city over the weekends.

"When training takes place in the parks, the grounds are full of conversation. People are laughing." Tara Dethridge, City of Sydney

A regular observer at the weekend training sessions, Tara is acutely aware of the role that off-leash parks play in offering regular opportunities for friendly exchanges and conversation between strangers. With physical inactivity and obesity increasing dramatically in Australia, off leash parks also provide an important opportunity for both pet owners and their dogs to exercise.

"There's this strong community feeling that comes about through the training. Many people have become good friends and support each other from meeting there."

Tara has been managing the courses for two years and has seen the very popular program escalate in numbers.

"We run 18 different courses around the City of Sydney on a Saturday, each of which has an intake of up to ten residents per class. We believed it was important that the new off leash parks be populated with educated owners and well socialised dogs."

The City of Sydney has overturned the conventional view of rangers as primarily enforcing agents in the community. Instead, the Council has actively helped rangers be seen as providers of helpful information, expertise and education where possible.

City rangers therefore give warnings and explanations for a first offence rather than a fine.

With the largest number of public housing residents in the whole of Sydney, the Council's free training is accessible to anyone, and has had participants from all walks of life enjoying the benefits of training and community interaction.

"We see the free training programs as a significant and continuing project. As long as they continue to be popular and serve a purpose for the community, they will remain."
Tara Dethridge

Benefits of education and voluntary compliance

- Provides pet owners with the tools to look after their dog properly
- Decreases the potential for dog attacks
- Decreases nuisance behaviour as dogs are well exercised and socialised



Tips

- Engage qualified local dog trainers
- Select suitable locations
- Advertise in local papers
- Rangers to recommend particular owners attend

Web Links

City of Sydney - www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au



Councils partner with local dog walkers to deliver widespread community benefits

Benefits of local dog walking groups and voluntary compliance

- Encourages dog owners to exercise, improving the health of both humans and dogs
- Provides a vehicle to promote local rules and regulations and other responsible dog ownership strategies
- Creates a social network within the community
- Decreases nuisance behaviours in dogs that receive regular exercise

Walking is the most common and readily accessible form of physical activity in Australia, but is not always so accessible for those who want to take a dog as a companion. However, the dual benefits of dog walking for human fitness and the health and contentment of dogs are being increasingly recognised. Similarly, it is widely acknowledged that group events and activities encourage and facilitate voluntary compliance within the community.

An innovative example of healthy communities in action is the partnership between the Kingborough Dog Walking Association (KDWA) in Hobart, the Kingborough Council and the Hobart City Council who have collaborated to develop accessible off leash dog areas and create the “dogwalkinghobart.info” website.

The website was created in response to the steadily increasing public demand for comprehensive information on dog walking activities, parks and tracks within the greater Hobart area. The site also promotes social dog walking activities while encouraging responsible dog ownership through initiatives such as “Clean up the Beach Day”. Events like this play a key role in linking and strengthening communities and in developing positive relationships.



“It comes down to peer group pressure; people begin to feel like outsiders when they do the wrong thing.”
Merry Conway, Kingborough Dog Walking Association

The KDWA now has a membership of around 150 and sends out at least six newsletters a year that further keep the community up to date on social activities and dog related events. “We might run a new bush track walk for members on a Saturday morning. It’s nothing grand, but it gathers people together to enjoy themselves,” said Merry.

While it is dogs that have brought KDWA members together, Merry believes that it is the relationships that are formed, along with the community activities that lubricate discussion and develop interest in other community issues in the area.

“We’ve garnered a wealth of support from different areas of the community, including the local vets, and have also managed to build great relationships with the Council staff. It’s meant we can have healthy conversations concerning many things in the region, and can bring about positive change for everyone.” Merry Conway

Web Links

Kingborough and Hobart Dog Walking Groups
- www.dogwalkinghobart.info/index.htm
Hobart City Council - www.hobartcity.com.au
Kingborough City Council - www.kingborough.tas.gov.au

Tips

- Create new relationships and work with existing dog owner walking groups
- Prepare dog walking maps of the local area detailing a number of walks that will appeal to a range of interests and fitness levels
- Use websites and flyers to promote walking groups and other social activities and to remind dog owners of their responsibilities

Unleashing healthy lifestyles in local areas

Providing parks and open space that cater to the needs of different user groups is one of the challenges facing Local Government nationwide. A strategic approach to the design and use of open space can maximise its usage and benefits for individuals and the broader community.

The Nillumbik Council of Victoria recognised this when it engaged in a two year process of preparing and implementing a masterplan for a major area of open space, the Eltham Lower Park. The Park has a large number of users and diverse groups and is of high regional significance.

“One of the main goals of the masterplan is that it be acceptable to all users. What emerged through our consultation is that while there are a number of structured formal groups, (i.e. sporting teams and leisure groups), there were also a large number of unstructured groups like walkers with dogs.”

Darren Bennet, Nillumbik Council

The Council determined it would be vital to consult with all user groups to ensure their needs were adequately met. Fay Gravenall is the President of the Eltham Recreational Walkers Group, and she notes, “A surprising amount of young mums come down to the park with toddlers, prams and dogs. Dogs give these mums a companionship service whereby they can move through a public space and feel secure.”

“Owners with dogs are more likely to speak to others,” she continues “and the regular contact between the individuals provides mental stimulus, a vehicle for sharing community interests and support for those facing the grittiness of their everyday lives. A dog is also a perfect fitness partner.”

Through the robust community consultation, the Council grew to understand the importance of an area that could be specifically utilised by walkers and their dogs.

“After we interviewed the walkers with dogs group, we came to see the networking opportunity they provided to the community,” said Darren. “A lot of society’s problems stem from people being socially isolated. It’s in the Nillumbik Council’s mandate to motivate our community into social activity.”

As part of the masterplan, the Council decided to create an area that was highly dog friendly, providing the dogs with a drinking fountain, water bowls, and a rotunda. Other dog friendly inclusions include leash free ovals and some divided paths that cater to walkers and bicyclists separately.

“Experiences like these foster the skills needed for citizens to take part in constructing the wider community environment.”

