

Simple support steps can make a difference

Benefits of delivering to the community using community organisations

- Helps people who may be isolated to feel part of the community and benefit from pet companionship
- Creates opportunities for local residents to contribute to their community by volunteering
- Provides animal contact to those in the community who are unable to have pets of their own

With vision, determination and a will to create, a community can change the way people live. Evidence shows that solutions driven by community members are often the most effective and sustainable and can assist people who may otherwise be isolated and marginalised to be included and supported.

Formed by Mary Ancich, BowMeow provides volunteers for clients in need of dog walking, a ride for pets to the vet and animal care for owners requiring a stay in hospital. The group currently services the inner city suburbs of Sydney and is looking to expand. The Leichardt Council provides funding for the organisation to assist with promotion and publicity.

"I really think that people with pets lead much fuller lives than those without. I feel so sad when an older person thinks that when their pet passes on they wouldn't be able to get another."

Mary Ancich, BowMeow



BowMeow's clients are mostly people without strong social networks. Mary finds that a client's needs can bring powerful networks together in a way that benefits both the client and those working collectively as part of the solution.

In one case, an elderly woman who had very little money was given a dog by a local animal shelter and a pet door from a local pet shop at wholesale price which was then installed without cost by a local builder.

"These people's contributions made such a difference to her life," said Mary. "And she was so grateful. She could never say that enough."

When the woman passed away, half of the people at her funeral were BowMeow volunteers, a sign of how much she had been appreciated by her new community.

"I know that pets are important physically to people but I also see how much they give socially and emotionally. A person may not notice that they have lived two months longer, but they will notice the joy that a pet brings to them every day," Mary said.

Another benefit of BowMeow is the opportunity for interaction with pets it provides for many of its volunteers whose living arrangements might not enable them to have a pet of their own.

Sally Bonser was one of the first volunteers to join up to the program when she read about it in the local paper.

"Volunteering for BowMeow is fantastic. I can give back to the community and learn about another person's experience. I really looked forward to my Monday afternoons with my client - it's a great way to start the week with a walk, a chat and a cup of tea."

Sally Bonser, Volunteer

Tips

- Encourage and support any existing local volunteer groups or consider helping the local community develop a program if none exists
- Develop links between animal welfare agencies, veterinarians, pet shops and volunteer groups

Web Links

Bow Meow - www.bowmeow.com.au