Abstract - De Rosa

When you’re not welcome: The not so ‘forever’ home

The place of pets in modern society has changed over the years. Pets have moved from the kennel to the couch, given individual names and considered to be ‘family’.

However, this situation can easily change. When pet owners relocate to other housing types such as a residential aged care home, private rental, or retirement village, they are often met with exclusionary pet or NO pet policies (or specific pets only). In Australia, only 18% of residential aged care homes consider allowing older people to move in with their pets (AWLA, 2018).

At this juncture in their life, many older people are forced to decide whether to have a bed/place in the new ‘home’ or give up their pet. Forced separation can have severe implications for both the pet and owner. Pets are removed from their familiar home, life, and owner and either taken to an animal shelter, rehomed or euthanised.

In Australia, ‘pet’ policy (exclusion or inclusion) is left to the aged care providers, and this is highly discretionary. Although some aged care homes use the term ‘pet friendly’ what does this really mean? What does it mean for the pet?

Animal experiences are often overlooked in scholarship and practice, and there is a need to place greater importance on the animal side of ‘pet-friendly’ to address this oversight if we are to understand human-animal relations in multispecies spaces.

To get a glimpse into the animal side of human-animal relations in residential aged care spaces, research methods will have to move beyond surveys or interviews!

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