

The City of Nedlands behavioural management program

Graeme Raine

INTRODUCTION

The City of Nedlands is situated in the western suburbs of Perth, Western Australia. It has a population of 20,500 with 7,500 rateable properties covering an area of 20.6 square kilometres. Suburbs included in its municipality are Nedlands, Dalkeith, Hollywood, Mount Claremont, Swanbourne and parts of Shenton Park, Floreat and City Beach. The majority of residents are affluent with well fenced properties, however some areas do contain a proportion of rental houses in proximity to the University of Western Australia.

The city's ranger service consisted of one senior ranger and three operational rangers whose duties were mainly parking control and dog control. A strong enforcement policy had been in effect for many years and a study of past statistics revealed that detected dog offences were being contained in the vicinity of 400 per year. This figure was made up from impoundings and infringement notices issued for offences contrary to the Dog Act or By-laws.

It was not practicable to increase the enforcement level as staffing was adequate so a number of other initiatives were trailed.

BEHAVIOURAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

'Living With Your Dog' Course

These initiatives began with a 'living with your dog course which was open to the public and ran through a community centre. The course was designed to cover all aspects of dog ownership over six two hourly sessions. Specialist knowledge was obtained on a voluntary basis and the ranger was the coordinator and delivered the appropriate subjects.

Week 1	Introduction to the course which included the ancestry and domestication of dogs. Selection of the appropriate breed and temperament of a dog and socialisation. Delivered by an Animal Behaviourist.
Week 2	Health, nutrition and emergency care. Delivered by a Veterinarian.
Week 3	Handling and grooming. Delivered by a pet shop owner. Welfare. Delivered by the RSPCA Inspector.
Week 4	Communication and training. Delivered by an Animal Behaviourist and a Dog Trainer respectively.
Week 5	Legal responsibilities. Delivered by the Senior Ranger. Behaviour and the law. Delivered by an Animal Behaviourist.
Week 6	Common bad behavioural problems. Delivered by an Animal Behaviourist.

A post course assessment included a questionnaire to the participants. All feedback was of a positive and enthusiastic nature. Cost of the course to participants was \$33.00 each.

Benefits

1. Expert advice was made available to dog owners.
2. The ranger service and council were seen as educators for the first time. Rangers were also able to interact with dog owners in a positive and proactive manner. This could be effective in preventing or reducing the 'them and us' attitude that may develop between rangers and the public.
3. The knowledge gained by participants was spread to family and friends.

Disadvantages

These courses relied heavily on volunteers if costs were to be contained to an affordable level. This had the potential to create difficulties in procuring and maintaining a quality product.

It was time consuming in that a lot of time and effort was expended on a small number of people who probably attend because they already were or wished to be responsible dog owners. It is unlikely that those in most need of the course will attend. A number of such persons were approached prior to the course and all had a 'good' reason to be elsewhere.

Following our critique of the course the senior ranger, Mr Graeme Raine, and Mr Garth Jennens, the animal behaviourist who designed the course, decided that while the information provided was relevant to dog owners a more cost effective and mass market approach was required.

YOUR DOG'S BEHAVIOUR AND THE LAW IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Mr Raine and Mr Jennens co-authored a 44 page booklet titled 'Your Dog's Behaviour and the Law in Western Australia'. No funding was available and the authors bore the cost of printing and publishing. Copies of this book were circulated to all Western Australian local authorities. The City of Nedlands purchased copies of the handbook and issued a copy to dog owners when their dog was initially licensed or on renewal of the existing licence.

The booklet contained the following index of subjects which were designed to assist dog owners in a knowledge of the law relating to dogs and their ability to comply with it.

