

MEDIA RELEASE

10 December 2008

A healing paw

Many people offer others a helping hand at Christmas, but the 600 Delta Society "Pet Partners" are doing that little bit more, offering a healing paw to the sick and elderly.

In Victoria there are around 130 Pet Partners, visiting institutions where they are needed, whether it is a nursing home where there are frail older people or a hospital with sick children.

"The way a child's face lights up when their Pet Partner comes to see them has to be seen to be believed. It gives them a moment of sheer enjoyment, in what is usually a very difficult time for them," says Dr Joanne Righetti, Chairman of the Delta Society.

"Ebony, my toy poodle, and I joined Delta over five years ago and for the last three years we have visited the children at the Monash Medical Centre. I'm not sure who enjoys the visits most, Ebony, the children or me," says Rosalynne, one of the volunteers with Pet Partners in Victoria.

"Parents often comment on how wonderful it is that we volunteer, but Ebony and I get so much from it and it is a privilege to be able to provide the happiness we do. The sight of a child curled up cuddling a small dog really is wonderful therapy for all concerned," says Rosalynne.

Dr Righetti says this is just one of the 300 or so institutions that are regularly visited by Pet Partners each year.

"Pet Partners visit children's and adult hospitals, mental health units, hospices, adult respite day care centres, rehabilitation units, schools and nursing homes. Increasingly we are seeing demand for specialist Pet Partners to work on a one on one basis with patients to achieve specific rehabilitation or treatment goals," says Gemma Farrar, Pet Partners' Melbourne Coordinator.

Gemma adds that the program is so popular that "demand far exceeds our ability to service all interested facilities. For anyone who may be interested in joining with their dog to become a Pet Partner team, we have our next assessment day planned for Sunday 22 February 2009."

"Of course, not every dog is suited to becoming a Pet Partner. We temperament test the dogs first, as it is critical that they will cope with a sometimes unpredictable environment. We also look for a strong level of trust between the dog and its owner," says Dr Righetti.

"Once the dogs and their owners have passed through this process, the owners attend a

training session and are matched with a facility in their area. Another experienced Pet Partner volunteer will go with the first timers and provide on-going support.

“Funding for the Pet Partners program comes from donations and sponsorship. If you are considering a gift for the person who has everything, a donation to the Delta Society of more than \$2.00 is fully tax deductible and guaranteed to bring a smile to the face of someone who may not have a lot else to smile about,” says Dr Righetti.

To donate to the Delta Society go to www.deltasocietyaustralia.com.au or call (02) 9231 3218. Information on becoming a volunteer with the Delta Society is also available on the site.

(ENDS)

Issued by the Petcare Information and Advisory Service

Media enquiries: Jill Hollingworth, 0419 508 597 or
jill_hollingworth@tangopr.com.au

Australia – A Nation of Pet Lovers

Australia is a nation of pet lovers. It is estimated that 63% of Australian households have some type of pet with 53% of households owning a dog or a cat.

Over many years, Australian and international research has shown that owning pets can help improve a person’s mental and physical health, reduce the effects of stress, help children learn about responsibility, facilitate social interaction between people and build a sense of community.

The Petcare Information & Advisory Service (PIAS) is funded by Mars Petcare Australia as part of its commitment to socially responsible pet ownership. PIAS’ websites: www.petnet.com.au and www.i-pet.com.au provide information on the responsible and enjoyable ownership of pets. The sites are suitable for children, although PIAS encourages parents to supervise any online access by their children.