

Dog agility area delivers big benefits to pets and owners

Inactive lifestyles and increasing rates of obesity are a significant problem for both the human and canine populations of Australia in the 21st century. Communities therefore need to cater to the exercise needs of both people and pets, in particular dogs. A variety of local options for exercising dogs is ideal and, purpose-designed dog exercise areas can aid animal socialisation while simultaneously building community.

Five years ago, the Town of Kwinana Council in Western Australia addressed responsible pet ownership and dog exercise needs through the ranger driven initiative of "Peace Park", a fenced dog exercise area.

The fenced dog exercise area provides a setting in which dogs and owners can exercise.

"People can even bring dogs here that are more difficult to manage off lead and coach them to behave in a controlled and friendly environment."

Bradley Wilkinson, Town of Kwinana

The positive reception of the dog exercise area is not limited to residents of the Town of Kwinana, with Clinton Venables, the Senior Ranger, noting that "The park is always busy... I'm aware of people travelling from over 15km away to use the park to train their dogs."

A community survey undertaken independently for the Town of Kwinana in mid 2008⁵⁵ found that among the 350 residents surveyed, those with dogs generally had higher levels of social interaction with other residents whilst at parks in the area, when compared to non dog owners.

The Town of Kwinana survey also found that:

- 37.9% of dog owners made friends whilst at a park compared with 26.5% of non dog owners;
- 84.5% of dog owners had conversations with other people in the park compared with 65.2% of non dog owners; and
- 73.9% of dog owners wave at other people in the park compared with 58.1% of non dog owners

Council rangers are also seeking other ways to promote responsible pet ownership including the "Kwinana Fun Dog Show" that has been held annually at the Peace Park since 2007. "Pet responsibility is the main aim behind it," says Bradley. It's a social and fun event with activities including friendly low-key dog competitions, free veterinary checks and stalls.

The need for more dog exercise areas like the Peace Park was noted by a number of residents spoken to at the 2008 dog show. In the words of Clinton, "As a Senior Ranger I would recommend a park like this be placed in every suburb."

Other areas that include specific exercise equipment for dogs include City of Kingston in Victoria and Whiteman Park in Perth.

Benefits of providing services and facilities for dog owners

- People are more likely to interact in public places when accompanied by dogs
- Off leash and agility areas encourage owners to exercise with their dogs
- Well exercised dogs are less likely to become bored and a nuisance



Tips

- Consult with local dog associations, veterinarians, trainers and community to determine where to position and how to best equip an off-leash agility area
- Encourage rangers to promote responsible pet ownership through fun pet events that involve the whole community and publicise through community media tools

Web Links

Kwinana Council - www.kwinana.wa.gov.au