Fay Gravenall, Eltham Recreational Walkers Group



Benefits of maximising open space and existing user space

- Well planned open spaces encourage exercise and networking opportunities
- Creates opportunities for local residents to engage actively in their community
- Motivates and increases social activity between different user groups



Tips

- Thorough community consultation that includes unstructured groups ensures the needs of all user groups are met
- Water, shade, seating, leash free areas for dogs and community education help to ensure public spaces are popular and responsibly used

Web Links

Nillumbik Council - www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au

Making the Most of What You've Got



“Every community has more potential resources than any one person knows.”⁵²

Councils can play a lead role in harnessing existing community assets such as people, infrastructure and resources, while simultaneously encouraging and affirming those that do it of their own accord (i.e. the many individuals and groups involved in volunteering).

While needs assessment and problem identification have often been the cornerstone of community planning, this can have a 'deficit' focus. There is however a growing trend towards more 'asset' based methods (i.e. what strengths do we have, how can we support what is already working). With some lateral thinking, making the most of what a community already has can provide low cost solutions to its needs.

More simply, it is a glass half full way of viewing community, versus a glass half empty.⁵²



Volunteering

The Australian tradition of 'mateship' and helping others is a sometimes overlooked or taken for granted community asset.

However, the desire to help others in the community is the most frequently cited motivation for volunteering in Australia.⁵³ As well as the obvious benefits that volunteer services provide to recipients, the very act of volunteering itself can fulfil an individual's need to belong, feel valued and find meaning in life.⁵⁴ Indirectly, the individual benefits of volunteering then go on to flow into greater levels of community trust and civic engagement⁴ and help to build community goodwill and community mindedness.

Economically speaking, there is also growing recognition that official national accounting figures such as Gross National Product (GNP) seriously underestimate the economic value that many important activities such as unpaid labour and volunteering give to the community.⁵

The following volunteer programs, DAS, the Pet Companion Program, PetLinks and SAFE demonstrate ways in which such services can be successfully implemented throughout different sections of the community, benefiting both those involved in providing and receiving the volunteer services, as well as the broader community.

Infrastructure and Place

Enhancing 'the fit' between existing resources and community needs can often be both more effective and less expensive as community improvement options than solutions that rest on a 'more is better' premise. In a recent community consultation relating to parks for example, residents didn't actually want 'more' but wanted the local parks to feel safe, to be well maintained and to cater for children of all ages.⁵⁵

Programs or promotional strategies that draw people to visit a community facility or park are also cost effective methods to make the most of what already exists and tap into people's desire for a strong sense of community.

The following case studies provide examples of ways in which councils have effectively drawn people into their parks to create community and healthy outcomes.



Gold Coast program delivers exercise, information and social interaction

Benefits of using existing programs, parks and utilities

- Creates social activity in underused open spaces
- Creates opportunity for education in socially responsible dog ownership
- Assists in achieving broader council goals and targets
- Connects community and builds new networking bridges

Councils around Australia are experiencing new challenges with public open spaces. In the past, planning for open space was much simpler, with parks addressing needs at basic levels either passively (parks and playgrounds) or actively (sports ovals). Increasingly, Councils are recognising the need to prepare open space strategies that cater to the whole of their municipality while targeting community issues.³⁹

Prior to the “Just Walk Me” program launch in 2007, certain Gold Coast City open spaces were experiencing community underutilisation and dog ownership issues.

The Gold Coast City Council successfully addressed both with a number of programs under the umbrella of ‘Active and Healthy’, one of them being the highly popular “Just Walk Me” campaign.

“Just Walk Me” is held in open spaces where owners have an opportunity to learn how to become more socially responsible pet owners while enjoying physical exercise. Animal Management Team Leader Alf Mikelat now finds the community turning up in droves to exercise their dogs, seek friendly guidance and make friends with neighbours.

“It’s an opportunity to demonstrate to people what normal dog behaviour actually is so that owners can enjoy the benefits of dog ownership while meeting new people” Alf Mikelat, Gold Coast City Council

Flyers promoting the program are sent to dog owners living in areas that experience more than their share of complaints. This effectively brings people together while lending support through free dog training seminars.

As with all new projects, however, the team has had to iron out a few bugs.

“The first time we parked the dog truck in the middle of the park and hopped out in our AMO uniforms. Everyone took off, thinking we were there to bust them for something! We learnt that lesson quickly,” Alf laughs. “We changed our shirts to a friendly green, stuck up some signage and painted up the truck. It wasn’t long before word of mouth got around.”

The Sunday mornings now attract more than 70 people and dogs. “Experience has taught me that the average person can feel confused with the kind of language used in Local Government,” says Alf. “It can be overwhelming to people who are after a simple answer on how they can spend more time enjoying their dogs.”

The program so far has been a success, with a plateauing of animal complaints being just one of the benefits.

“If we can fix just one complaint, then I reckon we’ve done our job. I’m really stoked at how well the program’s gone. It’s not only been dead easy to run, but dead cheap too!” Alf Mikelat

Web Links

Gold Coast City Council - www.goldcoast.qld.gov.au

Tips

- Wear shirts in “friendly colours”, green or yellow, and embroider with your own program logo
- Set up lots of signage in the area advertising the event
- Link to an existing health program that’s running in your Council. In doing so, you can get assistance with signage and promotion

Dog agility area delivers big benefits to pets and owners

Inactive lifestyles and increasing rates of obesity are a significant problem for both the human and canine populations of Australia in the 21st century. Communities therefore need to cater to the exercise needs of both people and pets, in particular dogs. A variety of local options for exercising dogs is ideal and, purpose-designed dog exercise areas can aid animal socialisation while simultaneously building community.

Five years ago, the Town of Kwinana Council in Western Australia addressed responsible pet ownership and dog exercise needs through the ranger driven initiative of “Peace Park”, a fenced dog exercise area.

The fenced dog exercise area provides a setting in which dogs and owners can exercise.

“People can even bring dogs here that are more difficult to manage off lead and coach them to behave in a controlled and friendly environment.”
Bradley Wilkinson, Town of Kwinana

The positive reception of the dog exercise area is not limited to residents of the Town of Kwinana, with Clinton Venables, the Senior Ranger, noting that “The park is always busy... I’m aware of people travelling from over 15km away to use the park to train their dogs.”

