

AUSTRALIAN
COMPANION
ANIMAL
COUNCIL INC.

Dogs in Society Position Paper

Review of

Dog bite prevention programs in Australia

Prepared by the Australian Companion Animal Council

June 2007

Introduction

Australia has a canine population of about 4 million. It has been estimated that each year more than 100,000 Australians are attacked by dogs, causing injuries of varying degrees of severity. The Accident and Emergency Departments of the nation's public hospitals treat between 12,000 and 14,000 people for dog bite injuries and almost 1,400 of those have injuries that are serious enough to warrant hospitalisation.

The annual cost to the community for treating dog bite injuries in Australian public hospitals has been calculated at over \$7 million. This figure does not include the many cases treated outside of the public hospital system, nor does it take into account the cost of the personal suffering and psychological damage associated with these attacks.

Several large scale public education programs have been developed to help reduce the overall incidence of dog bite injuries in Australia. The four key programs, Dogs 'n' Kids, Delta Dog Safe™, AVA PetPEP and SPOT, aim to teach safe and sensible behaviour around dogs, whether in the family home, the backyard, or in public places. Education of children and their parents is the main focus of these programs, as children have the highest risk of injuries from dog attacks. Many other programs that incorporate messages about the prevention of dog bites are being used by State and Local Governments, and community and welfare groups around Australia.

Dogs 'n' Kids

This program is a joint initiative of the Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre in Melbourne, the Children's Injury Prevention Working Party, other child safety units, local government authorities and maternal and child health services. It is a national education program targeted at parents of young children (0-4 years) to help parents model and teach the correct behaviour inside and outside of the home environment.

The Dogs 'n' Kids program is implemented through the child safety body Kidsafe, in each state. The program comprises a resource kit designed for use by maternal and child health nurses. It includes a display poster, and brochures for distribution to parents about the safety issues surrounding dogs and children. More detailed background information is provided as a resource for health care professionals when counselling parents. Dog's 'n' Kids is a multilingual program and the brochures have been produced in 6 languages.

Dogs 'n' Kids has also been disseminated from many other outlets such as veterinary clinics, local councils, hospitals and safety centres across Australia

The program was first developed in 1994 and released nationally in 1995-1996. The content was reviewed in 2001, and a second edition has recently been released. The Petcare Information and Advisory Service (PIAS) provides funding and assists in the printing and distribution of the materials.

Australian Companion Animal Council Inc

Unit 40, 2A Herbert Street,

St Leonards NSW 2065

Telephone (02) 9431 5000

Facsimilie (02) 9437 9068

ABN 34 412 308 181

- Australian Veterinary Association
- Australian Small Animal Veterinary Association
- Australian National Kennel Council
- Animal Health Alliance (Australia)
- Delta Society Australia
- Pet Food Industry Association of Australia
- Pet Industry Association of Australia
- Petcare Information and Advisory Service
- Veterinary Manufacturers & Distributors Association
- Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia

The demand for the Dogs 'n' Kids program has been growing steadily. This year over 35,000 copies of the Dogs 'n' Kids brochure and 2170 posters have been distributed to the various state-based Kidsafe organisations. Since 2003, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment has contributed to funding the reprinting of the package to increase dissemination in Victoria.

Delta Dog Safe™

Delta Dog Safe™ is a dog friendly public health and education strategy specifically targeted at dog bite prevention. It was developed by the Delta Society Australia Ltd, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to promote and facilitate positive interaction between people and companion animals. The program is formally structured and was tested in a randomised, controlled Sydney field trial in 1999 and the results were reported in the British Medical Journal in June 2000.

The Dog Safe program is presented to junior primary school children by Delta accredited volunteers and participating council staff who have completed Delta's training seminar and attended class room demonstrations.

The Delta Dog Safe materials consist of training seminar notes for classroom presenters, a teacher resource kit, a lesson plan for the classroom presentation, a large stuffed toy dog and a six panel brochure which contains messages for children and their parents. Teachers use the Delta resource kit to lead discussions prior to and following the classroom presentation by the Delta accredited volunteers.

The program is being delivered in Tasmania by the Delta Dog Safe branch, funded by the Tasmanian Health Department. By the end of the 2007 school year it will have been presented to more than 20,000 five to seven year old Tasmanian children - almost 100% of the target 'audience.

Delta Dog Safe in South Australia is funded by an annual grant from the SA Government, through the Dog and Cat Management Board SA. By 30th June 2007 it will have been presented to 60,000 five to seven year old SA children over the three financial years 2004-05 through 2007-07, again almost 100% of Delta's target for that State.

AVA PetPEP (Pets & People Education Program)

AVA PetPEP began in 1989 as an initiative of the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd. AVA PetPEP is a national education program which involves veterinarians and teachers working together to teach primary school children about socially responsible pet ownership, and includes components on dog bite prevention. It is the largest program of its type in Australia.

