

Lonely pets fill laps in new scheme

by Rebecca Chave

It's not a great way to start the day – watching your dog's doleful eyes follow you as you head off to work, leaving them alone.

But it doesn't have to be like that now as local not for profit organisation Cuddles and Company is bringing lonely pets to empty laps for seniors and members of the community who want a pet but can no longer look after it full time.

Formed and founded by Mount Barker locals Chris and Ray Moore, the organisation is an offshoot of their small dog rescue charity, Hope Springs Eternal Dog Rescue.

"We started out running a small dog rescue and as a part of that we became aware that there were a number of senior people who live alone and would enjoy the company of a dog or cat," founder Chris Moore said.

"And there are many animals that would enjoy nothing more than sitting on someone's lap all day instead of waiting for their owners to come home.

"I thought there was an opportunity to bring the two together and create mutual benefits." Chris has been setting up the program for 12 months and is now hoping to create better social connections for elderly people.

"It will be really good for seniors who may not have family living nearby as it enables them to have somebody checking in on them regularly to see if they need to be referred to their support services."

Chris said the organisation works on an agreement run basis so an elderly person is able to choose how often or for long a dog can visit - whether it be every day, all day or just a few hours monthly.

"We match the two together and we give them a big or small dog depending on what they request."

"We will go and assess the dog to make sure it's right for everybody, including making sure the home



Katrina Boardman and Chris Moore with friends.
Photo by John Hemmings

is suitable for a cat or dog, the carer doesn't have a condition like dementia that will affect their ability to look after the dog, it won't be a tripping hazard for the carer and to make sure the dog is appropriate for the carer.

"Once the match is established it's anticipated that the dog owner and worker will drop off the dog on the way to work and then pick them up on their way home.

"This means that they can form a relationship with the person and see them regularly, for example if they are seeing 'Mabel' on a regular basis, they can comment on her condition and report to us if she's not looking so well so that we can immediately inform her family or support services."

There is countless research proving the physiological benefits of spending time and stroking a pet as they lower blood pressure, reduce stress and release the feel good hormone serotonin.

The benefits for the dog participating are also boundless.

"It's excellent because then you haven't got dogs sitting at home, lonely, crying, digging, barking and annoying the neighbours

because they appreciate the companionship," Chris said.

The Cuddles and Company organisation is looking to recruit dogs and their owners who think this program will suit them; especially retirement homes, lonely elderly seniors looking for a companion and people passionate about dogs who are willing to volunteer their time to become a care coordinator.

Care coordinators will help Chris organise matches between laps and pets and make sure all entering into the program are appropriately trained.

"Volunteers play an important role in the success of this program and Hope Springs will be delighted to hear from you if you have any time to share," Chris said.

"We're looking for people who are interested in all areas of participating, so care coordinators, pets and people who want to be visited."

For more information or to register to become part of the program visit www.hsedr.org.au/index.php/about-us/our-services/cuddles-co/ or contact Chris on 0408 188 040.