# Psychology at La Trobe

## Anthrozoology Research

### Associate Professor Pauleen Bennett

My name’s Pauleen Bennett, I’m an Associate Professor in the School of Psychological Science at La Trobe Uni based at Bendigo and this is Eddie, my dog.

So the area that I work in is called Anthrozoology and all that really means is “human-animal”, so “anthro” means human, “zoo” means animal, so I study how animals and humans get on, and I’m interested in it both from the welfare of the people but also from the animal welfare side of things, so how our relationships with animals can make life better for them and for us.

What I want to do is look at why pets are useful for us, how it all works, how they plug into our brains in the wonderful way that they do and have such huge effect. So we know they can help people relax, their blood pressure goes down. There’s some interesting ideas around stroking a cat can help with chronic pain relief. People who have had a heart attack survive better if they own a pet than if they don’t. People who are depressed get out of bed in the morning if they’ve got a dog to feed or a cat to feed. Kids read better if they read to a dog, you know if you take a dog into a school, children will read to the dog and improve their reading.

We’ve done a bit of research looking at using dogs with children with autism and how they can be helped by dogs. We also did a project looking at why really successful people own pets because we think, some of the theory around human-animal relations is that people who own pets are a little bit socially deficient, and we don’t think that’s true, because it turns out that lots of very successful people own pets and we wondered why that was, so we looked at that as well.

I guess a lot of my research is about fitting people and animals together, so different people, different lifestyles should probably own different pets. Not everybody can own a big strong dog, not everybody can own a cat, not everybody can own a parrot because they live forever and they take a lot of care.

So part of what I do is education of the community about what would be an appropriate animal for them but also I think the other side of that is people who are breeding animals, training animals, socialising those animals need to get better at doing it so that those animals are as equipped as they possibly can be for living in the environment that we’ve created for them.

There’s lot and lots and lots of issues in the human-animal relationship field that need research. I’m only one person and I can’t make a huge difference but if I can change the lives of 20 or 30 or 40 students, then they can change the world and that is the biggest buzz ever.