



Media Release

Thursday 30 October 2014

Selwyn school children are DogSmart

Selwyn District Council's Animal Control team are visiting primary schools around Selwyn to teach children how to care for dogs and be safe around them.

The sessions are part of the DogSmart programme, which was attended by more than 1,600 children in eight Selwyn schools last year.

The forty-minute interactive sessions are presented by Animal Control officers Steve Clarke and Grant Beckingsale and cover dog safety, bite prevention and the importance of registering and microchipping dogs.

Team Leader Steve Clarke says there are a number of key messages they use to help the children understand the importance of being safe around dogs.

"We bring along one of our dogs to the DogSmart sessions and talk to the kids about how to pick up after their dog and what to do when they meet new dogs," he says. "One idea we keep coming back to is, 'if a dog's on its own, leave it alone'. This means if you see a dog you don't know, it is best not to approach it or pat it, just slowly walk past it."

A short two-minute video is shown to reinforce this message and features scenarios where children have to decide how they should react to seeing puppies and meeting a dog in a car park or on the way home from school.

Mr Clarke says using interactive tools like this are the best way to get children to remember the information.

"I've been presenting talks like this to school kids for over 17 years and it's very easy to tell when they are bored and aren't taking in what you are saying, so we actively engage them in a sing-a-long video and invite them to practise their new skills with us in a safe environment on a real dog."

Selwyn has around 12,000 registered dogs and more than 70 new dogs are registered in the district each month.

"If dogs go wandering and aren't with their owners they can be unpredictable, so we encourage kids to keep themselves safe and stay away," says Mr Clarke.

Around 20 schools in Selwyn use the DogSmart education programme and hold sessions once every three years for their students. Sessions were held at schools in Southbridge, Greendale and Prebbleton earlier this month and will be held in Lincoln and Hororata over the next two months.

Prebbleton Primary School teacher Cherie Harris says the children's participation in the programme has been fantastic. "It helps give children the knowledge and skills to interact

with dogs safely. The children have been walking around singing the song from the programme 'if a dog's on its own, leave it alone', so it's obviously made an impression."

Mr Clarke says schools who aren't participating in the programme may like to coincide it with their pet days or Keep Kids Safe education programme.

"We're happy to offer this programme to all schools in Selwyn so parents may want to encourage their local school to become part of the programme if they are not already participating."

More information about the DogSmart programme is available from the Selwyn District Council Animal Control Team, ph.03 347 2800.

Ends

Photos attached:

Years 4 and 5 Prebbleton School children practise approaching Sika, Animal Control officer Grant Beckingsale's 8-year old Hungarian-Viszla dog.

Back from left to right: Ryan Garters, Seth Whiten, Callum Lockhart, Katie Steele, Jesse Williams and Emma Johnstone. Front: Animal Control officer Grant Beckingsale with Sika, an 8-year old Hungarian-Viszla dog.

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