A community survey undertaken independently for the Town of Kwinana in mid 2008⁵⁵ found that among the 350 residents surveyed, those with dogs generally had higher levels of social interaction with other residents whilst at parks in the area, when compared to non dog owners.

The Town of Kwinana survey also found that:

- 37.9% of dog owners made friends whilst at a park compared with 26.5% of non dog owners;
- 84.5% of dog owners had conversations with other people in the park compared with 65.2% of non dog owners; and
- 73.9% of dog owners wave at other people in the park compared with 58.1% of non dog owners

Council rangers are also seeking other ways to promote responsible pet ownership including the “Kwinana Fun Dog Show” that has been held annually at the Peace Park since 2007. “Pet responsibility is the main aim behind it,” says Bradley. It’s a social and fun event with activities including friendly low-key dog competitions, free veterinary checks and stalls.

The need for more dog exercise areas like the Peace Park was noted by a number of residents spoken to at the 2008 dog show. In the words of Clinton, “As a Senior Ranger I would recommend a park like this be placed in every suburb.”

Other areas that include specific exercise equipment for dogs include City of Kingston in Victoria and Whiteman Park in Perth.

Benefits of providing services and facilities for dog owners

- People are more likely to interact in public places when accompanied by dogs
- Off leash and agility areas encourage owners to exercise with their dogs
- Well exercised dogs are less likely to become bored and a nuisance



Tips

- Consult with local dog associations, veterinarians, trainers and community to determine where to position and how to best equip an off-leash agility area
- Encourage rangers to promote responsible pet ownership through fun pet events that involve the whole community and publicise through community media tools

Web Links

Kwinana Council - www.kwinana.wa.gov.au

Social barriers broken down via pet program that supports older and disabled people

Benefits of volunteers in urban settings

- Builds bridges between new and seasoned residents
- Enables personal satisfaction through opportunity to volunteer in busy environment
- Helps older people stay in their own homes longer and remain in contact with their community

Pets provide the reason for contact amongst local residents who may otherwise remain isolated from one another. Pets can also contribute to reduced loneliness and depression, two common problems facing people as they age.

The PetLinks program enables people to gain personal satisfaction through volunteering, helps prevent social isolation among the elderly and assists older people to stay in their own homes for longer periods of time. In 1996, the Victorian Government launched the PetLinks program in Port Melbourne to support older people and people with disabilities who wanted to own pets.

The PetLinks project recruits volunteers to provide services that include pet walking, washing and grooming, transport and foster care.

The program is run as a community based incorporated association and holds a community driven service agreement with the City of Port Phillip, Melbourne.

Mary Kehoe is the Volunteer Coordinator at the South Port Day Links in Port Melbourne. Along with three other support programs, Mary manages PetLinks, matching the most appropriate volunteer to the most suitable pet owner and situation.

"It's a highly popular program. There are in fact many more people who want to volunteer than there are clients." Mary Kehoe, City of Port Phillip

A recent trend that Mary has identified as a volunteer source is young people moving into apartments in the Port Phillip area where it can be difficult to accommodate a pet of their own.

"They have often come from the country and deeply miss the relationships that they had with their own pet. PetLinks can provide an opportunity for them to satisfy their needs while helping out older members of the community."

The program is also helping break down social barriers between people within communities that might otherwise remain isolated from each other.

"We have a new community here called "Beacon Cove" and we're finding that PetLinks is serving to break down the social barriers that can so easily occur between new community members and the older members in the area," says Mary. "PetLinks is bringing these two very different communities together and each is coming to realise that the other is not so bad after all."

Mary is also acutely aware that the program helps people stay in their houses for longer, which is not only important to the individual but a growing priority for government and the healthcare system as Australia's population continues to age.

"Our clients are so grateful to the volunteers, regardless of whether they come once or three times a week. It's a real community strengthening process which is wonderful to see in action." Mary Kehoe

Web Links

South Port Day Links - www.spdl.org.au

Tips

- Identify an appropriate existing community organisation to manage the program
- Identify elderly and disabled residents in need of assistance
- Advertise for recruitment of volunteers
- Promote the program with Council media tools

Saving the lives of animals is life enhancing

Volunteering has many positive benefits, for the people volunteering, for those they assist, and for the broader community. These include improved physical health, enhanced social skills and involvement, and improved mental health and happiness. Volunteers also help to reinforce the importance of a compassionate, collective and community minded society.⁵⁶

Volunteers with SAFE (Saving Animals From Euthanasia), have the opportunity to contribute to an important community need and be involved in helping and saving the lives of animals.

Sue Hedley founded SAFE in 2003 after travelling for her job through the Pilbara, a sparsely populated, remote area in the Northwest of Western Australia that stretches over 510,000 square kilometres.

On her travels, Sue regularly came across homeless cats and dogs who were being euthanased due to the lack of animal rescue services in the region.

The not-for-profit animal welfare organisation successfully operates through a network of devoted volunteers operating from the mining and resources town of Karratha, committed to the welfare of thousands of animals.

SAFE is dedicated to the rescue, care and re-homing of abandoned and unwanted pets. Its primary goal is to make a difference in the quality of life for cats and dogs and to promote the immense value to humans of pet ownership. Less directly, but just as important, is its impact on volunteers.

"SAFE has played a big part in my mental health. I have something so important to get up for every morning that it soon overrides any difficulties I may have on a personal level." Sue Hedley, Founder, SAFE

In addition to the positive benefits that can accrue from volunteering, SAFE also provides enjoyment and social contact through interaction with animals for people who, for whatever reason, are unable to have a pet of their own.

Through continued dedication and hard work, SAFE has branched into other regions including Broome, Perth, Carnarvon and the South West with networks throughout the state involved in pet rescuing and rehoming.

