

Typing in the community

free baby crying CD - download from web site.

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In March 2008, Caboolture Shire Council, Redcliffe City Council and Pine Rivers Shire Council amalgamated to create Moreton Bay Regional Council (MBRC). MBRC, covering 2,011 square kilometers with a population of 360,000 is represented by a Mayor and 12 Divisional Councillors. There are approximately 65,500 children enrolled at schools from prep to grade 12 across the region and approximately 70,000 registered dogs and 10,000 registered cats.

The Environment and Local Laws Division, Community Response Unit is responsible for all Local Law related matters, including Animal Management, Regulated Parking and Local Government Controlled Areas/Reserves. This is supported by a workable mission statement -

"Enhancing community lifestyle and enjoyment of the Moreton Bay region through innovation, education and promotion of Council local laws".

Despite the best attempts of the animal management officers, enforcement programs fight an uphill battle where efforts to re-enforce responsible companion animal ownership messages and in turn, behaviour change, fail. To face this challenge, Moreton Bay Regional Council has set out on a number of novel paths to both inform its community of the needs and requirements of their animals and to help them achieve a better understanding of their pets, the community's needs and positive behaviour change.

This paper details the innovations and initiatives that have been a positive outcome for both the council and the community and provides detail on how these initiatives can be implemented at a Local Government Level anywhere in the country.

1. PETSMAST PROGRAM

MBRC considers the PetSmart Program a very important component of its Animal Management program. A key component of the program targets students. The community benefits are widely spread as students learning about animal behaviour and safe interaction at school take information home to share with their families and friends. Knowledge and awareness of safe and responsible companion animal ownership in all age groups is a vital step in achieving a safe and amenable community and the prevention and reduction of attacks.

Pets can provide children with an understanding of mutual respect, unconditional love and trust however, bad experiences can leave long standing physical and emotional scars. During 2009 MBRC had just over 1000 reported dog attacks (includes menacing) and anecdotal evidence suggests there may be nearly this many that go unreported each year.

The long-term goal of Petsmart, through education and awareness, is to encourage the community to be safe and responsible pet owners and to respect all animals.

This essential education package, which is benefiting over 1000 children each month, is designed to reduce the number of bite injuries received by children. Increasing safe interaction with dogs and knowledge of animal behaviour, the program currently consists of Day Care and Kindergarten visits, Library Story Time and sessions to suit Prep to year 12. The main focus is teaching kids of all ages to be safe around dogs through the following 5 key points:

1. *Hide Your Sausages (fingers)*
2. *Stand Tall*
3. *Look Down*
4. *Freeze*
5. *Respect*

Each visit covers responsible pet ownership, Local Laws and dog safety

August to December 2007	7,000 children visited
January to December 2008	16,000 children visited
January to December 2009	18,000 children visited
January to September 2010	10,000 children visited

This Program involves a Story Book, which aims to reinforce the message through reading, a DVD, activity book and teachers webpage on Council's website. Mascots were created to be used throughout the learning tools - our mascots are Cooper with his pooper scooper and Marmaduke the marmalade Moggy. During 2009 MBRC created a song about PetSmart so children could learn a fun way to retain the important dog message through movement and music.

Link to Teachers page - this is currently under development
<http://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmart-teachers>

PetSmart Website link
www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmart

Dog Safety Month

Statistics compiled across the region indicate that dog attacks occur mostly in the months of June and July. In response to this, "Dog Safety Month" aims to decrease the attacks during the mid year school break through public awareness campaigns.

An education program that combines and reinforces the messages delivered to schools and community groups effectively increases awareness and provides key pointers towards reducing attacks during the highest attack months. Often simple steps including continuing to walk dogs during the winter months and desexing to reduce roaming dogs seeking out mates can show great results with little effort.

A new program is also currently being trailed - Code name "Dob-in-a-dog" is targeted at schools. Teachers have access to a new online form that can be completed if the children walk or ride past an angry dog that scares them.

This form is sent to the Education Officer who then discusses with the Animal investigation team for subsequent investigation.

Link to "Dob-in-a-dog" form:

<http://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmart-teachers>

Community Information Evenings

Community Information Evenings are a great way for dog owning residents to meet, discuss and gain free advice regarding their pets. Residents have commented on how they feel more at ease discussing (and resolving) dog problems when they know that support is available through a team approach. This promotes shared responsibility within the community. These informal gatherings are a great place for trained officers to provide assistance with some training ideas and advice to help residents manage problems they may face with their dogs. These sessions are free and regularly target community issues such as barking.

This program shows commitment to assisting community members in managing their pets. By taking a team approach, MBRC is encouraging residents to be informed and responsible.

Please visit the website to view our barking pack:

<http://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/uploadedFiles/moretonbay/living/Animals/Dogs-Barking-Info-Pack.pdf>

Family Pet Fair is a great vehicle for promoting the various programs and initiatives that MBRC provides for its community. This is a great opportunity for the community to attend a fun yet informative free event, attracting over 8000 people. The Family Pet Fair gives access to a wide range of information regarding pet ownership and is a great forum for links between MBRC and the community.

2. ANTE NATAL PROGRAM

Preparing for the arrival of a new baby is a very special time in life but preparing pets for this change can be daunting. A new baby can be stressful for the pet and high levels of stress can lead to bad behaviour. The aim is to reduce attacks and accidents and create a mutually safe environment for newborns and pets.

This program greatly benefits the community by teaching new families how to adjust the balance in their homes with newborns and pets. It prevents situations where pets are no longer wanted for the wrong reasons as well as reducing accidents and attacks. Targeting this group increases pet education awareness and in turn assists in decreasing confusion that often ends up in an attack or surrendering.

