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# Pets can play vital role in health and wellbeing

THE latest findings on what it takes to have a healthy community have been recorded in a special book to be released to councils all over Australia.

The *Living Well Together* handbook will give local councils the chance to learn about the role pets have in creating 'social capital'.

Edited by Dr Lisa Wood from the Centre for the Built Environment and Health at the University of Western Australia, *Living Well Together* includes some innovative case studies from Queensland.

These include 'Just Walk Me' – a Gold Coast City Council initiative in which dog owners get together for free dog training seminars and exercise in local parks.

A new policy to allow pets into a retirement community at Hope Island on the Gold Coast is another local case study featured.

"Our original research, published in the *Journal for Social Science and Medicine* in 2005, showed pets acted as a lubricant for social contact and interaction," said Dr Wood.

"The research found pet owners were more likely to exchange favours with neighbours, to be involved in community issues and to



**JUST FRIENDS ...** pets can help people from every walk of life.

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create and benefit from higher levels of what is called 'social capital'.

"Other research from the university demonstrated the role dogs have in motivating their owners to be more physically active.

"This has a flow-on benefit to the overall health of the owner and the dog.

"With growing concerns within

Australia and around the world about the erosion of community wellbeing, these findings led us to look at how communities are working together to make the most of the benefits pets offer.

"Once we started looking, we were staggered to find just how many examples there were of pets helping people from every walk of life.

"I'm sure that with the release of this publication, we'll find many more programs.

"The handbook shows how pet ownership has resulted in benefits for different members of the community: families, older people, children and individuals.

"It also provides practical advice on how to get similar programs happening in your area."

*Living Well Together* can be downloaded at no cost from [www.petnet.com.au](http://www.petnet.com.au).