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Council and community benefits through maximizing resources

LOUISE LAURENS

Education Officer, Environment and Local Laws, Moreton Bay Regional Council

Moreton Bay Regional Council (MBRC) is situated between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast and is a region of diverse communities and landscapes. MBRC covers 2,037 square kilometres with a population of 389,661 is represented by a Mayor and 12 Divisional Councillors. There are approximately 65,500 children enrolled at schools from prep to grade 12 across the region and approximately 70,000 registered dogs and 11,000 registered cats.

The Division of Community and Environmental Services includes Environmental Health and Environmental Planning and Compliance Departments. The Environmental Health Department includes the Community Response Unit, which is responsible for all Local Law related matters, including Animal Management, both domestic and livestock. Environmental Planning and Compliance deal with community engagement and environmental policy and projects.

PetSmart works with both Departments to deliver a range of education strategies covering local laws, voluntary conservation programs and environmental education – such as koala awareness.

1. PetSmart program

Pets can provide children with mutual respect, unconditional love and trust, as well as enhancing their childhood development however bad experiences can leave long standing physical and emotional scars.

In order to have an effective dog safety message remembered by the children, a joint effort from the parents, teachers and the PetSmart team creates positive results through behaviour change.

MBRC considers the PetSmart program a very important component of its Animal Management program. A key component of the program targets students. The community benefits are widely spread as students learning about animal behaviour and safe interaction at school take information home to share with their families and friends. Knowledge and awareness of safe and responsible companion animal ownership in all age groups is a vital step in achieving a safe and amenable community and the

prevention and reduction of attacks. PetSmart in schools is an essential package benefiting approx 10,000 children every year. The PetSmart program has visited over 60,000 students to date.

MBRC's PetSmart program is an interactive education program for all primary and secondary schools of the Moreton Bay Region. From daycares, girl guides to grade 12 students – there is no limit or restrictions on who can be involved.

The PetSmart team presents this exciting educational program with lessons linked to National Science curriculum and SOSE related curriculum outcomes. The program provides year level appropriate experiences to reinforce key messages regarding interactions between pets, humans and wildlife, responsible pet ownership, and the role of local laws in protecting pets, the community, and the local environment.

PetSmart has joined local laws and the environment together. This initiative has proven to provide a very positive outcome for the officers across both departments as well as for the intended recipients of the program.

The long-term goal, through education and awareness, is to encourage the community to be 'PetSmart', to be responsible pet owners and to respect all animals.

Every lesson starts with a discussion on the key components of Council's local laws and animal behaviour. In relation to dogs, the lessons teaches children they have to FREEZE – stand up tall, look at their shoes and hide their fingers which look like "sausages" when approached by an unfamiliar dog. PetSmart has created a song to assist children learning a fun way to retain important information through movement and music. The creation of this song is a great opportunity to promote dog safety and reinforce the messages to children and their parents. The children remember the song and the "sausages" which, when combined, assists them to retain the information learnt during the lesson.

The lessons then discuss the relevant information around dogs, cats, koalas or wildlife with 16 lessons plans to choose from:

- PetSmart with Dogs -Years Prep – 3 - If I could talk like a dog; Years 4-5 - In the dog house; Years 6-9 - It's a dog's life; Years 10-12 - Teaching an old dog new tricks;
- PetSmart with Cats - Years Prep – 3 - Cat Tails; Years 4-5 - Kitty Galore; Years 6-9 - Alleycat or Aristocat; Years 10-12 - Putting the cat among the pigeons;
- PetSmart goes WILD - Years Prep – 3 - Take a walk on the wild side; Years 4-5 - Where the wild things are; Years 6-9 - Born to be Wild; Years 10-12 - Wild at heart;
- PetSmart meets Koalas - Years Prep – 3 - How do you know if a koala has been in your backyard?; Years 4 – 5 - What do you get when you cross a koala and a pet?; Years 6-9 - Living in a koala's backyard; Years 10-12 - Fostering KoalaSmart in our community.

Link to Teachers page: <http://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmart-teachers>

PetSmart Website link: www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmart

OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE PETSMAK PROGRAM:

'I'm Alert' is a new interactive tool linked onto Council's webpage that is available for the community and schools to access. It covers dogs in general including behaviour and local laws.

Community Information Evenings are informal gatherings where officers provide assistance with some training ideas and advice to help residents manage problems they may face with their pets. These sessions are free and target community issues such as barking.

Workshops are held at our Environmental Centres and cover topics such as cats and wildlife; snake ID and pet first aid. These workshops target local law requirements and how our pets can live together with the wildlife in our back yards.

