

Paws For A Cause walk aims to end senseless killing of healthy dogs

Concern of certain dog breeds and dog attacks are 'exaggerated and create unnecessary fear in the community'

AFTER being continually horrified by the senseless killing of healthy and re-homable dogs, South Yarra dog trainer Michelle McClurg is running an inaugural charity Paws For A Cause (PFAC) community dog walk at Como Park on December 7.

Ms McClurg and the PFAC team aim to raise \$10,000 for Glen Iris 'no kill' animal shelter Save-A-Dog-Scheme (SADS) – an established leader of the no kill movement since 1985.

"PFAC aims to make a positive difference in the lives of dogs, their owners and our communities, through increasing awareness and education around responsible dog ownership," Ms McClurg said.

The National Dog Trainers Federation (NDTF) Certified Dog Behaviourist and The Art of Dog Training owner said she had a burning desire to make a difference in the lives of dogs and cats since doing work experience at age 15 for a North Melbourne animal shelter.

She said dogs deemed dangerous and/ or homeless (not reclaimed by owners) were being killed at this North Melbourne shelter at a rate of up to 54%, according to their national annual report.

"RSPCA statistics show that shelters across Australia had euthanasia rates of 30-40% of animals on average," she said.

"This is way too high and dogs are often incorrectly or inaccurately deemed dangerous due to ignorance in the community and irresponsible dog ownership.

"Sadly, many homeless dogs who are being killed would have made great companion animals. Thousands of lives can be saved with basic owner/ dog training and awareness of how easily these dogs can be trained rather than given up on."

Interestingly, the Australian Veterinary Association was not consulted before the new Victorian Domestic Animal Act legislation was drawn up around euthanising dogs. The Act states: Councils can seize and impound wandering dogs if they are unidentifiable and believed to be a danger to the public. The dog can be euthanased within 48 hours if unclaimed. A dog that has previously been declared a 'dangerous dog' found wandering can be seized and impounded, and euthanased after 24 hours. All cats and dogs 3 months of age and above must be registered and wear council identification on public property. New laws have been introduced that affect declared Menacing, Dangerous and Restricted Breed Dogs. Ms McClurg said breed specific legislation did not address the issue of responsible dog ownership in the community.

"My long-term vision is for the City of Stonnington to be a leader for the other municipalities in Melbourne to show that if we address responsible dog ownership and empower people with the correct knowledge and training, we can save thousands of lives and eliminate fear in the community around dog attacks."

She said people's concern of certain breeds, such as pitbull terriers and Japanese tosas, and dog attacks was exaggerated and created unnecessary fear in the community.

"Just because a dog looks a certain way, and I see this all the time, people walk the other way and/ or pick up their own dog. There's absolutely no need for this," she said.

"I believe all dogs have the potential to be dangerous and menacing depending on how they are trained."

Ms McClurg and the PFAC team is standing for 'happy, loving and obedient dogs in homes for life'.

"I want to make a positive and sustainable difference in the lives of dogs, their owners and our communities," she said.

After sharing her vision with world-renowned American dog trainer Cesar Millan in Los Angeles last year, he fully supported her views on responsible dog ownership targeting a whole of community approach as opposed to victimising certain dog breeds.

The Paws For A Cause project has the support and backing of City of Stonnington Mayor Melina Sehr, Councillor John Chandler, the Animal Management Department, Australian actress Leah Vandenberg, My Pet Warehouse and Animals Australia.

"Be part of the culture change from killing companion animals to a culture of saving them."

Paws For A Cause will be at Como Park, South Yarra, on Sunday, December 7, with 3 walks from 10am to 2pm. Registrations are \$35 for each dog and can be made at www.mycause.com.au/events/pawsforacause

For more details, call Michelle McClurg on 0403 000 122.