



Pets foster social connections within neighbourhoods

Bruce Butler

Owning a pet provides not only health benefits but also increases social connections within the neighbourhood, according to an international study across Perth and three US cities.

Researchers from The University of Western Australia conducted the largest international study on

the social benefits of pet ownership and found that owning a pet is not only important for our well-being but important for social connection in our neighbourhood

Drawing from a sample of more than 2500 pet and non-pet owners in Perth, San Diego, Portland and Nashville the research revealed owning a pet, irrespective of the type of animal, is linked to

increased perceptions of trust in the community and increased social capital (formation of strong networks and positive relationships between people).

UWA lead researcher Dr Lisa Wood said the notion that pets could help facilitate the “glue” that holds communities together went far beyond the role of pets as a conversation starter or icebreaker.

Dr Wood said 60 per cent of those surveyed who owned a dog knew their neighbours better and 25 per cent of those who owned another animal knew their neighbours better.

But none of that is news to local vet Dr Marjorie Lukin, of Kalgoorlie’s Animal Hospital.

“I think we all benefit from

having a pet. They get us out and

about and give us something to think about other than ourselves, which is a good thing,” Dr Lukin said. “They provide comfort to so many people and companionship.

“They are great companions, especially for the elderly.

“There are many considerations to being a responsible pet owner, but there are certainly many rewards from owning a pet.”