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Beach education intervention: Implementation and evaluation of a social change campaign

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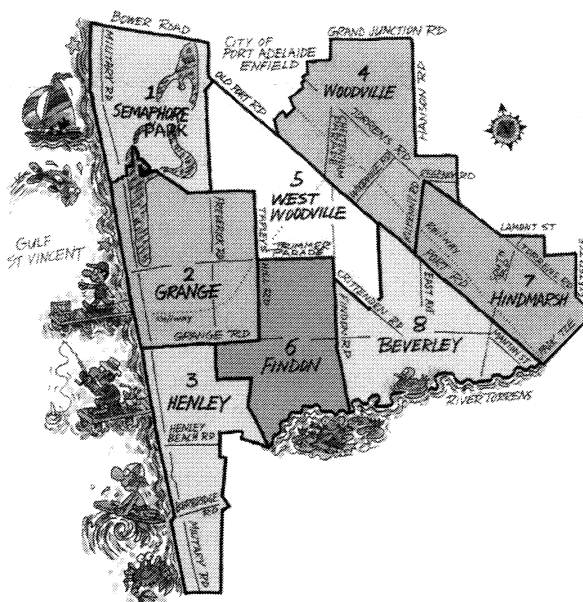
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Through regular Animal Management Patrols, the City of Charles Sturt identified the need to address the issue of non-compliance of dog owners along the 13km of foreshore. Undertaking a tailored survey along the foreshore it was identified that the main issue of non-compliance relating to animal management was dog owners' lack of knowledge. In collaboration with Vanessa Rohlf from Monash University the survey results were analysed and collated to assist in creating a tailored strategy to address the real issue along the foreshore. Behavioural observations of non compliance with on leash requirements have decreased since the implementation of the intervention suggesting that the campaign has been successful in its overall goal. The implemented strategy will be discussed with particular attention paid into the preliminary results of the tailored strategy and the observation of the differences in dog owners' behaviour, knowledge and perceptions.

Introduction

The City of Charles Sturt is located on the western side of the Adelaide City CBD. It is one of the State's largest Councils covering an area of 5557 hectares with a population of 105,573 people and 14,937 registered dogs. Ideally located within the western suburbs the City of Charles Sturt is close to the City of Adelaide, the beach, the River Torrens Linear Park, the airport, shopping facilities and entertainment venues. The City is characterised by a diversity of land use having a balance of residential including high density, industrial and commercial activities; and a diversity of people in terms of culture, age and socioeconomic character.



One of the particular highlights of the City of Charles Sturt is its coastline. The City boasts 13 kms of coastline which are divided up into six beach areas; Grange, Henley, Henley South, West Beach, Tennyson and West Lakes. These beaches are very popular, particularly in the summer months, and are used for a variety of recreational purposes by the City of Charles Sturt residents as well as visitors to the area.

The Council welcomes dog owners to all six beach areas. In order to balance the needs of other beach users with those of the dog owners the council allows dogs to be off lead but only during designated times. These are during the daylight savings period, before 10am and after 8pm. Further to this when dogs are off lead owners must ensure that their dog is under effective control. This means that the person in control of the dog must be able to demonstrate voice control of the dog and it must be within close proximity of and within sight of the person in control of the dog.

These requirements are important because they ensure the safety of all dogs and people.

Having received a number of complaints (Gorka, 2001; Williams, 2011) concerning non-compliance with leash laws and nuisance dog behaviour together

with Vanessa Rohlf from the Anthrozoology Research Group, Monash University (Rohlf, 2010) we developed and executed a survey to identify the real issue of non-compliance along the Charles Sturt coastline.

The survey we developed was aimed at identifying the real problem and its magnitude. Both dog owners and non-dog owners were surveyed to explore compliance with on lead requirements, the frequency and perceptions of potential nuisance behaviour, as well as knowledge of on lead requirements and effective control. We also sought to determine whether non-dog owners and dog owners differed in terms of their perceptions towards potentially problematic behaviours and whether the frequency of non-compliance with on-lead requirements and potentially problematic behaviours differed across the six beach areas surveyed. (Rohlf and Vukoje, Beach Education Survey – A Social Change Campaign, 2011)

The aim of this paper is to discuss the implemented strategy with particular attention paid into the preliminary results of the tailored strategy and the observation of the differences in dog owners' behaviour, knowledge and perceptions. I will conclude by outlining the need to utilise effective research and implement tailored strategies when dealing with real world issues.

Survey results

In response to complaints about non-compliance with leash laws and the existence of problematic behaviours along the 13km stretch of coastline we designed and implemented a survey to determine the extent of the problem and identify factors underlying these issues.