The **dob-in-a-dog program** is used in schools and allows students to report dogs that have scared or have the potential to scare a child. If a dog can put his head over under or through a fence and scares a child, the child can tell the office or their teacher and the teacher can send in a report. The form is also available to the public. Once received by Council the area officer will conduct a fence inspection and educate the owners on responsible keeping of their pet and how to keep it from causing issues with children. Patrols are regularly conducted in the area around school times. The program has worked well and following one school visit 29 emails were received from the school – all about 1 property.

2. FamilySmart program

FamilySmart is delivered via DVD into both the Caboolture and Redcliffe Hospitals. Expectant couples attend ante-natal classes which covers pet awareness and preparing the pet for the newborn. During this very special time for new parents preparing the pet can be daunting and often forgotten. The aim is to reduce attacks and accidents and create a mutually safe environment for newborns and pets.

The development of a standalone ante-natal program including DVD and crying CD was completed in 2011 and approx 200 expectant couples attend sessions monthly or available as a free download on the website.

The aim of the FamilySmart program is to educate the new and expecting parents on pet ownership and basic behaviour. Topics discussed include pack structure, basic dog manners, preparing the pet, introducing the baby, walking with the pram, worming, senior pets, cats, do's & don'ts, some tips and encourage lots of fun. The most important message that is given is about never leaving any child or baby unattended – no matter how much you trust the dog.

Website and Crying CD Link: <http://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/living.aspx?id=32661>

3. Education K9

Council's 'Education K9' assists with school visits and provides an excellent opportunity for children to interact and build confidence with an animal and reinforces the lessons learned. The Education Officer is responsible for training the 'Education K9'. Workplace Health and Safety assessments are conducted regularly.

"Smash" – The 5 year old Education K9 was rescued from the Caboolture Pound as a 7 week old. He has now visited over 57,000 children across MBRC. With 'Smash's' assistance the lessons taught can be practically reinforced by allowing interaction with a live and responsive animal.

"Cinders" is our new leaner boxer pup in training. She is now 12 weeks of age and has completed the first 4 weeks of her 6 month training program.

4. Microchipping program

Council's microchipping program is held every month either traditionally on a Sunday or Wednesday. Residents can often find it hard to attend during the week so the Sunday session is frequently the most popular. The sessions are held at various locations across the region but traditionally targets low-income areas or areas showing poor animal management compliance.

The program offers discounted pet microchipping to MBRC residents and has increased the percentage from 50% of all pets in MBRC to 60% and over a five year plan with a goal of moving towards 75% within the next three years.

Conclusion

Education and promotion play a vital role in aligning a number of MBRC's key goals and in the successful future of the Moreton Bay community. When a community is educated, the gained knowledge increases awareness and interest in the future success of their local environment. This in turn, leads to a powerful and motivated community that is more willing to take responsibility and get involved, resulting in community where everyone works together towards a common goal.

Local Laws benefit the community through the provision of structure and guidelines which in turn promotes a harmonious living environment for all residents. A public education program is vital to help residents know, understand and observe the laws of their community and how to live together to protect our community and in turn it's environment.



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It is important to remember that working together is the key. Communication, inclusion, feedback and feed forward are crucial. Environmental Officers and Community Response Officers work in conjunction with Education Officers to ensure that the community is supported from an environmental, regulatory, and educational perspective.

References

Web site: www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmart

About the author

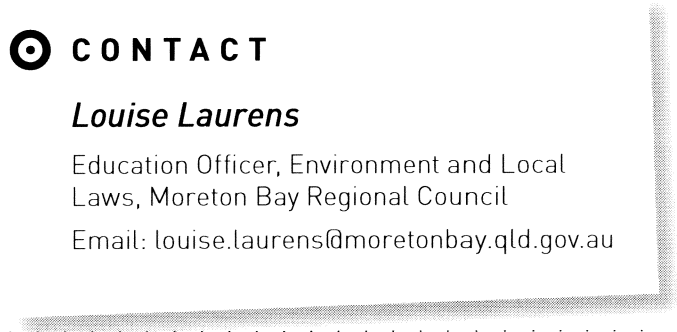
Mrs Louise Laurens believes education is the key to changing behaviour and attitude. Twenty years' experience working within the animal industry and her knowledge in animal behaviour has prepared her for this role.

 **CONTACT**

Louise Laurens

Education Officer, Environment and Local Laws, Moreton Bay Regional Council

Email: louise.laurens@moretonbay.qld.gov.au





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