

# Homesitters in demand

**Y**ou won't hear Lisa McFarlane tell tales of easing overfed cats through catflaps with a spatula or encouraging a particularly adventurous goat to come down from the top of the water tank, but that's because maintaining the privacy of her clients is "one of the most important aspects of this business".

McFarlane, of Town & Country Homesit Ltd, has neatly answered the question of how your home and animals will survive when you're not there.

Undoubtedly one of the great attractions of having a lifestyle block is the feeling that you're trading in the hustle and bustle of city and suburban life and getting away from it all. So far, so good. Until of course it's you who needs to get away.

Boarding a cat or dog is reasonably simple. Boarding two dogs, three cats, nine goldfish, one llama, two goats and a pet lamb which has grown into an assertive 60kg ball of fluff can be a little more problematic.

"Around 95 per cent of our clients have pets that need feeding, watering and company while they're away," says McFarlane, "and when you've got more than one or two of them and live in a relatively remote area, then asking the neighbours to pop in once or twice a day can be a bit much."

In its five years of operation Town & Country Homesit has placed hundreds of homesitters in both city and rural areas.

"All our sitters are thoroughly screened and police checked," says McFarlane. "They range from people who have just sold a property and are waiting to build to those who have shifted from another part of the country or returned from overseas."

"When you put someone into a client's home you're putting them in a huge position of responsibility and trust," says McFarlane. "We only use people we have checked out very carefully." The average age of

sitters is 45 and they have worked in various roles from nursing to farming.

"All of them, of course, must like and be familiar and confident with animals, have an enormous amount of common sense and be reliable and responsible," says McFarlane. "Country sitters will generally have rural backgrounds and able to handle the day-to-day basics of farm life."

Based in Christchurch, Town & Country Homesit services Christchurch City and surrounding areas.

"We specialise in city properties and lifestyle blocks," says McFarlane, "but we can also service larger farms if suitable sitters are available."

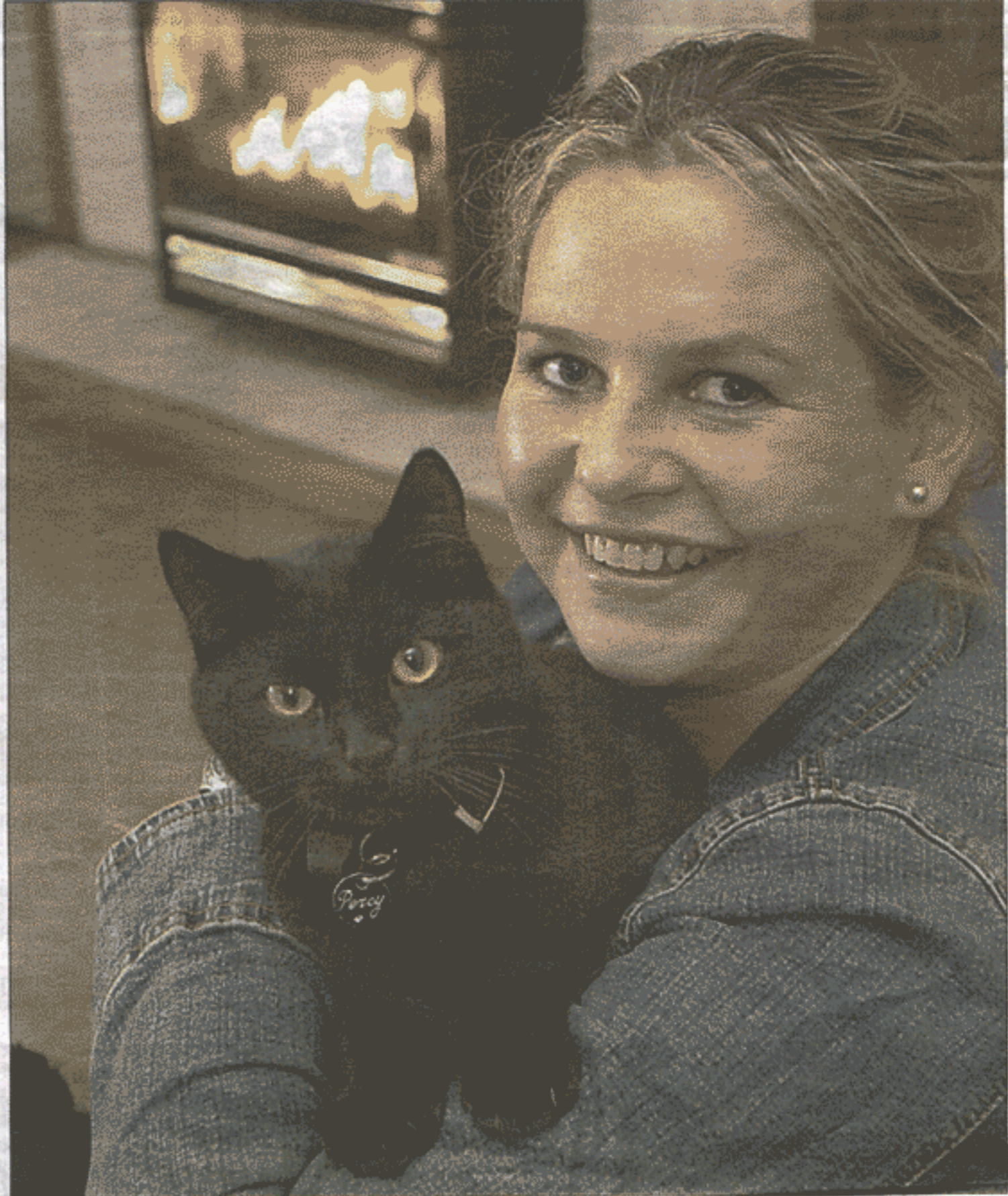
The length of an average homesit ranges from one to six weeks and Town & Country Homesit will negotiate a total, rather than daily, rate for homesits at the longer end of the scale.

McFarlane started the business with her mother, Helen, after returning from London, where she spent five years in the recruitment industry.

Their first housesitter was placed in May 2000 and word-of-mouth referrals have ensured a steadily increasing demand for the service ever since.

"I meet clients at their home to assess what type of sitter would be best suited to them and their animals," says McFarlane, "and then the sitter and client meet to go over what is required and ensure everyone is clear about what needs to be done. It's a good time to check a sitter's compatibility with the animals they'll be responsible for, too."

Maintaining a normal daily routine for animals, including any special exercise or medication, is one of the great attractions of having a homesitter. Other advantages include a presence on the property to deter would-be burglars, having your mail collected, plants watered, irrigation turned on and off and



attending to any emergencies that may crop up while you're away.

"It's difficult to relax on the beach in Fiji if you're constantly worrying about how your pets are doing in a boarding facility or if a waterpipe has decided to burst and flood the bedroom," says McFarlane. "With someone actually in your house when you're not, you can relax knowing that someone else is spoiling your pets and taking care of anything that may crop up."

Town & Country Homesit works alongside veterinarians, the Crime Prevention Squad, SPCA and other professional and

animal agencies but the service doesn't stop there.

"We also have a Personal Organiser service," says McFarlane, "from getting the groceries in to event management."

So whether you have a cat which needs to be lovingly eased through its cat door for its morning constitutional or someone to organise tradespeople, Town & Country Homesit probably has just the person for the job.

Visit its website [www.townandcountryhomesit.co.nz](http://www.townandcountryhomesit.co.nz) to see just how easy it is for someone to keep everything on track when you can't.

**Fur-ever loved:** Percy takes a break from his mouse-work in the arms of Lisa McFarlane of Town & Country Homesit.