Benefits of volunteers in regional settings

- Provides a safe haven for animals at risk in isolated rural Australia
- Volunteering brings about positive mental and physical benefits to the people involved
- Creates opportunities for people in isolated areas to connect



Tips

- Consider setting up a SAFE style program independently or look for opportunity to plug into an existing animal welfare program
- Refer interested volunteers to SAFE style programs and publicise through council media tools
- When identifying pets in need, refer to SAFE style programs

Web Links

SAFE organisation- www.safe.asn.au



Community spirit lifted and euthanasia rates reduced

Benefits of shelter volunteer dog walking programs

- Reduced euthanasia rates mean better animal welfare, a happier community and savings for local authorities through reduced admission rates and veterinarian costs
- Provides opportunities for people to volunteer which research shows increases feelings of wellbeing
- Creates opportunities for local residents to interact with each other and with the dogs
- Encourages residents to exercise

Volunteer work can improve access to social resources, bring families together, build new friendships and increase levels of physical activity.⁵⁶

Volunteers at Domestic Animal Services (DAS), part of Territory and Municipal Services in the ACT, get the opportunity to enjoy these benefits in the great outdoors and help dogs (many of whom spend extended periods of time at the shelter) find appropriate new homes.

It is generally acknowledged that dogs receiving regular exercise, training and socialisation are less stressed and therefore more attractive to new owners. Similarly, dogs that are comfortable with strangers have a better rate of rehoming than those that are not.

Rangers at the DAS facility had heavy and unpredictable workloads which left little time to exercise shelter dogs. The organisation addressed this issue when it began a formal volunteer program; one that ensured dogs at the facility received regular exercise and socialisation opportunities outside of their pens.

Volunteers at the shelter take the dogs out for 15-20 minutes walks, utilising the organisation's two grassed yards and walking track. Not only are the dogs enthusiastic for human interaction, volunteers also get a chance to exercise and bond with the dogs and play an active role in reducing shelter euthanasia rates while improving animal welfare conditions.

Over the last ten years, the admission rate of dogs to both the Domestic Animal Service's shelter and the RSPCA shelter in the ACT has fallen by 21.5%. More spectacularly, the euthanasia rate in these two facilities (the only refuges in the ACT) fell by 65.1% over the same period.

Registrar Scott Horan believes that Domestic Animal Services has a particularly low euthanasia rate.

"Last financial year we were able to re-home over 95% of suitable dogs."

Scott Horan, RSPCA ACT

"Dogs that are extremely old or very sick are generally not made available for rehoming, although in some cases DAS has been able to work with rescue groups to give the dogs a final home where they can recover. While aggressive dogs are not considered for re-homing, healthy happy dogs have a great chance of finding a new home through our service."

The reduction in euthanasia rates at DAS, improved animal welfare levels and uplifted community spirit have resulted from the concerted efforts of the DAS staff combined with the hard work of volunteers and various dog rescue groups, both local and interstate.

Web Links

DAS services - www.tams.act.gov.au

Tips

- Work with the local animal welfare shelter or pound
- Develop a protocol for a volunteer program considering training of volunteers as well as liability issues
- Advertise for volunteers in local newspapers, council newsletters and websites, veterinary surgeries and local dog rescue groups



Frail and elderly maintain beloved pets with help from community



Sometimes the people who would most benefit from the companionship of a pet find it difficult to fully attend to a pet's needs, and this is particularly true for older people or people with illness or disabilities. Council's supporting and encouraging volunteer programs that address this disparity are creating healthier communities.

Initiatives such as the Pet Companion Program in Knox and surrounding areas of Victoria, aim to provide support to older people and people with disabilities who require pet care assistance. The program is funded by the Department of Human Services and underpinned by the dedicated work of many volunteers.

"The program supports people who may come from lonely or isolated environments," says Rosie Nelson, Program Coordinator for the Pet Companion Program.

"They might not have family, or the family they do have live in another state or country. The volunteers not only help to sustain the relationship that they have with their pet, but bring some light into their day."

Rosie Nelson, Pet Companion Program

Volunteers visit pet owners in their home to provide assistance with dog walking, pet bathing and grooming and transporting clients and their pets to veterinary visits. Clients are responsible for paying veterinary fees as well as the cost associated with dog grooming facilities but the program is provided free of charge.

"When I match our client with a volunteer we often find that the relationship between the two becomes very strong," said Rosie. "Even if the pet passes away, our volunteers will often continue to visit."

The program attracts a large variety of volunteers who live in the Knox area, including retired people, young mums, and full and part time workers, many of whom have been matched into the program for years.

"At the moment we have around 100 clients and 101 volunteers. Every now and then we'll pull everyone together to have a volunteer social. We're always surprised at how many people turn up for them and how successful these occasions are!"

Rosie Nelson

Programs such as the Pets Companion program are a win-win for both the clients and the volunteers who get immense satisfaction from participating. In addition, there are broader benefits in terms of the strengthened civil fabric of a community where people help each other and economic savings associated with helping people to live independently in their homes for longer.

Benefits of volunteers in suburban settings

- Helps people who may be isolated or marginalised to feel part of the community and benefit from the companionship provided by pets
- Creates opportunities for local residents to contribute to their community by volunteering
- Assists pet owners to harvest the benefits of pet ownership while receiving social and practical support
- Delivers economic savings associated to people living independently



Tips

- Support any existing local volunteer groups or consider helping the local community to develop a program if none exists
- Develop links between local animal welfare agencies, veterinarians, pet shops and volunteer groups
- Encourage the local community to volunteer

Web Links

Knox Community Volunteers

- <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~knoxvols>

Companion Animal Volunteer Support Program (CAVS)

- www.balwynwelfare.org.au/services.aspx

Catering to All



“If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships - the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Australia often prides itself on providing a ‘fair go’ for everyone. The litmus test of an inclusive society however, is how well it includes and meets the needs of different population groups, including Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and those who are disadvantaged by social or economic circumstances.

With Australia’s ageing population, older people are also a significant and growing part of local communities, which is said to present both challenges and opportunities for local government.⁵⁷

Support For Independent Living

For older people, as well as people with illness and disabilities, there is increasing emphasis on enabling people to live in the community or at home for longer. This has implications for the way in which housing and neighbourhoods are designed, the accessibility of community facilities as well as for the availability and delivery of various government, non-government or voluntary support services.

Pets can sometimes play an important role in assisting independent living and mobility, as illustrated in the case studies relating to the organisations, BowMeow and POOPS.



Diverse Backgrounds

Pets are a great leveller, transcending racial, cultural, geographic, age and socio-economic boundaries in terms of their ownership and impact. This is evident in the exchanges between dog owners of diverse backgrounds at a local park or an animal being the catalyst for communication between timid patients and health professionals.

