

NewsDecember 15, 2010 11:19 AM

Pets more trustworthy than people: Survey

By Neil Haesler, Postmedia



Canadian pet owners would rather deal with their furry friends than other people, according to a recent study by Harris/Decima.

Photograph by: Hyungwon Kang, Reuters

Canadian pet owners would rather deal with their furry friends than other people, according to a recent study by Harris/Decima.

The study revealed that 53 per cent of Canadians who own pets find them more reliable than people. Ninety per cent of Canadians talk to their pets and one-third have confided their deepest, darkest secrets to Fido or Milo or Hero.

According to the survey, conducted for Purina and its pet connection website, PawsWay.ca, pet owners look to their animals for all manner of interactions including using them as confidantes, matchmakers, personal trainers and possibly even therapists.

Shiri Joshua, a psychotherapist who specializes in animal-human relationships, agrees that pets are good friends for people.

"There are many reasons why people trust their pets, but what's really important is that we learn from their behaviour," Joshua said in a release Wednesday. "We can honour what they teach us by offering the same gifts to the people in our lives; namely, by being kinder as human beings towards one another."

Joshua said sharing our lives with a pet may make it easier for us to deal with the other people in our lives and those we come into contact with.

"Sharing a life with a companion animal actually acts as a catalyst for human-to-human interaction; by observation alone, it's quite obvious that people talk to one another, laugh and smile more if there is a pet involved," she said.

Pets have always been a social network of sorts. According to the survey, 61 per cent of pet owners say their neighbours talk to them more when they are with their pet, and about 41 per cent say their pets have helped them begin a new relationship with someone they might not have otherwise met.

Pet people seem to meet other pet people.

Animals have also been found to help people deal with illness, Joshua said.

"I once spoke with a woman who was quite depressed before she adopted her puppy," Joshua said. "Her dog helped her open up to the world and she met her husband shortly after. She says if it wasn't for her pet, she never would have learned how to trust others and build strong relationships. Her pet helped her connect with people."

"Companion animals are very sensitive to their owner's emotions and energy because they share their space," said Joshua. "They are able to sense when things are not right and respond accordingly. They often pick up on our moods and even physical illness before we are aware of it ourselves."

This might go toward explaining why 61 per cent of survey respondents said their pets deal with them differently when they are sick. Pet owners said their animals helped lift their spirits.

The feelings are mutual it seems. Thirty per cent of pet owners said, if permitted, they would bring their animals to work because they don't like to think of them home alone all day long.

According to Statistics Canada, about half of all households in the country have at least one pet. The average expenditure on pets in Canada, according to the government agency's 2008 data, is about \$439 a year.

"Pets are powerful. Research shows us that the bond we share with them spills over into other areas of our lives and greatly enhances our connections with people," said Karen Kuwahara, president at Nestle Purina PetCare Canada.

The poll was conducted between Nov. 11 and Nov. 14. It surveyed 1,014 adult Canadians, of which 781 own or have owned a cat or dog. The margin of error for this subgroup was plus or minus 3.5 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

Harris/Decima pet survey facts:

- 73 per cent believe pets can sniff out illness.
- Women more likely to confide in pets (33 per cent) than men (18 per cent).

- 44 per cent would bring their pets to a hotel if allowed.
- 86 per cent believe pets can help lift a bad mood.
- 82 per cent of retirees (65 plus) feel less alone in their home because of pets.
- 67 per cent believe their pets help to keep them active.

Breeds:

The Canadian Cat Breeders Association lists breeds including: Manx, American shorthair, Himalayan and Persian.

<http://www.cca-afc.com/classified/index.php?>

The Canadian Kennel Club lists dog breeds including: Chesapeake Bay retriever, Irish setter, Newfoundland, border collie.

<http://www.ckc.ca/en/>

© Copyright (c) Postmedia News