

# Canine custodianship a tail of dog's best friend

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JENNY Brearley never could stand putting her best friend, Rhodesian ridgeback Sophie, into a kennel when she went on holiday. She wanted Sophie to have the cuddles and attention she enjoyed at home.

So she threw in her job of 18 years as a computer programmer and started a one-woman dog-minding business.

It tapped into a rich vein of dog lovers consumed with guilt whenever they left their pets behind.

Now, two years later, Ms Brearley has built up a business that turns over more than \$100,000 a year and employs an army of about 150 people, like Sydney retiree Ann Lewis, who take the dogs into their homes as one of the family while their owners enjoy guilt-free holidays.

"People have said things like they haven't been able to have a holiday for years because they wouldn't leave their dogs in a kennel," said Ms Brearley, 42, whose business is appropriately called Don't Fret Pet.

She said most of her minders were retirees who appreciated the companionship, but also liked being able to earn a bit of money at the same time.

Among their more unusual clients was the chihuahua that drank a cup of tea whenever the minder had one and a couple who were determined their dog attend their wedding so they hired



Happy home: Mrs Lewis with guest

a minder to look after it in the church and on the wedding night.

While Don't Fret Pet only operates in Sydney, Ms Brearley plans to expand her business nationally.

An avowed dog-lover, Mrs Lewis enjoys the freedom of having a pet when it suits her with all the added benefits an animal brings.

"I don't think a house is a home without a dog," says Mrs Lewis, who has minded 15 dogs on 35 occasions in the past two years.

The cost of the peace of mind is \$20 a night for the first dog and \$10 a night for each extra dog. This compares quite favourably with kennels, which usually charge between \$10 and \$20 a night, depending on the size of the dog.