Societal Fringe

Pets have also been shown to bring therapeutic benefits and pleasure to many people who are not in a position to own or fully care for one on their own. The same applies to population groups who are sometimes on the societal fringe including those in prison, in healthcare facilities or nursing homes, or living in more impoverished circumstances.⁵⁸

The case studies relating to AMRRIC, PetLinks, Delta Animal Assisted Therapy, Assistance Dogs Australia, and the Human Animal Interaction Directory are excellent examples of this.

Supporting Our Communities

The benefits of pets for priority population groups is not just about a superficial ‘feel good’ effect; rather research has linked contact with pets to the prevention or reduced incidence of depression and stress and to buffering the impact of grief, traumatic events and loneliness.¹⁹ In a society struggling with issues of loneliness, isolation and depression, and an increasing proportion of people living alone or in fractured family situations, supporting initiatives that provide contact with pets can be seen as a real investment into the community.

As articulated by Eva Cox in her seminal Boyer lecture series on social capital, “societies rich in social capital recognise our common humanity, accept diversity and reject gross inequalities”.⁶

In their own small way, pets can in fact play a part in our expressions of humanity and care for others; and in the way in which we cater for diversity and strive for greater equality within Australian communities.





New approach improves dog health in Indigenous communities

Benefits of delivering culturally appropriate programs to indigenous communities

- Reduces dog bite incidences in communities
- Reduces zoonotic diseases (diseases spread from animals to humans, such as scabies, ringworm, intestinal parasitism)
- Successfully controls community dog population and reduces stray and unwanted animals in the area

There are many unique issues that arise in Indigenous communities that require different and culturally appropriate responses. The place of dogs in Indigenous lives, communities and homes is one example.

Pilot programs delivering dog health in Indigenous communities demonstrate that all members of the community benefit when dog health is improved.

Dogs in rural and remote Indigenous communities around Australia often suffer from poor health. Many are in poor body condition, infested with scabies, mites and other parasites⁵⁹. But it isn't just animal welfare that suffers in these situations – many diseases can be transmitted to humans. And un-desexed dogs may be more likely to attack, leading to dog bites which may require stitches and antibiotic treatment.

Until recently dog programs were ad-hoc, expensive and unsustainable.

In the past, quick-fix culling programs, often driven by well-meaning non-Indigenous people, generated hurt and mistrust. For example, not only was euthanasia of community dogs often inhumane, it was also ineffective, with dog numbers bouncing back in a year.

"This approach encouraged a feeling of detachment towards animals. If people knew there was a chance that someone might come into the community and kill their dog, they would distance themselves from the animal to avoid being hurt. Because those things are now a thing of the past people are much more secure in treating dogs as pets and can love them."

Dr. Stephen Cutter, AMRRIC

AMRRIC is an independent organisation consisting of veterinarians, doctors, Indigenous environmental health workers and academics. It facilitates sustainable dog health programs, with the aim of building the capacity of Indigenous communities to sustainably manage animal health and welfare issues.

Dog health programs are delivered only after extensive consultation with stakeholders, which may include community councils, traditional owners, health workers, women's groups, art groups, schools and other community groups.

Dr Cutter said that consultation is absolutely essential. "In our programs pet owners are able to decide whether to have their dog treated and how." The effects are tangible. Following a pilot program in the Northern Territory's Kintore in June 2008, dogs were observed to have increased body condition, with many owners proud to have a healthy dog. In addition, there was a reduction in faecal and urine contamination of households from dogs.

Prior to the pilot program, there were 17 dog bites reported to the Kintore police and health clinic. Between the first and third visit there were no reported dog bites.

The organisation partners with Governments, Non-Government Organisations and communities to develop and implement effective animal management policies at national, state and local government level.

Web Links

AMRRIC organisation - www.amrric.org



"It is essential to have the community on board. Otherwise you are just another one in a very long line of white people coming in and doing things to Aboriginal people that they don't want." Dr. Stephen Cutter

Tips

- Where available, partner with AMRRIC to assist in coordinating dog programs in rural and remote Indigenous communities.

Pets in healthcare prove to be key motivators in recovery



Animals and pets play an increasingly important therapy role in a range of healthcare settings including children's hospitals and nursing homes. Evidence indicates that animal assisted therapy can be an effective complement to other forms of medical treatment and care and also provides a source of interest and social interaction for patients and a rewarding experience for volunteers.

Sophie, a Newfoundland dog has worked for five years as a volunteer with Delta in the Dog Visiting Program. The Delta Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) commenced in 2007 with Sophie being the first dog to be used in the program. AAT is an innovative plan bringing together sick children and therapy dogs that is proving to be a vital step in the road to recovery for young patients.

Four year old Hayley Sparkl, who has Osteogenesis Imperfecta, or brittle bone disease, is just one of the success stories. Sophie and Hayley worked together for two years before Sue Armston, Sophie's trainer and owner retired the Newfoundland for some rest and relaxation.

"I really enjoy working with the kids. I love working on something where I can see that what I'm doing is really helping make a difference." Sue Armston, Delta Animal Assisted Therapy

For many children, ongoing physiotherapy and rehabilitation can be very challenging. The AAT program, the first of its kind to be implemented in New South Wales, provides a motivating factor that young patients need to continue to progress.

Hayley's mother Sharon said she always hoped her daughter would walk, but was unsure whether it would ever happen. "She's been coming to physiotherapy for most of her life, but as a three year old, she began to lose interest in it," Sharon said. "But the dogs have made the physiotherapy so much more fun. We're so thrilled our little girl can finally walk."

About 15 patients have taken part in AAT since it began in 2007.

Len and Sheila Mills are two other Delta volunteers who bring Miss Dolly and Miss Marigold, two miniature long haired Dachshunds, into the hospital to work with the children.

"It's a new world to us. We began work on the AAT program in September last year, and the whole thing has been wonderful. Just to look at one child's face, to see just one smile is a privilege. Their eyes are bright and they don't fear the way that we do. They're special children and we've learnt so much from it all. It's given us all a new lease on life!"