According to the survey there was a definite issue with non-compliance of leash laws across all six beaches with a third of the participants surveyed having witnessed non-compliance. Even 17% of the dog owners surveyed admitted that they don't always have their dog on leash when they are supposed to. It is also likely that these rates of compliance are an underestimate because dog owners may have been reluctant to report acts of non-compliance, especially to a representative of the council. One of the major impediments to compliance appears to be a lack of awareness of the leash laws at this beach. Only 53.9% of dog owners knew what the on lead times were. Even those that thought they knew what the times were incorrect.

The survey results also reveal the existence of potentially problematic dog behaviours across all six of the beach areas with dog owners and non-dog owners being equally affected by these behaviours. Approximately 43% of the beach users surveyed reported that dogs run up to them at

least sometimes and 36% reported that dogs jump up on them at least sometimes. Despite this, few people actually reported these dog behaviours are problematic. On the contrary, many were amused by dogs running up to them (26.6%) or jumping up on them (30.7%). Clearly then if the majority of people are not bothered by the incident dogs owners are not likely to be motivated to change their dogs behaviour because the behaviour is being positively reinforced by people's amusement. The fact that some people were annoyed and frightened by these antics however should not be ignored. Dog owners need to be made aware that there are people out there that do not appreciate these dog behaviours.

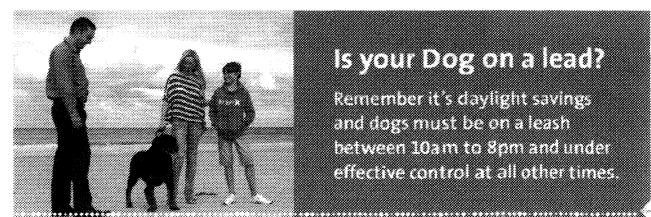
Overall though, most dog owners are believed to be responsible. Dogs in general are also believed to be friendly and obedient with both dog owners and non-dog owners sharing similar views.

Implemented strategy

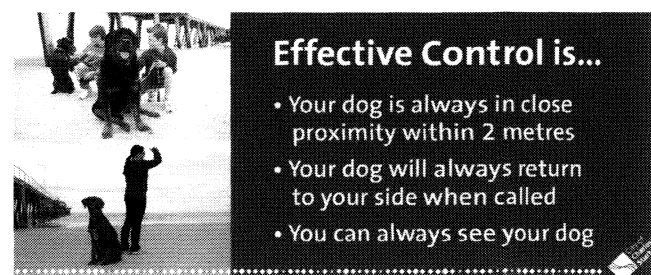
Taking into consideration the results of the survey the intervention we implemented was designed with a focus on education and social influence. The strategy was implemented during the daylight savings period during 2011/2012. As knowledge was found to be lacking in relation to the on leash / off leash laws the first strategy we implemented was educational banners along the 13km of coastline.

The banners featured key messages to address the issues that were raised within the survey. These included:

- Informing dog owners on the leash times.



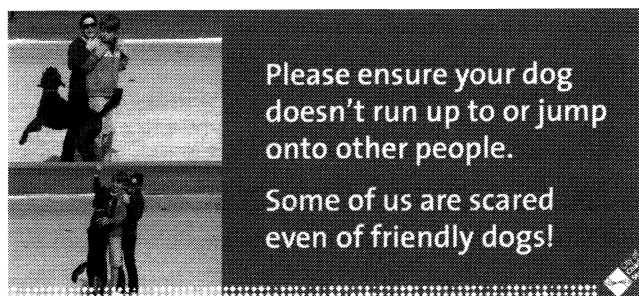
- Educating dog owners on what 'under effective control' means. This is because the survey revealed that only about 40% correctly understood this term effective control. Highlight that it's more than just being able to recall your dog.



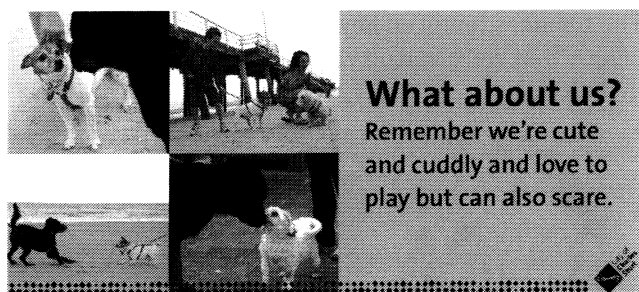
- Promote dog obedience because, according to the

survey, only about 61% say that their dog returns always when they recall the dog.

- Remind dog owners to be mindful of other beach users. Their dog might be cute and cuddly to them but there are others who may be afraid of their dog especially if the dog runs up to them or jumps on them.



- Remind dog owners that dogs can be scared and need their attention and support.



