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CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

Canine clamber to join coffee club



WE'VE seen it happen and probably been a part of it. A dainty baby or entertaining toddler arrives on the scene at a cafe, in a park or a shop. Adults previously unknown to each other start chatting and delighting in the charms of the little one.

Psychologists tell us we're programmed to be attracted to baby faces as part of nature's plan to encourage good care of infants. Biologists tell us that being attracted to all that is alive and vital is part of what it is to be human.

The term biophilia was coined to describe the innate need human beings have for contact with nature. It literally means love of life or living systems and may explain why it's not only babies and toddlers that are good at breaking the ice in social settings.

Animals are also renowned for their capacity to bring people together in positive ways.

Research is supporting the biophilia hypothesis that contact with nature through pets and the great outdoors has significant social, mental and physical health benefits.

By opening up our neighbourhoods to pets in supported and planned ways, we are letting life back in for ourselves and enhancing health and wellbeing collectively.

Back in 2002, research by Dr Lisa Wood, of the University of Western Australia, concluded that "social benefits of pets are not merely neighbourhood niceties but can positively influence health at the individual and community level".

With growing policy and public interest in rebuilding a sense of community and the high rates of pets living in neighbourhoods, there is a strong case to optimise the role that pets can play in this process.

Along with a potential ripple effect for non-pet owners, these findings have practical implications for the way pets are valued, included and accommodated in urban areas.

In many European cities, well-socialised dogs cheerfully accompany their families to coffee shops, on the Underground, in parks and gardens and shops.

City planners in Paris are streets ahead, providing gutters which regularly flush to eliminate rubbish including dog waste.

It remains a mystery as to why pets are more restricted in this country compared with other developed nations.

Happily, Food Standards Australia New Zealand announced recently it was re-examining the rules on dogs at outdoor eateries.

As a result, eateries choosing to accommodate dogs in their alfresco areas will be provided with consistent set of national guidelines.

You can congratulate FSANZ on its proposal by lodging a simple submission online at www.foodstandards.gov.au.

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PUPPYCINO PLEASE:
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