Sheila Mills, Delta Animal Assisted Therapy



Benefits of delivering to those in need of medical care

- Improves the physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning of the patient, as well as providing educational and motivational effectiveness for participants
- Particularly benefits children who may find physiotherapy sessions challenging and would otherwise have difficulty reaching their rehabilitation goals
- Improves sense of wellbeing in volunteers

Tips

- Promote Animal Assisted Therapy to hospitals and nursing homes in your area
- Support and promote Delta Society Australia and other organisations that provide Animal Assisted Therapy

Web Links

The Children's Hospital at Westmead - www.chw.edu.au
Delta Society Australia - www.deltasocietyaustralia.com.au

Simple support steps can make a difference

Benefits of delivering to the community using community organisations

- Helps people who may be isolated to feel part of the community and benefit from pet companionship
- Creates opportunities for local residents to contribute to their community by volunteering
- Provides animal contact to those in the community who are unable to have pets of their own

With vision, determination and a will to create, a community can change the way people live. Evidence shows that solutions driven by community members are often the most effective and sustainable and can assist people who may otherwise be isolated and marginalised to be included and supported.

Formed by Mary Ancich, BowMeow provides volunteers for clients in need of dog walking, a ride for pets to the vet and animal care for owners requiring a stay in hospital. The group currently services the inner city suburbs of Sydney and is looking to expand. The Leichardt Council provides funding for the organisation to assist with promotion and publicity.

"I really think that people with pets lead much fuller lives than those without. I feel so sad when an older person thinks that when their pet passes on they wouldn't be able to get another."

Mary Ancich, BowMeow



BowMeow's clients are mostly people without strong social networks. Mary finds that a client's needs can bring powerful networks together in a way that benefits both the client and those working collectively as part of the solution.

In one case, an elderly woman who had very little money was given a dog by a local animal shelter and a pet door from a local pet shop at wholesale price which was then installed without cost by a local builder.

"These people's contributions made such a difference to her life," said Mary. "And she was so grateful. She could never say that enough."

When the woman passed away, half of the people at her funeral were BowMeow volunteers, a sign of how much she had been appreciated by her new community.

"I know that pets are important physically to people but I also see how much they give socially and emotionally. A person may not notice that they have lived two months longer, but they will notice the joy that a pet brings to them every day," Mary said.

Another benefit of BowMeow is the opportunity for interaction with pets it provides for many of its volunteers whose living arrangements might not enable them to have a pet of their own.

Sally Bonser was one of the first volunteers to join up to the program when she read about it in the local paper.

"Volunteering for BowMeow is fantastic. I can give back to the community and learn about another person's experience. I really looked forward to my Monday afternoons with my client - it's a great way to start the week with a walk, a chat and a cup of tea."

Sally Bonser, Volunteer

Web Links

Bow Meow - www.bowmeow.com.au

Tips

- Encourage and support any existing local volunteer groups or consider helping the local community develop a program if none exists
- Develop links between animal welfare agencies, veterinarians, pet shops and volunteer groups

Assistance animals ensure mobility and independence for people with special needs

Animal companions can ease loneliness, calm our emotions and soothe in times of illness and hardship. For people with special needs, specially-trained animals are available to assist with mobility and independence.

A wide range of organisations, small and large, formal and informal, provide opportunities for animals to assist and interact with humans, across all ages of life and in diverse environments. Animals are involved in programs with children, adolescents, people with disabilities, prisoners, the elderly, hospitalised patients and many others.

Programs involving animal companions can contribute to social capital by helping people who may otherwise be isolated or marginalised to care for themselves and interact more readily with the community.

"Animals that work with humans are amazing. They're trained to support people perform ordinary activities but they can also undertake highly specialised tasks that draw on their unique skills." Dr Kersti Seksel, Australian Companion Animal Council

The Australian Companion Animal Council has published a directory which identifies some of the organisations responsible for dogs that assist people with sight, hearing or mobility. It also identifies organisations where animals form part of the therapy that patients receive.

"The role of dogs in supporting people who are visually impaired is well known but there are actually more dogs that work with people with hearing impairments," says Kersti. "In total, there were 389 guide dogs and seeing-eye dogs in Australia in 2005 and 405 dogs working with people with hearing difficulties. This directory helps put people who can benefit from these services in contact with organisations in their area."

Lisa Murray appreciates the companionship and assistance provided by her support dog, Cassie. "Cassie's changed my life. She turns barriers into opportunities, affording me greater choice and stability. She removes the element of risk and injury that can accompany me undertaking daily tasks and activities solo."

"With her life loving attitude and her golden paws at my side, I have been humbled, inspired and transformed. It is just awesome. I cannot thank Cassie, Australian Support Dogs and the general public enough for their generous donations and support. Life is definitely richer. I am undertaking animal studies at TAFE as a result of my golden girl."

Lisa Murray, Cassie's owner



Benefits of using animal interaction in the community

- Helps people perform day to day tasks so they can achieve a level of independence
- Creates opportunities for local special needs residents to remain interactive with their communities
- Provides an opportunity for people to volunteer leading to feelings of wellbeing

Tips

- People may not be aware that there are many organisations that exist in Australia that help animals help people - a range of these organisations are listed in the Directory of Human Animal Interaction Organisations
- Ensure Occupational, Diversional and other therapists in your local area are aware of the Directory and its usefulness in identifying programs and organizations operating
- The Directory of Human Animal Interaction Organisations is available online at www.anthrozoology.com.au

Web Links

The Human Animal Interaction Directory - www.humananimalinteraction.org.au
 Australian Companion Animal Council - www.acac.org.au
 Anthrozoology - www.anthrozoology.com.au



Assistance dogs enhance quality of life for those on the outer

Benefits of supporting assistance dogs in the community

- Increases life quality for other marginalised communities with opportunities for animal bonding and training
- Enhances quality of life for recipients of assistance dogs and creates new social networks for assistance dogs recipients
- Saves costs to the community by reducing attendant care needs

Both evidence and anecdote confirm the positive role that pets have played in assisting people with special needs. Assistance dogs are trained to enhance the quality of life of physically or mentally challenged persons while still maintaining independence for the handler. Interestingly, many handlers find that their “cloak of invisibility” also disappears when they are accompanied by an assistance dog.

