

Community contact promoted through dog parks and coffee culture



Cafes and coffee are now a big part of the social life of many Australians. So when a cafe and an off leash dog park get together, it can be a great way for local residents to exercise themselves and their dogs while meeting other members of their community.

A café dedicated to dogs and their owners sits in the middle of the Hawthorne Canal Reserve, in Leichhardt, NSW. While owners relax and enjoy a coffee, dogs run free and play with the others in the area. The park is very popular with around a quarter of a million dogs and people moving through it in a year.

While dogs are not permitted in the food preparation area, they are welcome to scamper amongst the outdoor table environment while owners order from the kiosk counter.

The owners of the cafe, Michael and Chaka Lloyd Jones have had the opportunity to see how well the atmosphere caters to those with social difficulties, allowing them to feel comfortable in a public place. Similarly Michael is able to watch the elderly and the odd traveller come down for the simple companionship that the café provides.

*"All status goes out the window.
Dogs are an instant way to bond with someone
without all the trappings of social mores.
Many people that have met here become life-long friends
and quite a few have even become partners.
We've had people come through who have hooked up to start
successful dog walking and training ventures together."
Michael Lloyd, Hawthorne Canal Reserve Cafe*

The park is Council operated and the couple have struck up very strong relationships with the rangers, one of whom is Ronnie Busuttil, an advocate for the strong role that the café plays socially in the local community.

"Because dogs are so social, it automatically means that a place like this particular cafe becomes very social," said Ronnie. "Whenever we [the rangers] come down here, we find people smiling and interacting positively. I don't see that same kind of communication in your average café in the city."

Ronnie sees that the cafe owners also provide council with a unique advantage.



Benefits of pets in public open space kiosks

- Dogs in social settings help to break down barriers and encourage interaction
- Outdoor cafes in an off leash park provide a comfortable venue where people and their dogs can meet
- Café environments encourage responsible dog ownership by owners making sure their dog is able to join in the fun in a well-mannered way

*"In many ways, Michael and Chaka have become
a third eye for us down at the Hawthorne Canal Reserve;
only responsible owners who do the right thing are welcome
at the cafe so they enforce the local dog laws in an informal way.
It's a functioning three way street whereby the council,
the community and the cafe all win."*

Ronnie Busuttil, Leichhardt City Council

Tips

- Where dogs are unrestrained, guard against hostilities by not selling dog meals
- Clear signage can remind patrons of their obligations and responsibilities

Web Links

Cafe Bones - www.cafebones.com.au

Leichhardt Council - www.leichhardt.nsw.gov.au