



## Local support networks, activities and advice developed online

### Benefits of an on-line community

- Connects people who may otherwise be isolated in the physical community
- Delivers immediate network of pet friendly people and activities to the community's fingertips
- Provides a myriad of other social and pet related activities through network links
- Owners can overcome nuisance behaviours resulting from bored pets by providing animals with companionship throughout the day

A community doesn't have to be defined by geographical boundaries. The internet has spawned a growth of virtual communities that connect people with a shared common interest or need while helping to build community. Such groups can play a particularly important role for people who are isolated, don't have the opportunity to meet like-minded others in their day to day life, or who want to exchange information or services.

An Australian website, created by Diane Hackett three years ago, is a unique example of an online doggy friendship service; an active online community which helps connect pet lovers locally and nationally. The site assists people in making and meeting new friends through their dogs while helping each other with dog minding, dog walking and even domestic doggy day care.

Diane saw a gap in the market for people who enjoyed the benefits of dog ownership and wanted to meet likeminded people while having a simple, on-line way to hook up with people willing to swap dog care favours or facilities.

Before the site existed, such relationships could only be found with "pot luck", or by asking people in the local street whether they might be able to help out; a confronting scenario for the majority of people.

But once Diane had built the website and it became populated with members enthusiastic for "petworking", the site created a comfortable way for both pet and non pet owners to use the site and initiate face to face meetings and find solutions to their problems and answers to their questions while meeting new friends.

"Some Councils have found the site to be very helpful when it comes to dealing with nuisance dog behaviours at the coal face," says Diane.

*"Problems like barking and whining that commonly occur when dogs are bored or lonely can be substantially reduced if you have the opportunity to get support by linking into a community network of pet friendly people."*

*Diane Hackett, Founder, doggymates*

The site also provides a multitude of links and information on other social dog related activities like Council Pet Days, dog sports and regular social dog walking groups.

Many of Diane's personal friends have been made through the site or through the outdoor dog activity events listed. "I get out every second weekend to join in on a relaxed social dog walking group and I've made some wonderful friends there," she says.

*"People from different walks of life that I know in my heart I would never have met otherwise."*

*Diane Hackett*



### Tips

- Dog owners help each other out, saving money on doggy minding and day care, promote 'petworking' in your local area through events and Council publicity tools

### Web Links

Doggymates website - [www.doggymates.com.au](http://www.doggymates.com.au)