Assistance Dogs Australia (ADA) was established in Sydney as a non-profit organisation in 1996 with a mission to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The organisation obtains, trains and maintains dogs in community settings to assist people with disabilities, give them more confidence, relieve social isolation and help them achieve greater levels of independence.

Since Richard Lord came on board as CEO four years ago, the mission statement of the organisation has expanded to include enhancing the quality of life for others in marginalised communities. This has been done by asking selected community members to train puppies for a number of months.

Pups have worked with people in prison, the long term unemployed and are soon to be trained by juvenile offenders.

“It’s a win-win scenario for the community and the dogs. Pups can be very life affirming for people who may not feel that they belong in the same way that others do.” Richard Lord, Assistance Dogs Australia

Similarly, ADA will begin to trial a program for children in early primary school years who experience difficulty in reading and can practice their skills on non-judgemental Labradors. Richard sees the program as an

opportunity for recipients of assistance dogs to connect into other areas of the community, like local schools.

At age 19, Tanya Clarke was involved in a road accident, which left her a quadriplegic, confined to a wheelchair, with limited arm movement and no hand function.

In 2001 Harry arrived as Tanya’s assistance dog. As Tanya says, “Harry came into my life and made a huge difference to my level of independence. For the first time since my accident, my quality of life has improved a great deal.”

Each assistance dog is fully trained to specific standards and provided to disabled recipients free of charge.

Assistance dogs are trained over a two year period to perform specific tasks that will help their disabled recipients, including opening and closing doors, turning light switches on and off, pressing pedestrian crossing buttons and retrieving items off the floor. They can also bark for assistance, if required.

Web Links

Assistance Dogs Australia - www.assistedogs.org.au



“Harry has improved my independence, my quality of life and the way I feel about myself. He is also my companion and the very best friend anyone could ever wish for.”

Tanya Clarke

Tips

- Promote assistance dogs services through the use of Council promotional material
- Publicise their recruitment drive for volunteer puppy sitters

In home volunteer pet care programs provides elderly with independent living and stress relief



There is growing momentum in Australia to help older people live independently and remain in their own homes. Pets provide a source of companionship, physical contact and antidote to stress and bereavement for older people,⁶⁰ but in some instances, their owners may struggle to meet the pet’s needs or access timely veterinary assistance.

Staff at St Joseph’s Hospital teamed up with RSPCA NSW to establish the Pets of Older Persons (POOPs) program in 2003, catering to pet owners in palliative care and those over the age of 65 who don’t have family to support them.

The Aged Care Assessment Team at St Joseph’s Hospital at Auburn have found that the bond between the elderly and their pet or pets is so great that the elderly person will defer or refuse medical attention (for example, an in-patient stay) as they do not want to leave their pets alone and may be unable to afford the costs of boarding.

Programs like POOPs enable the elderly and their animal companions to remain healthy and happy in their homes by assisting with the routine care of pets including grooming and walking; organising veterinary attention; and providing emergency boarding or foster care of the pet if the owner requires medical attention. If the owner’s situation changes to the point where they require constant in-patient care and cannot look after their pets, their pets are re-homed through the RSPCA.

“Pets are extremely important to elderly people. Sometimes their pet is the only thing left in their life that they can count on. As people get older they may feel that they can’t contribute as much to society, so being able to look after a pet gives them a sense of purpose. Some rely on their pet to get them out of bed every morning.”
Dr Magdoline Awad, RSPCA NSW.

Dr Awad said the bond between elderly people and their pets was so strong that some dementia sufferers were able to recognise their pet even when they could not recognise close family members.

Elderly pet owners are referred to POOPs from a variety of sources including social workers, community nurses, carers, veterinarians, RSPCA inspectors, Council Rangers and community groups. Since the program’s inception, the number of referrals have increased considerably and numbered over 200 in 2007.

Indirectly, programs such as POOPs also contribute to healthcare savings for the community.

“If we can help people keep their pets and live at home for longer then there is less strain on the health care system.”

Dr Magdoline Awad,

Benefits of delivering to the elderly using formal organisations

- Health and well-being of elderly people may be maintained and improved through caring for and bonding with a pet
- Assist in reducing burden on the health care system



Tips

- Determine which volunteer services currently exist in the area and support and promote
- Identify community residents in need and link to identified volunteer programs
- Promote service through Council media tools

Web Links

POOPs at RSPCA - www.rspcansw.org.au

Pulling it all together

So you've read the handbook and you're inspired to go out and put ideas into action. But how to do it?

One of the ways councils can effectively pull many of the issues raised in this handbook together is via a Companion Animal Plan that is integrated within the broader strategic planning process of Council. With concerns such as off leash park usage and animal management issues potentially creating "us and them" scenarios within the community, it is better to take the lead and plan rather than react to situations once they've already occurred.

Pets impact the community in many ways, so good pet management and planning can benefit the entire community, not just pet owners. As to whether the pet impact is negative or positive is largely traced back to identification of community needs, planning and stakeholder consultation. Progressive councils seek to educate, consult and pool resources to make good decisions that have the community's needs at heart. Sure it takes time, but it is well worth it.

Many local authorities have already successfully developed and implemented Companion Animal Management Plans (also known as Domestic Animal Management Plans and a range of other titles). Often these plans are part of the overall Strategic Plan for the Council. Whether your Council already has an Animal Management Plan and wishes to revise it, or you're developing a new Plan, the following ideas might help you to consider various departments and stakeholders to assist and support you.

First Steps

- Develop the Plan with the assistance of the Councils' communications department who should be experienced in planning and developing general stakeholder relationships.
- Get sign off from your department and Council management to undertake stakeholder engagement and implement the resulting strategies and tactics.

Internal Relations

Assess the environment, flag the needs of other departments and establish which strategies best suit your region. Key players might include Environment, Health and Ageing, Animal Management, Compliance, Planning and the Community Development department. Do your best to ensure that all stakeholder interests are delivered equally across the plan.

