



# **ATTITUDES**health & fitness **Dogs help make a social circle**

Walking the dog has been identified as a sign of a friendly neighbourhood

**THOSE** people looking to buy a home and become part of a welcoming community, may want to check out the number of pets in the neighbourhood.

Recent research at the University of Western Australia indicates pets will soon be the key motivation for people looking to buy a home.

According to Dr Lisa Wood from the university's School of Population Health, there is more to owning a pet than the well-

known one-on-one benefits.

Research results show 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," says Dr Wood.

"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."

For Ashleigh Spence

the research results were not surprising.

Ashleigh and her family, who live at Southport, make a point of taking their Maltese cross Shih Tzu Zakk to areas where they can interact socially.

"We take Zakk to the Spit where he can play with other dogs," says Ms Spence.

"We meet lots of dog owners and often stop to have a chat while we are walking along the beach – the dogs are a conversation starter.

"On certain days we see the same people with their pooches and it's nice to see a familiar face when out walking as it makes it social for us and Zakk."



Ashleigh Spence and her Shih Tzu Zakk are social animals