Educating new parents how to prepare their dog and cat for the new arrival is important as it assists new parents to identify any dog problems before arise and to understand what the dog is thinking. A well behaved dog creates a calmer home environment.

The development of a stand alone ante-natal program including DVD and crying CD has been created and approx 200 expectant couples attend sessions monthly.

The creation of an Antenatal CD containing a brief presentation of preparation tips followed by half an hour of baby crying sounds to familiarise pets has been produced and is available as a free download on the website.

The aim of the ante-natal classes is to educate the new and expecting parents on pet ownership and basic behaviour. Topics discussed include pack structure, basic dog manners, preparing the pet, introducing the baby, walking with the pram, worming, senior pets, cats, do's & don'ts, some tips and encourage lots of fun. The most important message that is given is about never leaving any child or baby unattended - no matter how much you trust the dog.

Website and Crying CD Link:

<http://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/living.aspx?id=32661>

3. EDUCATION K9

Our 'Education K9' assists with school visits and provides an excellent opportunity for children to interact and build confidence with an animal and reinforces the lessons learned. The Education Officer is responsible for training the 'Education K9'. Workplace Health and Safety assessments are conducted regularly.

"Bella" the Rottweiler, retired at aged 7 had visited over 7,000 children.

"Smash" - 3 year old pup was rescued from the Caboolture Pound as a 7 week old. He has now visited over 44,000 children across MBRC. With 'Smash's' assistance the lessons taught can be practically reinforced by allowing interaction with a live and responsive animal.

4. MICROCHIPPING PROGRAM

Compulsory microchipping for both dogs and cats came into effect throughout MBRC as of 1st July 2009. Educating the community on the benefits of compulsory microchipping has assisted in this process. Compulsory microchipping benefits the community by enabling Council to effectively contact animal owners quickly and easily. In turn the number of strays is reduced, and unwanted litters and reuniting owners and pets efficiently through identification.

K9 Clubhouse was designed to assist dog owners in seeking advice and ideas for problems they face and to encourage the use of Off Leash Council Parks. During 2009 MBRC held K9 Clubhouse activities at different locations on the first Sunday of every month. Residents are invited to attend with their dogs to gather free information and win prizes for a range of activities including dog obedience. MBRC also offers residents discount microchipping for \$10 at these days. As the program developed and community popularity grew the other activities were over taken by microchipping demands - during 2009, MBRC microchipped over 2500 pets at community days.

Cat Microchipping Days specifically targeting cat owners are a relaxed, dog free and inexpensive way of giving permanent identification to their cats. At these sessions, responsible animal ownership (including de-sexing and roaming issues) are discussed with owners. A reduction in the number of stray cats benefits the community by removing the nuisance factor.

Cat Snip and Chip Weeks (key message "Cats Have Value") benefit the community by offering discounted services, which reduce unwanted feline pregnancies and make identification easy if a resident's cat is lost. This, in turn, leads to changes in breeding patterns and reduces the numbers of strays. Snip and Chip Weeks have been designed to assist the community with desexing and microchipping.

This program has State Government funding – MBRC was provided \$86,000 to work in conjunction with RSPCA EMU (education mobile unit) and PAWS (mobile desexing unit) for the purpose of promoting and supporting Snip and Chip Weeks. The aim of the pilot program is to reduce the number of unwanted cats and dogs euthanised through Council pounds each year.

Target areas for the “snip and chip” clinics were selected based on cat impounding and release figures from across MBRC. Targeted areas for 2009 were Deception Bay, Wamuran, Kallangur, Bribie Island and areas for 2010 include Morayfield, Rothwell, Bray Park, Arana Hills, Beachmere and Caboolture.

To enhance the program MBRC sought support from vets in our region. Thirty of the thirty-three clinics in the region have offered support by supplying attendees an in house special and follow up care e.g. suture removal. It was determined that 92% of cats attending the snip and chip have never visited a vet. This new avenue gives the local veterinary practices an opportunity to initiate new client contact with the follow-up services they are providing for the cats desexed in our program (i.e. suture removal after 10 days).

Pilot Program: 2009 / 2010

- \$10 snip and chip program – 890 cats
- \$10 pet microchipping – 4000 pets
- New registrations at PETSMAST events – 1,500
- Children visited with PETSMAST program – 18,000

CONCLUSION

Education and promotion plays a vital role in aligning the goals of MBRC and the successful future of the Moreton Bay community. Education is knowledge and knowledge is power. When a community is educated, the gained knowledge increases awareness and interest in the future success of their local environment. In turn, this leads to a powerful community willing to take responsibility and get involved, thus everyone works together towards a common goal.

Local Laws benefit the community through structure and guidelines. This in turn promotes a harmonious living environment for all residents. A public education program is vital in order for residents to know, understand and observe the laws of their community.

It is important to remember that working together is the key. Communication, inclusion, feedback and feed forward are crucial. Community Response Officers work in conjunction with Education Officers to ensure that the community is supported from a regulatory and educational perspective. Teamwork assists in creating positive results through behaviour change.

Successful education and promotion within MBRC enhances responsible animal ownership and supports positive behaviour change. This directly links to enabling positive outcomes to the long-term goals of the MBRC and the Moreton Bay community as a team. When all staff members feel part of a team and that teams direction, they are more driven towards a successful outcome.

References

Website - www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmart

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Louise believes education is the key to changing behaviour and attitude. Sixteen years experience working throughout the animal industry and her knowledge in animal behaviour has prepared her for this role.