External Relations

- Outside your Council there are a multitude of stakeholders willing to assist and support your plans. Key players include welfare organisations, volunteer groups, animal breeders, dog trainers, vets, vet nurses, the pet industry, wildlife carers and assistance animal groups.
- Create alliances with authorities outside of your region i.e. ROCS (Regions of Councils) to help minimise and solve border problems through the pooling of expertise. Draw on their knowledge, look at other plans, and find out what works and what doesn't.
- Use qualified and experienced advisors known within the community to help create programs and educate people within and outside of your organisation. This will establish respect and community compliance. It's important to remember that Council should not only be looking to enforce and address issues, but create feasible, workable solutions that draw on and maximise the benefits of the community.
- Continually foster community champions to spread the word and help activate the strategy in the community.

Finally

Companion Animal Management Plans do not have to be set in concrete. Instead, introduce the Plan in stages and across a number of years. Strategies can be trialled, adapted and re-trialled to better address the objectives.

While stakeholder consultation cannot promise to eliminate all issues with the community, it will substantially reduce the time spent in re-addressing the same issues. It will also show the council to be fair and reasonable to all community concerns, its citizens and its groups.

Example - Gold Coast City Council



The Gold Coast City Council (GCCC) has over 60,000 dogs registered in their jurisdiction which means that developing a strong consultative relationship base has been vital in activating the implementation of their animal management strategy.

Internally, the Animal Management Team has built relationships with the Parks and Gardens Department, the Healthy and Active Project Team and the Seniors Department of the Council. Externally GCCC has built relations with educational institutions and the area's increasing ageing population. The Council also channels all communications through its Corporate Communications section to ensure uniformity of message and image.

The team has also developed across border relations with the Animal Management Committee that is responsible for animal management in Northern New South Wales.

"We're all in the same business and it means that we're across similar information and therefore educating our communities using the same material. And while we operate using different state laws, by having a solid understanding of each, we can help each other out in regards to stray animal and prohibited breed management. It works out well for all of us."

Alf Mikelat, Gold Coast City Council

The GCCC has also created a stakeholder committee that has around 20 people from various arenas, including veterinarians, the Canine Council, the RSPCA, dog and cat breeders, regulation officials and welfare agencies. The group has come together at different times in its six year history to discuss potentially contentious issues such as new state animal management legislation, cat and dog bills, euthanasia issues and pet shop codes of conduct.

With the Council having built working relationships with external organisations, it has set up a number of "roving eyes, ears and mouths" in the community which can report back to the Council who can then use their regulatory powers to advance the issue. The team can also assist its Council stakeholders by alerting them to relevant issues and situations.



"By essentially having created a network of organisations that work together, we have pooled our resources to develop stronger, more effective strategies. And those strategies can then go on to target a broader range of issues and keep a more watchful eye out for future developments and opportunities in the area." Alf Mikelat

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AMRRIC works with stakeholders to encourage Indigenous communities to join and remain engaged in culturally appropriate, sustainable animal management programs.

The organisation has made the manual, *Conducting Dog Health Programs in Indigenous Communities: A Veterinary Guide* by Dr Samantha Phelan, available free to members.

Petcare Information and Advisory Service has further information on pet ownership in the community at www.petnet.com.au

- How do animals help improve the lives of people: a research summary
- Public Open Space and Dogs: a design and management guide for open space professionals and local government
- People, Pets and Planning: living in a healthy community. Proceedings from the Deakin University Symposium
- Barking management strategies help neighbours get along
- Socially Responsible Pet Ownership in Australia: a decade of progress. Results from the 2006 National People and Pets Survey

More useful resources available at:

- www.anthrozoology.org – scientific research on human animal interaction
- www.cccac.net.au – the Australian Veterinary Association Centre for Companion Animals in the Community
- www.acac.org.au – the Australian Companion Animal Council
- www.aiam.com.au – the Australian Institute of Animal Management

Halcyon Retirement Community Pet Policy

- Pets be fully vaccinated against all common animal diseases
- Cats be confined to the property – a cat run may be installed if residents wish their cat to access the outdoors
- A behavioural assessment is undertaken by a professional Delta behavioural trainer
- Dogs must always be walked on lead in the village
- Dogs are prohibited from certain areas such as pools and particular facilities
- Dogs are to be de-sexed



Dr Lisa Wood

Dr Lisa Wood is a research fellow at the Centre for the Built Environment and Health, School of Population Health, at the University of Western Australia. She also has 18 years experience in public health campaigns, policy and programs, working with both government and non-government organisations nationally and across a range of health issues.

Lisa has a strong interest and commitment to research that is useful and relevant to the 'real world'. Her PhD thesis examined the relationship between neighbourhood environments, social capital and health. The role of pets as a facilitator of social capital and sense of community was explored as part of this study and has been subsequently published in two international journals. She was recently invited to present this research at an international scientific meeting on Human Animal Interactions auspiced by the National Institute of Health in the USA.

Other areas of research and public health activity include the built environment and neighbourhood design, mental health promotion, health inequalities, social determinants of health, tobacco, aboriginal health, domestic violence prevention and the translation of research into policy and practice.

Lisa's lifetime 'pet CV' to date includes 'Patches', 'Paddy', 'Benson' and 'Bella' (dogs); 'Fluffy' (a not very fluffy cat); 'Cocky' who flew away, the occasional goldfish and crazy crab!



Dr Lisa Wood with Bella

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This publication has been provided solely for information purposes to assist local government organisations in reviewing the ways in which pets can help to strengthen social capital in their communities.

In preparing this publication, Petcare Information and Advisory Service Australia Pty Ltd (PIAS) has relied on statements from interviewees which PIAS has assumed to be true and accurate in all respects and have contained no omissions.

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The mission of the Centre for the Built Environment and Health is to undertake policy-relevant research that builds capacity and influences planning and urban design policy and practice to create healthy and sustainable communities.
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The Petcare Information and Advisory Service Australia Pty Ltd (PIAS) was established in 1966 as an autonomous, non-commercial organisation committed to promoting socially responsible pet ownership. Funding is provided by MARS Petcare as a community service and PIAS has as its charter:

- To educate owners on the responsibilities of pet ownership.
- To undertake original research on the relationship between humans and companion animals.
- To ensure accurate and reliable information on pet related issues is available to all interested parties.
- To encourage pet ownership in balance with society's needs, and to help owners enjoy their pets.
- To provide information on and encourage the correct care of pets.

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