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## **Indigenous health and companion animal welfare Ranger initiative for compliance “Looking outside the box”**

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*Shire of Northham, WA*

This pilot programme was born through the desire to boost companion animal health and management this was going to be done in a framework of encouraging voluntary Compliance, through an understanding of the issues from both sides. This led to a partnership between the Shire of Northham and Max Employment. The aim of the initiative is provide training and education along with practical experience to facilitate future employment for Aboriginals in meaningful work in the community. At the same time gain a deeper understanding of the issues faced in the community by rangers and the effects that animals can have on the individual and the community as a whole. Also to show the benefits of compliance to the person or family that are dealing with rangers in their role in the community and how we are there to help and not hinder.

The 26 week program is a work experience initiative funded by the department education employment and workplace relations and delivered jointly by Max Employment and the Shire of Northham and assistance from the Shire of York. The project participants undertook accredited training in animal control and regulation as part of the work experience. Participants also worked alongside the Northam Shire Ranger Services to develop on the job skills and have a deeper understanding of animal welfare and the role ranger services plays in the community.

The program was designed around the needs of the community and community expectations of Ranger Services to deliver a service which makes the community a safer place (less stray animals and a reduction in the spread of Parvovirus and cat influenza). The participants see effects firsthand and have a deeper understanding of the need to maintain their companion animals responsibly. Sharing this information with their peers means that the message gets out without the need for a “white fella” to ‘preach’.

There are significant long term benefits to be expected for both the participants and the community. The participants will learn lifelong employment skills in an area that they will enjoy with

the potential of ongoing employment. The community will benefit from having access to better companion animal health and welfare trained individuals, and from having more participatory community members.

The challenge within the community of Northham was to break old opinions / pre-conceived ideas. We needed community members to stop and take time to say “hang on maybe I need to listen and gain an insight to another’s perception” There was the opportunity to dispel the “just another white fella in a uniform telling us what we can and can’t do” perception, this project thinks outside the square by inviting community members in so we can learn from them as well as teach.

The training that is now being provided by C Y O Conner that the participants have through Max Employment now consists of Cert II in Civil Construction, Automotive, industry construction skills and with the new training on board the participants have the opportunity to engage in Cert III in Aged Care, Child Care, Disability Care and home Services. All these skills are a very much sought after qualification within the Avon region. Having ranger services seek out and secure this training means that we have a real concern for the community and the community’s health and well being. So rangers are leading the community through a process of improvement and opportunity. Through this approach our ability to engage with people in a more harmonious way the desire to comply has greatly increased not because “some fella in a uniform told me” But because the community wants to it wants to, because the community understands and through joint respect and understanding and the desire to help each other compliance has improved beyond our hopes.

Along the way as rangers we have been privileged to learn from the local community members, we saw we had big gaps in our appreciation on what was going on “on the other side of the fence” This deeper understanding has given us a the skills to approach in a way that is more appealing to those in

the community that we interact with. This has made our job more enjoyable and of course out of all this our companion animals say thank you for giving us a human voice.

A special Thank you must go out to my CEO Mr Neville Hale for having the foresight to allow me to embark on this endeavour and to the Shire of Northam Council for believing in the work I do. Of course a huge thank of dept to Mr Barry Mackie from Max Employment and to the visionary Management and staff of C Y O Conner at Northam.

**About the author**

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