



Community connections created through local parties for owners and pets

Benefits of informal groups and social functions that incorporate pets

- Provides a fun opportunity for members of the community to connect in an informal way
- Is a celebration of the relationships formed by social dog walking in the neighbourhood throughout the year
- Facilitates newcomers to the neighbourhood feeling part of the "community family" at potentially isolating times of year

Annual events commonly celebrated with family and friends, such as Christmas and Easter can be lonely times for some, particularly if they have family living overseas or interstate or have simply lost contact. A festive Doggy Party in the local street or park is a simple event that can act to build community by bringing local residents together to socialise and form friendships through the event's festive nature and with happy dogs helping to break the ice.

The Edinburgh Gardens Christmas Party in North Fitzroy, Victoria has been running for many years and attracts around 80 or more people and around 100 dogs. Similar events are held around Australia with some going even further to provide a Santa for the children and presents for pets.

Jonathon Bray, a natural therapist, had moved from his home town of Adelaide to Melbourne with his Schnauzer Phyllis just a few months before Christmas 2007. And he wasn't looking forward to spending the season alone.

Having Phyllis in his waiting room however, prompted a number of Bray's clients to invite him to the local Christmas Party. Living just a few minutes' walk from the off-leash area meant that Jonathon had already met a number of the doggy residents and their owners.

"But it wouldn't have mattered if I hadn't. Everyone was so friendly. What was surprising to me though was that so many dogs could be around food and still get along."

Jonathan Bray, Local resident



The parties are a team exercise driven by the inspired effort of community nurse, Sally Martin. "I've lived in the area for around 16 years," says Sally. "But it wasn't until I got Susie (her demure Scotch Collie) 10 years ago that the community really opened up for me.

Until then I'd vaguely known my immediate neighbours, but after Susie I got to know so many more."

Nearby residents wheel barbeques across the street and attendees bring salads for two legged attendees and treats for the four legged ones. Word of mouth and a positive reputation for informal fun, help pull the crowds.

Tips

- Provide off leash areas where these kind of activities can take place ie: water, shade, benches, lighting, poo bags and in a pleasant environment
- To really get on side with local residents, consider dressing up one of your more outgoing rangers as Santa and handing doggy treats out to well behaved dogs

"It's a social highlight for both the dogs and their owners, many of whom also meet up at the park regularly while walking their dogs."

Sandy O'Connor, WA doggy party regular