

Gold Coast program delivers exercise, information and social interaction

Benefits of using existing programs, parks and utilities

- Creates social activity in underused open spaces
- Creates opportunity for education in socially responsible dog ownership
- Assists in achieving broader council goals and targets
- Connects community and builds new networking bridges

Councils around Australia are experiencing new challenges with public open spaces. In the past, planning for open space was much simpler, with parks addressing needs at basic levels either passively (parks and playgrounds) or actively (sports ovals). Increasingly, Councils are recognising the need to prepare open space strategies that cater to the whole of their municipality while targeting community issues.³⁹

Prior to the “Just Walk Me” program launch in 2007, certain Gold Coast City open spaces were experiencing community underutilisation and dog ownership issues.

The Gold Coast City Council successfully addressed both with a number of programs under the umbrella of ‘Active and Healthy’, one of them being the highly popular “Just Walk Me” campaign.

“Just Walk Me” is held in open spaces where owners have an opportunity to learn how to become more socially responsible pet owners while enjoying physical exercise. Animal Management Team Leader Alf Mikelat now finds the community turning up in droves to exercise their dogs, seek friendly guidance and make friends with neighbours.

“It’s an opportunity to demonstrate to people what normal dog behaviour actually is so that owners can enjoy the benefits of dog ownership while meeting new people” Alf Mikelat, Gold Coast City Council

Flyers promoting the program are sent to dog owners living in areas that experience more than their share of complaints. This effectively brings people together while lending support through free dog training seminars.



As with all new projects, however, the team has had to iron out a few bugs.

“The first time we parked the dog truck in the middle of the park and hopped out in our AMO uniforms. Everyone took off, thinking we were there to bust them for something! We learnt that lesson quickly,” Alf laughs. “We changed our shirts to a friendly green, stuck up some signage and painted up the truck. It wasn’t long before word of mouth got around.”

The Sunday mornings now attract more than 70 people and dogs. “Experience has taught me that the average person can feel confused with the kind of language used in Local Government,” says Alf. “It can be overwhelming to people who are after a simple answer on how they can spend more time enjoying their dogs.”

The program so far has been a success, with a plateauing of animal complaints being just one of the benefits.

“If we can fix just one complaint, then I reckon we’ve done our job. I’m really stoked at how well the program’s gone. It’s not only been dead easy to run, but dead cheap too!” Alf Mikelat

Tips

- Wear shirts in “friendly colours”, green or yellow, and embroider with your own program logo
- Set up lots of signage in the area advertising the event
- Link to an existing health program that’s running in your Council. In doing so, you can get assistance with signage and promotion

Web Links

Gold Coast City Council - www.goldcoast.qld.gov.au