



HAPPY DAYS: Research shows that children and teenagers who own pets have a more positive outlook on life.

PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

Pets bring pawstivity

The unconditional love and affection of our animals can make such a difference



SCHOOL OF THOUGHT
DR ALI BLACK
UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST

AS A family we had a pretty tough 2015. At the end of that year we felt like we had been through the ringer.

We felt we needed a lift, a distraction. Someone suggested a pet. Soon after, we welcomed Wally, a gorgeous burmese kitten into our lives. And what a difference he has made. He happens to fit into our lives beautifully – a little bit crazy, super affectionate, and full of personality.

My husband pretends he only tolerates him, but I see the affection and care between them. My daughter and I are completely smitten with Wally, and the phrase “he’s so cute” is never far from our lips.

I read an article this week by Dr Tim Sharp, whose moniker is Dr Happy (see www.drhappy.com.au/). Tim is widely re-

garded as a leader in mental health and an authority on all things happiness in Australia.

Tim’s article focuses on how having a pet can boost your happiness and well-being.

It made me reflect on the joy that Wally has brought to our family. It made me thankful for what our more-than-just-a-pet has given to us.

Before reading any research to understand the benefits, we have been aware that with Wally in our lives we have engaged in daily smiling and happiness.

Our experience mirrors those benefits explored in Dr Happy’s article.

Wally has provided us with a wonderful and positive distraction from life’s challenges. He focuses us on the present moment, grounding us, taking our minds off worries and sadness.

He offers us unconditional love and affection, along with a few playful nips and bites. Having him cuddle up near us makes us feel good, and supports a positive outlook about our lives.

Dr Happy outlines that just the physical contact and patting of pets benefits our phys-

ical and psychological well-being.

Patting Wally and experiencing his purr lowers our stress and connects us to feelings of contentment and comfort. (And there is more research out there that talks about connections between cats’ purring and healing; and that people with cats live longer than people without cats).

Pets help us engage in positive relationships and with feelings of connectedness. They boost positive emotions such as happiness.

Research shows that children and teenagers who own pets have a more positive outlook on life and report less loneliness, restlessness, despair and boredom.

Wally is a wonderful companion for my daughter and he provides her with so much love and affection.

He just wants to be around her, to love her and be loved by her. He puts up with quite a lot, dress ups, dancing, photo shoots, and interesting holding techniques.

Wally has brought a sense of playfulness and fun into our



AFFECTION: Bella and Wally the burmese cat. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

family. For a cat he is pretty silly and he brings out the silly in us. We play more, dance more, and laugh more.

He is a constant topic of conversation and we find ourselves sharing ongoing anecdotes about his antics, cuteness and quirkiness. (Perhaps my husband’s sharing is a little less enthusiastic). But there is no doubt that with his presence in our lives, Wally has added positivity to each and every day.

Dr Happy sums it up beautifully: “Flourishing and thriving in life require having a sense of

meaning and purpose, being reasonably healthy physically, feeling connected to others and having fun.

“On the other hand, a few of the more significant contributors to mental ill-health are being sick and tired, and feeling lonely and isolated. Interestingly, owning a pet can address all these issues in a positive way.”

So, if your child is nagging and pleading for a pet, I can wholeheartedly recommend it.

And the research says you should go for it!