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Fur babies: Enjoying a break at Pet Lovers Cafe in Maylands are Tanya Izzard and Maximus, Luke Harries and Caesar, study author Lisa Wood and Nala and Emma Thompson with Bo. Picture: Michael Wilson

Pets open up a world of friends

■ Claire Tyrrell

When Emma Thompson and Bodie Foster became dog owners, they did not expect it to change their lives like it has.

Thanks to 67kg cane corso Caesar, the Dianella couple have opened up a world of new friends.

“We have become best friends with people we would not have known otherwise,” Ms Thompson said. “We are great friends with the breeder we bought Caesar from and with another dog owner we met in the park.”

The couple are among thousands of WA residents who have gained meaningful human connections through owning a pet.

Research to be released by the University WA today found that pet owners were much more likely to get to know people in their area than non pet owners.

Held with Britain’s Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition, the research examined how pets help foster community spirit.

Lead author UWA Professor Lisa Wood said the results were not confined to dog owners.

“What we see is a broader ripple effect in the community,” she said. “Dogs were the most common pets, but we had cats, rabbits, birds, guinea pigs.

“All pet owners are more likely to know people in their neighbourhood than those who don’t own a pet.”

About 2600 pet owners in Perth, San Diego, Portland and Nashville took part in the study.

Professor Wood said she hoped the research would lead to more pet-friendly places, such as Maylands’ Pet Lovers Cafe.