Foreword and acknowledgments
Before obtaining a dog
Socialisation
Training and communication
Rules and regulations (definitions)
Control of dogs
Wandering dogs
Seizing and impounding of dogs
Infringement notices
Barking
Maximum number of dogs
Dog registration
Identification
Losing a dog
Finding a dog
Welfare
Dog attacks on people
Dog attacks on animals
Dog fighting
Chasing
Attacks on livestock

Attacks on wildlife
Causing harm to dogs
Removal of faeces
The dog's possessions
Sterilisation
Health
The responsible owners checklist

SCHOOL VISITING PROGRAM

The senior ranger and a local vet attended several primary schools in the municipality and targeted Year 5 classes. The senior ranger discussed the basic legal requirements and bite avoidance techniques, the vet advised on care and welfare issues relating to pets. These visits were of one hour duration. The senior ranger also presented 15 minute addresses to school groups attending the municipal offices.

It is felt that these visits were extremely important in removing the dog catcher image of the rangers. The message given to the children also went home in the form of a colouring competition which depicted 5 good and 5 bad dogs (with thanks to Ken Muir, Animal Control Services NZ Pty Ltd who provided this).

The Selecta Pet Computer Pet Selection Program was also used to assist children in the selection of appropriate breeds for their environment.

The Nedlands Primary School decided to take these visits one step further and ran an annual pet show based on Pet Care's Pet Show Kit. This proved to be extremely successful with the vet and the senior ranger being given the dubious honour of judging the dog section. On several occasions we were able to obtain dog display teams that demonstrated agility and tricks and also how and how not to approach dogs. The latter is extremely important in its potential to reduce dog attacks on children.

DOG TRAINING

A local vet was contacted in regards to setting up a basic dog obedience course. This course was run by a dog trainer through a veterinary practice. Council provided the training ground free of charge in acknowledgment of the benefits that training would give to the community.

This course had a duration of 6 weeks and was designed to give dog owners basic control over their pets.

The benefit of the vet running the courses was that there was no administrative burden on the Council and that a consistently high standard was required of the trainer due to the reflection of professionalism on the clinic.

A second vet also ran a similar course on another reserve. This course was eventually taken over by the AMREX program.

In considering this matter, Council accepted that dog training was beneficial in reducing the potential for nuisance behaviours and could assist in treatment programs to remedy behavioural problems.

SWANBOURNE OVAL DOG AGILITY TRACK

It was felt that some owners would like to take their dogs training beyond the basic level. It was also considered that the provision of a specialised agility track would encourage owners to further develop their bond and interest in their pet.

To this end, the dog trainer provided plans to Council for an agility course which contained the following pieces of equipment: jumps, weaving poles, spread hurdles, tyre jumps, a tunnel and triple jump. The equipment was duplicated for small and larger breeds.

To assist Council in its decision to approve this initiative, private sponsorship was obtained to construct the equipment.

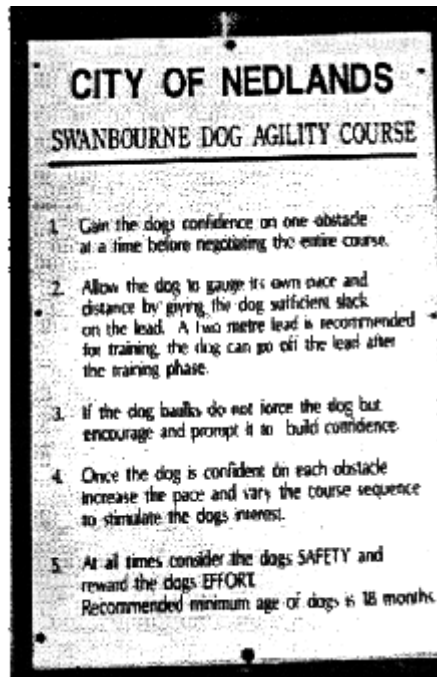
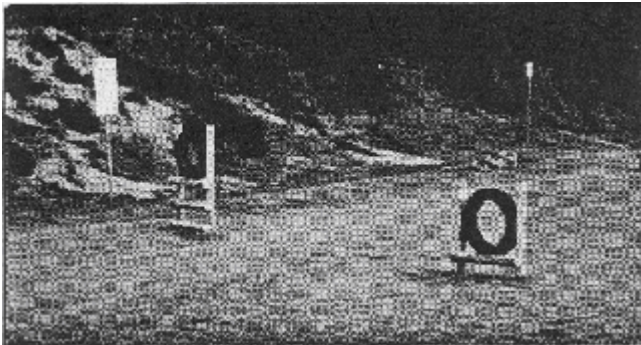
The track was opened in 1992 and gained considerable media coverage by three television stations and four newspapers. One of the newspaper photographs was entered in the annual press photography awards.

