They May Be Just Acquaintances. They’re Important to You Anyway.

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Victoria Tirondola and Lam Gong first struck up a conversation last spring at the dog run in Brookdale Park in Bloomfield, N.J., when they realized that each owned a dog named Abby. Ms. Tirondola, 65, an insurance sales representative who lives in nearby Cedar Grove, has a tiny bichon-poodle mix. Mr. Gong’s Abby, older and portlier, is a terrier-beagle.

They chatted about dogs at first. Then they learned that they both cooked, so “we talked about food and restaurants,” said Mr. Gong, 67, a retiree living in Clifton.

“And how much better my cooking is than his,” put in Ms. Tirondola. They were sitting on a bench, as the dogs dashed around on a warm spring afternoon, with a third member of a growing collection of regulars: Pattie Marsh, dog walker for a miniature Australian shepherd named Ollie.

“All of us live alone,” Ms. Tirondola said. “My mom just passed away in July, and we were very close. Lam lost his wife a few years ago.”

“It gives us companionship” to meet at the Bark Park, said Ms. Marsh, 55. She and Ms. Tirondola, who bonded as born-again Christians, come daily. Mr. Gong joins them once or twice a week. So does Lee Geanoules, 69, a part-time restaurant server from Clifton, who soon arrived with Charlie, a pug and beagle blend.

Psychologists and sociologists call these sorts of connections “weak ties” or “peripheral ties,” in contrast to close ties to family members and intimate friends. Some researchers investigating weak ties include in that category classmates, co-workers, neighbors and fellow religious congregants. Others look into interactions with near-strangers at coffee shops or on transit routes.

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