The materials and activities are presented in a format with a strong literacy and numeracy focus, and learning outcomes can be assessed using the Curriculum Profiles for Australian Schools. Local veterinary practitioners can become involved through sponsorship and participation in the school programs and in-school pet expos.

AVA PetPEP also aims to create links between veterinary practices and their local schools, as well as fostering beneficial relationships with other relevant community groups, local councils and other animal related organizations to help promote responsible pet ownership. This is done by recruiting local council funding and program support, lobbying for community and media

awareness on pet care issues, and assisting veterinary practices to build a profile within their local community.

AVA PetPEP is aimed at three different levels of primary school students – lower primary, middle primary and upper primary. Pet PEP consists of a teacher's resource book that contains worksheets, activities, websites, black line masters and industry contacts. Pet PEP covers topics such as:

- Behaving Safely Around Pets
- Choosing the Right Pet
- Being Responsible for a Pet
- Preparing for a Pet
- Caring for Your Pet's Health
- Treating All Animals Well

The program is funded by the AVA® and subscriptions from veterinarians. Other state based funding comes from state government departments, the RSPCA, and Local Government.

In 2007 AVA PetPEP presentations will be made to some 40,000 children in South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania, the ACT and Northern Territory. In NSW AVA® has been involved in the development and implementation of the SPOT program which incorporates elements of AVA PetPEP.

SPOT (Safe Pets Out There)

The NSW Department of Local Government SPOT (Safe Pets Out There) Program was conceived in 2006 and developed under the umbrella of the Australian Companion Animal Council by the NSW Animal Welfare League, the Australian Veterinary Association, Delta Society Australia and the RSPCA NSW. The program incorporates key elements from the AVA PetPEP, Delta Dog Safe, NSW AWL and RSPCA NSW education programs. Through SPOT a selection of the best content and materials from these programs, which was previously only available for presentation on an individual basis, have been combined into one comprehensive program.

Funded for implementation over three years 2007 through 2009 by the NSW Department of Local Government, SPOT is a unique school program about pet care, kindness and respect for all animals. It also incorporates a specific module about safe behaviour to reduce the incidence of serious dog bites in children.

The SPOT program is targeted specifically to junior primary school children in classes K to 2 in New South Wales and includes three modules:-

1. Kindness and Humanity (RSPCA NSW, AWL NSW)
2. Safe Behaviour Around Dogs (Delta Dog Safe)
3. Pet Care (Australian Veterinary Association)

For more information on SPOT visit the SPOT website www.Spot.dlg.nsw.gov.au

Other programs

Other State and Local Governments, and community and welfare groups have developed education programs that incorporate dog bite prevention messages. Some, such as the Responsible Pet Ownership Program administered by the Department of Primary Industries in Victoria, cover all aspects of responsible dog ownership. This program has a web site for school and community use, which includes information specifically on managing children and dogs, and another section on dealing with dogs that is applicable to people of all ages.

In Queensland the RSPCA has the EMU (Education Mobile Unit) a contemporary mobile classroom staffed by RSPCA Education Officers and volunteers, which visits schools and other community centres to promote animal care, and teaches the principles of dog bite prevention, to children and adults.

Within the veterinary profession, the Australian Small Animal Veterinary Association (ASAVA) assists members to educate their clients by producing leaflets such "Your New Puppy - Starting off on the Right Paw", which teach the principles of dog behaviour and training.

Various Local Governments have been active in this area, and many have developed responsible dog ownership programs, administered by Environmental Health staff, often with the assistance of local dog obedience clubs and veterinary practices. As well as emphasising the legal requirements of dog ownership, owners are educated about dog behaviour and sensible management of dogs in urban areas.

Preventing behavioural problems in dogs is an important means of reducing the incidence of dog attacks. Many programs that emphasise dog training and socialisation techniques are available in the community, including:

- Puppy Preschool® - offered by many veterinary clinics to small groups of clients with new puppies, to improve socialisation of puppies and teach basic training methods.
- Dog Obedience Clubs – provide basic obedience classes and more advanced training for obedience trials and dog agility competitions.
- Delta - Canine Good Citizen™ Instructors Course - the only nationally accredited course for dog trainers, run by the Delta Society over a period of 15 months. The course emphasises the training of pet dogs to live harmoniously with humans in urban environments.
- Bark Busters™ - a home-based dog training company that utilises behaviour modification techniques for problem dogs.

Behavioural problems are less likely to arise when dogs are well-matched to their owners. Factors such as the owner's lifestyle, the physical environment, the dog's size and temperament, and its requirements for food, grooming, exercise and training should all be taken into account when selecting a suitable breed of dog. With so many different breeds now available, this can be a complex task for aspiring dog owners. PIAS has developed the Selectapet™ computer program to assist potential pet owners to find the breeds of dog or cat that are most appropriate to their circumstances. Selectapet is available on-line on the PIAS website (<http://www.petnet.com.au/>) or via mail-in questionnaire.