



## Pets contribute to a happy community

**P**ets could be the key to finding the perfect place to live, according to recent research.

Dr Lisa Wood from the School of Population Health at the University of Western Australia said while there were well known one-on-one benefits to owning a pet, the university's research clearly shows that pet ownership also has a beneficial ripple effect for the whole community.

"Non-pet owners spontaneously identified people walking dogs as one of the ways in which they get to know and recognise neighbours and other residents within their suburb," she said. "Dog owners also identified social contact resulting from being out with their dogs."

Dr Wood also said seeing people walk their dogs around the streets or in the parks created a sense of safety and community for residents.

With a range of block sizes and housing styles available in the modern market, whether or not people have pets also affects the property they buy.

People with pets tend to buy larger blocks with back yards.

And while most council areas have specific off-leash areas, dogs are required to remain on the leads at all times in most

council areas.

Key findings from the study *More Than a Furry Companion, the Ripple Effect of Pets on Neighbourhood Interactions and Social Capital* also revealed:

- 40.5 per cent of pet owners said they had got to know other people in their suburb through their pet, with dog walking being the activity that was most likely to initiate contact;

- 83.8 per cent of dog walkers talked to other pet owners while out walking their dog;

- Pet owners were 57 per cent more likely to be civically engaged than non-pet owners;

- Pet owners were 74 per cent more likely to have a high social capital score compared with non-pet owners;

- 82.5 per cent of dog owners felt safer in their homes because of owning a dog; and

- The odds of feeling lonely more frequently were twice as high among non-pet owners as pet owners.

Dr Wood said that nearly two thirds of Australian households own pets, outnumbering the number of homes with children, Internet connections and DVD players.

