

# Opportunity to build community through free dog training

Pet ownership makes an enormous difference in people's lives, and free dog training in parks where members of the public can gather with their pets helps to draw people together, while breaking down social isolation.

The City of Sydney Council leads the way in animal friendly policies and programs. One way it is achieving its goals in this area is through partnering with community to promote equitable access to parks and open spaces.

The Council has created 36 off leash parks over the last few years, in acknowledgement that they improve the lives of the area's dog and human residents. Council is also installing signage and dog litter bag dispensers in all parks.

Further, Council Officers are working actively with the community to promote responsible dog ownership, with the Council rolling out free dog obedience training in parks across the city over the weekends.

*"When training takes place in the parks, the grounds are full of conversation. People are laughing."* Tara Dethridge, City of Sydney

A regular observer at the weekend training sessions, Tara is acutely aware of the role that off-leash parks play in offering regular opportunities for friendly exchanges and conversation between strangers. With physical inactivity and obesity increasing dramatically in Australia, off leash parks also provide an important opportunity for both pet owners and their dogs to exercise.

"There's this strong community feeling that comes about through the training. Many people have become good friends and support each other from meeting there."

Tara has been managing the courses for two years and has seen the very popular program escalate in numbers.

"We run 18 different courses around the City of Sydney on a Saturday, each of which has an intake of up to ten residents per class. We believed it was important that the new off leash parks be populated with educated owners and well socialised dogs."

The City of Sydney has overturned the conventional view of rangers as primarily enforcing agents in the community. Instead, the Council has actively helped rangers be seen as providers of helpful information, expertise and education where possible.

## City rangers therefore give warnings and explanations for a first offence rather than a fine.

With the largest number of public housing residents in the whole of Sydney, the Council's free training is accessible to anyone, and has had participants from all walks of life enjoying the benefits of training and community interaction.

*"We see the free training programs as a significant and continuing project. As long as they continue to be popular and serve a purpose for the community, they will remain."*

Tara Dethridge

## Benefits of education and voluntary compliance

- Provides pet owners with the tools to look after their dog properly
- Decreases the potential for dog attacks
- Decreases nuisance behaviour as dogs are well exercised and socialised



## Tips

- Engage qualified local dog trainers
- Select suitable locations
- Advertise in local papers
- Rangers to recommend particular owners attend

## Web Links

City of Sydney - [www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au)