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| CANINE COMPANIONSHIP

Anyone's best friend once you get a dog

The theory that blokes who have dogs get the ladies seems to be more fact than fiction.

WA University researchers have discovered that pet owners are much more likely to get to know people in their neighbourhoods than those with no furry companion.

Scientists quizzed 2500 adults in Australia and the US and found 53 per cent of Aussie pet owners got to know people as a direct result of their four-legged friend.

A quarter described at least one of these people as a friend. And dog owners were found to be five times more likely to get to know people than other pet owners.

Sophie Aubrey

Assoc Prof Lisa Wood, who conducted the Pet Factor study in collaboration with Mars Petcare, said the research showed animals could combat the social isolation and lost sense of community that often resulted from a modern urban life.

Wood said there was "every possibility" relationships might also blossom out of pets.

She said as young Aussies continued to bury themselves in technology, pets were a "practical solution".

"The role of pets as a catalyst for friendship ... is an overlooked

way that people get to know others," Wood said.

"We're all guilty of being a little too fixated on our screen-based devices these days.

"Pets, and specifically dog walking, bring us out of the technology bubble and create opportunities for ... deep, human friendships."

Katie Fox, 35, lives with her two labradors in Brisbane, where she moved three years ago after a difficult breakup.

She accredits her hounds for

helping her form a new social network.

"I didn't know anyone in Brisbane whatsoever," Fox said.

"Without having the dogs it would have made it a lot harder.

"I looked forward to getting up every morning and going to the dog park ... to say hello."

Fox has yet to land a date through her dogs, but she joked she was "still hopeful".

"He has got to be a dog lover," she said.

"Pets, and specifically dog walking, bring us out of the technology bubble."