Along with the banners the Beach Education Officer had increased hours. The rostered hours were for both morning and afternoon shifts to provide opportunity to communicate with a range of beach users at different times. Furthermore the Animal Management Officers' were also undertaking daily patrols along the foreshore during the day.

The Charles Sturt Dog Owners Association was also briefed with the new foreshore strategy and encouraged to speak to dog owners about responsible dog ownership and promote positive beach culture in regards to animal management. Charles Sturt Dog Owners association consists of mainly animal management volunteers and animal owners alike that are passionate about positive animal management. Their support has been instrumental in promoting responsible animal management in particular along the foreshore through the inclusion of a Council column within their newsletter as well as a positive voice in the community.

Beach education officer observations

Beach Education Officer observations outlined a noticeable decrease in the number of dogs off the leash in comparison to last year.

The mobile banners on the beach were noted as attracting a bit of attention from both dog owners and non-dog owners alike. This added exposure has been received quite well so far, with non-dog owners in particular strongly in favour of the education initiative. Dog owners are not quite as happy, and are generally more neutral regarding the presence of the banners; however there have been no complaints against them.

Having identified the Henley Beach Jetty, as a central part of the coastline, with the largest number of people and dogs, we created a large banner that was placed on the Henley Jetty.

As knowledge was found to be lacking in relation to the on leash / off leash by laws the strategy will be tailored with a focus of educating beach users of these laws. The banners were placed on star droppers and were moved along the 13km of coastline by the Beach Education Officer during his roster shifts. This ensured the banners were moved along the foreshore at different times and days.

There is a noticeable 'beach culture' among dog owners, in particular during the morning. The same people tend to walk the same stretch of beach most days of the week, and most seem to know each other fairly well. This adds a good sense of community amongst dog owners, as they have no problems with other dogs coming up to them or their pet. This same culture is not quite as apparent in the afternoon. This group has been very receptive to the new education initiative and appears more compliant to the leash requirements along the foreshore in comparison to last year.

With the introduction of a new casual beach uniform that featured "Animal Management" on the back of a white top the officer was recognised easier as a Council employee by beach users. In comparison to last year people are more receptive and accepting of the education officer and in particular him encouraging dog owners to ensure dogs are kept on the leads and are practicing effective control. Last year people were found to be not quite as accepting of this education.

Setting up the banners each shift did take some time to set up and take down. However, the mobility of the banners allows for them to reach more beach users, and so spread the council's message more effectively. During the time involved in setting up the banners each shift people have approached the education officer to converse about the banner messages and express their opinion or ask questions. This served as a good opportunity to build rapport with the public, and act as a 'friendly face' of the council.

It became quite noticeable that most people would immediately put their dog on the leash if the beach education officer was near. Most people would also do this if they walked past the education banners however some would still continue to keep their dog off the leash.

While the banners may help, it seems that the combination of a Council presence greatly increases compliance of dog owners on the beach.

During the 16 shifts the officer undertook prior receiving the banners, he spoke to 30 dog owners who had their dogs running free during leashing times. In the next 16 shifts, this number increased to 35 dogs. While this may suggest that the banners are having no impact, anecdotal evidence from beach users, in particular non-dog owners, indicates that the banners may be having some influence, or at the bare minimum indicating to beach users that the council is attempting to minimise the incidence of off-leash dogs.

Results

The Beach Education Officer was asked to monitor and record the number of dogs witnessed off leash and the number not under effective control during his patrols. Those dogs not under effective control were mainly recorded during the designated off-leash times.

The table below shows a comparison of results from this year to last.

Year	Patrols Undertaken	Off Leash during the On Leash times	Not Under Control	TOTAL offences
2011	32	74	14	88
2012	47	78	13	91

Although there is a slightly larger number of dogs witnessed off leash, as the number of patrols have been increased this would indicate that this number has actually decreased.

To compare the two we divided the number of offences by the number of patrols to give us the number of offences observed per patrol.

In 2011 2.3 offences were observed per patrol in comparison to 2012 where only 1.6 offences were observed per patrol.

The number of dogs witnessed not under effective control has also decreased taking into consideration the number of increased patrols.

Conclusion

Establishing why dog owners fail to abide by leash laws is a difficult task however by implementing a survey to find the real issues behind the lack of compliance provides us with the tools required to move forward with a tailored strategy. Taking into consideration that the intervention implemented was prompted by community concern the newly implemented strategy is showing positive results not only in compliance but also in acceptable by the community as a whole as well as dog owner behaviour.

Conferences like those organised by AIAM give participants' opportunity to not only share ideas and present findings but to look at ways to collaboratively tackle existing issues facing Councils. Through my work with Vanessa we were able to locate the root

