

## OUR BONDS



*Money can buy you a fine dog, but only love can make him wag his tail.*

-- Kinky Friedman, musician

The RSPCA estimates 63% of Australian households have pets, equating to 4.2 million dogs and 3.3 million cats. Other pet types are included in the remaining 1.06 million. A further 1.1 million households planned to get a pet at the time of survey. It is therefore no surprise that animals have become part of our immediate families and considered integral family members.

Modern animals now celebrate events with birthday parties, personalised clothing, their own specially-prepared dishes, and even birthday cards sent on behalf of other animal friends. Most homes have a bed placed for their pets, among other modern conveniences of comfort and love.



*Animals are such agreeable friends - they ask no questions; they pass no criticisms.*

-- George Eliot, British author

It is no surprise then, that when an animal passes, or is ill, the family unit suffers. The University of Hawaii's Department of Animal Science reports that animal grief lasted six months or more in **30% of grieving families**. Pet owners feel the loss of their best friends, and their comfort gone. Some professionals have even suggested pet owners being allowed bereavement leave from work when a pet dies.

Gerry Smith, pet grief specialist says, "People have told me that they have found it much more difficult losing a pet than losing a family member who had a prolonged illness or had a good life, or perhaps they did not have such a good relationship with."

"But with a pet, once you get attached, it is something very, very special. It is very difficult to put it in words."



*If people could be as honest as animals, what a different world it would be.*  
-- Tippi Hedren, actress

## HOW ACAWS COUNSELLING CAN HELP

*Absent Companion and Adversity Wellbeing Services* are a free phone service to assist animal owners and care workers through their difficulties via short term counselling options. We are a confidential service, who honour Australian industry standards of treatment and interaction, our staff registered with the *Australian Counselling Association*. We help clients who:

- \* have a terminally ill pet
- \* have lost a pet recently, either because they are missing or passed on
- \* work as animal care workers
- \* have witnessed an animal crime or disaster

While we are only on-call four hours a day, we can arrange appointments at other times by request. To organise a time, please email us on [info@acaws.info](mailto:info@acaws.info), or call us on (08) 8121 5775. We offer a call-back service to rural and interstate callers.

**Our grief counselling** aims to help clients understand the context of their loss, accept the loss, find a new place in their heart for their loved one, and find ways to express their pain that honours the pet they lost. We help the client navigate through this difficult time. Counsellors offer reassurance and guidance, assisting in any problem-solving or decision-making.

**Families with terminally or very ill animals** are given support and tools to help cope. We understand that sometimes making final decisions on your pet's health can make you stop in your tracks. While helping build strength and resilience, we will help prepare the client for the big decisions that will inevitably come. We will offer coping tips, emotional support, help with the planning process, and speak about the changes that have occurred in life since the pet has become ill, looking at which factors support the situation, and which are causing issues.

**Our trauma care** works with people who have witnessed an accident involving an animal, are involved in animal rescue and need de-briefing, or people who are haunted by an animal attack. We understand that animals impact our lives greatly, sometimes for the worst as well as the good. Clients who have gone through such unfortunate experiences are given support while counsellors assist in helping clients express themselves wholly, reach acceptance, address nightmares, flashbacks or visions, assess for PTSD, review coping mechanisms, and focus on any key issues the client has.

**Families with recently missing animals** are also invited to call, as counsellors are able to assist you with dealing with the hopefully temporary loss, assist in ideas on how to find the pet, and work through the frustrations of waiting for news. A missing family member is a painful situation; our counsellors hope to help offer some relief.



*Animals have a much better attitude to life and death than we do. They know when their time has come. We are the ones that suffer when they pass, but it's a healing kind of grief that enables us to deal with other griefs that are not so easy to grab hold of.*

-- Emmylou Harris, musician

ACAWS also provides follow-up care, ensuring our clients remain on a positive path. Our primary focus is on our clients and their best interests.

## REFERRALS

Sometimes clients need further care, such as if they suffer grief with complications, or have a history of difficult adaption. In these cases, we provide the best care possible and may offer extended services. If a client requires more specialised care, we will refer to services more equipped to provide in-depth treatment. We are connected to a network of qualified, caring professionals.



*Dogs are better than human beings because they know but do not tell.*

-- Emily Dickinson, American poet

## MEMORY ROAD

Memory Road is a special place for our clients. To honour their lost ones, we will add their pet's photo and a description that gives the final thoughts of the family. We leave the messages up indefinitely, as that's how long their spirit will be on Rainbow Bridge. Due to the confidential nature of our services, we do not publish client's names, private details, or contact details.

To submit, email us at [info@acaws.info](mailto:info@acaws.info) with the subject line, Memory Road. Write the message you'd like added to the photo, such as:

*Gibley was a member of our family for 9 years. His favourite toy was an old boot he took from my son when he was 6. The boot survived his teeth, and became an item he just loved to carry around..Gibley Anders 2005 - January 5, 2014*

*Squeak, aptly named for his chatty nature, was the most amazing mouse we ever met. He used to run up and down the back of the sofa any time someone walked past, squeaking his jovial greetings. The Lamaze family miss their little climber.*

*Freddy, the neighbourhood tart, came to us from another household, when they stopped feeding him. He made a relationship with one of our cats, then bonded with the family for other necessities he needed. At first he was just a visitor, but soon became part of our family. He went missing years ago, and we still miss him. Although he didn't pass away with us, we know he probably did with another family.*

Images must be less than 500x500 pixels, as we only host small images. Please note: we do not accept attachments in email, so photos you want to use for the submission must be hosted elsewhere. If you have pictures of your animals on Twitter or Facebook, include the link of a photo. Alternatively, upload your image to tinypic.com, a free image host that is easy to use, and doesn't require you make an account.

Additionally, we offer a special area your family can add extra information about your pet. Want to write their life story? Go ahead. Want to share more images? You're welcome. Ask about the special page in email and send us the writing and photo links (photos have to be hosted elsewhere) and we'll construct the page for you. This service is free of charge and can be used to remember your pet fully. You can share the page with family, or share it with friends on social networking sites.

Bless you on your journey, and we look forward to assisting you. May you heal from your losses.

**ABSENT COMPANION AND ADVERSITY WELLBEING SERVICES**

Email: [info@acaws.info](mailto:info@acaws.info)

Phone: (08) 8121 5775

Call-back service for rural and interstate clients.

**acaws.info**

**Hours of operation: 9:30am to 9:30pm AEST,Sat-Thursday.**

**Immediate counselling hours: 9:30am - 11:30am; 7:30pm - 9:30pm Monday - Thursday.**

**CLOSED FRIDAYS.**