One of the basic philosophies in setting up the track was to exercise the dog's mind as well as its body. The dog therefore had to turn left and right as it negotiated the obstacles. We felt that this was more stimulating than just running alongside the owner or chasing a ball. A well trained, exercised and stimulated dog was less likely to be a nuisance to the community by wandering or barking. Less complaints of this nature directly reduced costs to Council and reduces animosity between neighbours. The dog trainer also trained owners in the importance of removing dog faeces thus directly assisting council in its education program free of cost.

Siting of the dog agility track

Swanbourne Oval is situated off Oden Crescent, Swanbourne. The reserve contained a cricket wicket but was being under utilised. The natural topography was used to shield the track from view of residential properties and the area had expansive views over the Indian Ocean. It was well served by bitumen parking areas, toilet areas and a kiosk. Potential improvements would include the provision of shade and water.

Several comments were received regarding the potential for injury to dogs. No injuries have been reported to Council. In designing future facilities it would be important to recognise the potential for injuries relating to jumping, especially in younger dogs. The Nedlands track has signposting advising on the correct use of the equipment. This facility was instrumental in promoting council as being proactive in its approach to dog owners.



Dog Owner Support Network

Council recognised that from time to time dog owners might require assistance in managing behavioural problems. To assist them, three of the rangers attended 10 hour conferences on dog behaviour at Murdoch University. The Australian Veterinary Association provided a referral list of veterinarians and a dog behaviourist for those owners that required professional assistance in modifying their dog's behaviour. A dog trainer was also available on Sunday mornings to offer advice.

ADVANTAGES OF THE BEHAVIOURAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The advantages of the behavioural management program are:

Information and assistance is geographically localised and directly related to an owner's individual problem.

Advice could be obtained on dog behaviour, health, welfare, and training and the owner's legal responsibilities.

Costs to the local authority are minimal as private enterprise constructed the activity track and ran the training courses, and users paid for professional services.

The information is conveyed by appropriately qualified people and is objective and informative.

RESULTS

The following chart represents the number of offences that were detected from the program's implementation.

This indicated a reduction of 50% in offences detected from the project's inception. During this time the rangers section was staffed by the same officers.

City of Nedlands - Dog Offence Statistics

	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95
Dog warning issued	53	61	41	45	61
Dog infringement issued	228	151	88	56	44
Dogs impounded	156	124	127	110	99
Total offences detected	437	336	256	211	204

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Graeme has been employed in local government for 14 years, nine of which involve animal control. He is currently employed by the City of Rockingham as senior ranger. He was involved in the Curriculum Development Committees of the Certificate of Supervision First Line Management, Municipal Law Enforcement A & B, Certificate IV Statutory Investigations and Enforcement and the National Animal Management Project. He currently delivers Municipal Law Enforcement and the national Animal Management Project. He also delivers Municipal Law Enforcement A & B through the Central Metropolitan College of TAFE in Perth, Western Australia. In conjunction with the Keep Australia Beautiful Council WA, Graeme runs three training courses per year in Litter Law Enforcement and he runs the Animal Handling course through the Municipal Training Service. Graeme is a training officer for the Municipal Law Enforcement Officers' Association and has a strong interest in the provision of relevant training courses for Animal Control Officers.

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