



Dog lover Jenny Pratt, of Cammeray, introduces her dog Sophie, right, to a new house guest.

Photograph by ELIZABETH DOBBIE

New service offers pets a home away from home

By JO ARBLASTER

Jenny Pratt loves dogs so much that when she has to go away and leave her Rhodesian ridgeback, Sophie, she pines.

"I put her in kennels for one night and I fretted," admitted Ms Pratt, of Cammeray.

Realising other people might also hate going away if it meant putting their pet in kennels, Ms Pratt decided on an alternative.

Her Don't Fret Pet! business offers foster homes for animals while their owners are away.

Animals are placed with loving minders carefully vetted by Ms Pratt. Dog owners are also carefully checked.

"I ask them all sorts of questions like [if the dog is] male, female, de-sexed, intact, whether they are an inside dog or an outside dog, where they would

need to sleep, what type of dog it is and whether or not they are an escapologist and how often it needs to be walked," she said.

From the information gleaned from owners, Ms Pratt is able to match dogs with prospective minders. "I try and get a match as close as possible to being at home," she said.

Occasionally minders and their charges do not work out and Ms Pratt is there to organise an alternative home or take the animal in herself.

When one minder rang with a problem, her heart sank but she needn't have worried: the minder was worried the dog might not want to go home because it was having such a good time.

Minders live from North Sydney to Wahroonga and Newport. Ms Pratt checks each home personally, as well as the pets who

live there permanently. It is imperative that the carers are true dog lovers.

One woman failed the test because Ms Pratt felt that although she would have cared for the pets, "she wasn't absolutely potty about them".

Pets need more than food and a place to sleep. Walks and cuddles rank highly on her list of doggie necessities.

About 85 per cent of minders have animals of their own, so why do they take in strange dogs?

"Sometimes it's so their animal can have company . . . and they themselves don't like putting their pets in kennels, so they like to help other people so they don't have to," Ms Pratt said.

The minder, owner and Ms Pratt enter into an agreement to take all care but accept no responsibility.