



**NEWS RELEASE: Embargoed until 00.01 Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

## **EVERYBODY NEEDS GOOD NEIGHBOURS AND DOGS ARE A BIG HELP**

- We are **55 per cent more likely to start a conversation** with someone if they have a dog and **75 per cent** of us say having a dog reduces **feelings of loneliness**
- New research shows more than **half (52%)** say that having a dog **improves relationships** in the community
- Dog owners have **three friends** originating directly from having their pet
- More than **7 million neighbours** and around **1million dogs** took part in **The Big Lunch in 2015 and this year, on Sunday 12th June, there are likely to be even more**

Having a dog makes you twice as approachable, new research by **The Big Lunch** reveals.

A study of 2,000 people looked at the positive social impacts of owning a dog compared with not having one.

Results found people are **55 per cent more likely to start a conversation with someone if they have a dog.**

While the average dog owner has **six chats** a week - **312 a year**, with people in the community, as a result of their canine companion.

Results showed dogs make you more approachable than children it seems - with people **30 per cent more likely to start a conversation** with someone with a dog than someone with children.

The research was commissioned by **The Big Lunch, a one-day get-together on Sunday June 12** for neighbours, and looked at the effect having a dog has on making new friends in the community.

Results showed the typical dog owner has at **least three friends** that originated directly from them having their pet.

The results make a valuable argument for the impact owning a dog can have on a person's social interactions – **(75%) say having a dog reduces feelings of loneliness** and more than **half (52%) say that having a dog improves relationships** in the community.

The results emerge in conjunction with photos taken as London Big Lunchers gathered at Tanner Street Park, Bermondsey, with their dogs for a little dog training session to prepare for the big day.

The study also reveals that people think that getting a dog is one of the best ways to make friends with neighbours. Other top recommendations include volunteering in your community,

joining a club or group, such as an organising committee on your street to make plans for a Big Lunch.

**Oxford University Professor of Psychology, Robin Dunbar**, who worked with The Big Lunch as part of the campaign, said yesterday:

“Research has shown that owning a dog is a good way of combatting loneliness, both because of the company that such a pet can provide, but also because of the way that other people react to dogs and their owners.

“The majority of people (52%) said that having a dog improves relationships in your community, and 71 per cent said that people out on the street are more likely to stop and talk to you if you are walking a dog. This is because when we see someone with a friendly animal, we feel safe with them and feel that they will be happy for us to stop and talk.”

And sometimes the dogs are even more memorable than the owners - **four in ten Brits know the names of certain dogs but do not know their owners by name**, results showed.

**Peter Stewart of The Big Lunch added:** “While two thirds of us have never shared a meal with our neighbours, we are more likely to strike up conversation with those with dogs. Hosting or joining a Big Lunch on June 12<sup>th</sup> is a great way to make new friends, share stories, to have fun, whether you have a canine friend or not – it offers a simple way to make lasting relationships and most Big Lunches are also dog-friendly.”

More than **87% per cent of all Big Lunch attendees met new people** at last years event and **58% met several new people** or families<sup>1</sup>. What’s more **82%** have kept in touch with new people they met since their last Big Lunch and **65% have taken part in other community activities** with the people that they met, since The Big Lunch<sup>2</sup>.

Research reveals the top recommendations to making friends with your neighbours:

1. Volunteering in the community
2. Joining a club or group
3. Getting a dog
4. Joining or hosting a Big Lunch
5. Inviting neighbours to lunch

For more information please contact [thebiglunch@wildcard.co.uk](mailto:thebiglunch@wildcard.co.uk)/ 020 7257 6470

## Notes to editors

### About the research

OnePoll research commissioned amongst 2,000 UK adults by The Big Lunch May 2016

### About The Big Lunch

- The Big Lunch ([www.thebiglunch.com](http://www.thebiglunch.com)) is the UK’s annual get-together for neighbours, an idea from the Eden Project made possible by the Big Lottery Fund.
- The Eden Project started The Big Lunch in 2009 with the belief that we’re better equipped to tackle the challenges we

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Big Lunch Organiser Survey Base: All Big Lunch Attendees/2015

<sup>2</sup> Source: Big Lunch Organiser Survey Base: All Big Lunch Attendees/2015

face when we face them together.

- Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cornwall is Patron of The Big Lunch.
- Bringing communities together, reducing loneliness and isolation and helping to make a difference locally is at the heart of the Big Lottery Fund's mission.
- The Big Lunch is the perfect recipe for having fun with neighbours, feeding community spirit and helping to build stronger neighbourhoods. People are the key ingredient, with those taking part creating friendlier communities in which they start to share more – from conversation and ideas to skills and resources.
- This year there is more reason than ever to get involved and join the fun, as the annual event will take place on Sunday June 12 2016, the same day as Her Majesty The Queen's 90th birthday celebrations
- Over the past seven years, Big Lunches of all sizes have happened in all kinds of communities – in streets, back gardens, parks and local community venues. Thousands of events have taken place each year, with a whopping 7.29 million people taking part in 2015.
- It is never too late to take part in The Big Lunch. Anyone can request a free planning pack, which contains invitations

#### **About Professor Robin Dunbar**

Professor Robin Dunbar is a British anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist and a specialist in primate and human behaviour. He is currently head of the Social and Evolutionary Neuroscience Research Group in the Department of Experimental Psychology at the University of Oxford. He is best known for formulating Dunbar's number, a measurement of the "cognitive limit to the number of individuals with whom any one person can maintain stable relationships"

#### **About Peter Stewart MVO**

Peter is an Executive Director and has responsibility for Eden's charitable mission. This role includes responsibility for Eden's biggest educational outreach campaign, The Big Lunch. Peter was appointed to the main Eden Board in March 2012. In the same year he was also awarded an MVO by HM The Queen for his work on the Diamond Jubilee, as The Big Lunch played a major part in the celebrations.