

Just Walk Me

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The Gold Coast City Council provides over 90 locations in the City where people may exercise their dogs off-leash. Many of these areas are quite popular with the dog owning community and attract hundreds of users daily.

Data has shown that Australia has one of the highest levels of pet ownership per capita in the world with 85% having owned a pet at some point in their lives. With two thirds of Australian households owning pets, nearly 40% of these households own a dog.

However 60% of these dogs are not exercised and it has been reported that a daily constitutional walk is good for a dog's health and behaviour. It is a well known fact that a daily walk can improve human fitness and health. It has been widely documented that pet owners are healthier and happier than non-pet owners.

For the above reasons, Gold Coast City Council's Animal Management has initiated the Just Walk Me program, which has been operating every Sunday since the beginning of October 2007 in one of the numerous parks throughout the City. The program takes place between 8.30am and 10am, and officers from Council's Animal Management team join Gold Coast dog owners and their dogs for a walk, followed by a free healthy morning tea at one of the City's many off-leash dog exercise areas.

These events not only encourage people to get out and get active by walking with their dog, but also gives Animal Management staff opportunities to pass on valuable tips and advice on topics such as basic dog walking skills, dog socialisation and lead aggression.

Studies by the University of Melbourne indicate dogs are spending 20-40 hours per week alone. It is these dogs who are most likely to exhibit undesirable behaviours.

Over time people have learnt that by simply taking their dog for a walk every day can significantly reduce and even eliminate boredom-related, destructive and undesirable behaviours at home.

Since the Just Walk Me program commenced and it is apparent by the amount of positive feedback received to date that this friendly interaction is benefiting both the community and Council's image. Dog owners are learning valuable skills and information at no cost from Council staff. This in turn is promoting a positive image of Council and its staff whom members of the public may see as being helpful, knowledgeable and professional.

The Council's Active and Healthy program has also linked with the Just Walk Me program and two central messages are being promoted to the public. The first message is a walked dog is healthier, happier and more social, which appeals to the dog owners' desire to do the right thing by their pet and the community. The second message is dogs are great walking companions and personal trainers which provides benefits to the dog and the owner.

The Just Walk Me program can be utilised in any of the City's numerous off leash/dog exercise areas, mornings, afternoon, weekends or weekdays.

The Officers interact with the public during a friendly, well run and relaxed atmosphere provides considerable benefits for Council's to get involved with the community on a City wide basis.

