



# Pets break the ice: study

THE phrase 'Location, location, location' may soon be replaced by 'pets, pets, pets' as the key to finding the perfect spot to live.

Latest research reveals pets are a key to encouraging neighbourhood friendliness.

Lisa Wood, of the School of Population Health at the University of Western Australia, said:

"While there are well-known one-on-one benefits to owning a pet, our research clearly shows that pet ownership also has a beneficial ripple effect for the whole community."

Dr Wood said 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.

Dog owners also identified social contact resulting from being out with their dogs.

"The visible presence of people walking dogs seems to contribute to feelings of collective safety and a generalised sense of community."

In her report, *More Than a Furry Companion, the Ripple Effect of Pets on Neighbourhood Interactions and Social Capital*, Dr Wood found:

- 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 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.

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

"Dog ownership specifically contributed to people feeling a sense of community and getting to know others, and pet ownership contributed to an overall high score on the social capital score," Dr Wood said.

Almost two-thirds of Australian households have pets, outnumbering homes with children, internet connections and DVD players.



**Caring community:** Latest research shows pets are a key to encouraging neighbourhood friendliness.