

ADOPT A PARK PROGRAM

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1. Palmerston Background

Palmerston is the second City of the Northern Territory and is situated 22km from Darwin. The City is 21 years old this year and we have maintained our place as one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia for many years now.

The Adopt a Park (AaP) program began in Palmerston 10 years ago as a community committee of Council. It has grown from strength to strength with 15 committee members who organise events, adoptions, sponsors, promotional items, media coverage and over 800 community members who are adopters – these range from individuals, families, school classes, whole school grades, an entire school, scouts and guides groups to an Army squadron of 120 soldiers.

2. Aims

30% of our population is 15 or under and a significant proportion of these attend school irregularly or not at all. AaP's aims are many-fold:

- To give ownership to families of our parks and involve them more in community activities
- To add more eyes and ears (in the form of adopters) to the currently under-resourced police force
- To reduce anti-social behaviour, such as vandalism, graffiti, littering in and around parks
- To establish a rapport between hierarchy and youth on neutral territory (i.e. not in Court or an office rather in the parks)
- To increase usage of open green spaces and therefore increase fitness of youth which then alleviates problems resulting from boredom
- To show young people, particularly marginalised ones, that the community and businesses support them.

We enjoyed a 22.5% population growth (1999-2000 ABS figures) but the growth has consistently been 17.5%. This has dropped in the last couple of years to around 7%. The growth is attributed to an increased military presence in the Top End and young families moving from Darwin to attractive land/house packages in new estates (accounts for 60% of our growth!)

3. Initiatives

PIPP's Days – People in Palmerston Parks

These are held during the April, July and October school vacations in a different suburb each time. Families and marginalised youth from all ethnic backgrounds are invited to a free fun day when a

BBQ meal is provided, cooked by Lions Clubs members, with provisions donated by Coles and Woolworths and drinks are supplied by Parmalat (Pauls NT). The Guides, Scouts and sports clubs all provide activities such as sack races, tug o war, egg and spoon races that take street-wise kids back to a childhood that in many cases was very short or lost altogether. Average attendance is between 300 and 500. The last one held this year on July 12th attracted close to 1,000 participants. It was a combination of celebrations of National Sister City Day, Palmerston's 21st birthday and Adopt a Park's 10th birthday.

Park Adoptions and Park Watch

This involves neighbourhood groups “adopting” their local parks. This culminates in a BBQ in the park where a plaque, with all adopted families’ names engraved on it, is unveiled by the Mayor and each young adopter is given a bag of goodies such as a cap, water bottle, stickers, information – all donated by major companies such as Territory Insurance Office (TIO) or Keep Australia Beautiful (KAB). There are a number of steps leading to this:

1. A representative from an interested group attends our meeting or contacts a committee member expressing interest in adopting one of our 75 local parks (about 45 are adopted!) They then canvas the area to see who wishes to adopt the park
2. A date and time is decided and the committee makes up a flyer that is distributed by letterbox drop in the park neighbourhood informing them of the adoption
3. The BBQ to honour the adopters and unveil the plaque takes place

The result is that families get ownership of the park and are part of what we call PARKWATCH that involves reporting anti-social or criminal behaviour and keeping a general eye on the park as far as play equipment, vandalism and litter are concerned.

Graffiti Areas

A wall was erected in one of our major parks and sponsored by a local construction business. It was launched with a large group of youth led by a graffiti artist doing the “first coat”. A similar exercise took place in the park adjacent to our new skate park where the tunnel under the main road was painted and lit up and young people were given ownership and therefore responsibility for it.

Reach Out to the Community

- a) Children’s Book – a competition took place to create a mascot for AaP. There were hundreds of entries and whilst “Reggie” the redwing parrot won, a number of other creatures such as “Wally” the Wedge-tailed Eagle, “Libby” the Lizard, “Frank” the Frog, “Frances” the Frill-necked Lizard, “Roger” the snail, “Gary” the Gecko, “Pamela” the Python and “Luali” the Quoll gave us the idea
- b) to create a children’s book called “Reggie and Friends”. A local author and illustrator created a book that tells the story of the cost of vandalism and litter to creatures who eventually turn the young vandals into productive carers of the parks. The book has been sold around the community for a number of years and has sent out a very positive message to youth.
- c) Newsletter – This is distributed three times a year to keep adopters informed of activities – it has photos of PiPP’s days and upcoming activities
- d) Displays – such as “*Vandalism – what cost to the Community?*” have been initiated by Adopt a Park to increase a sense of community responsibility to report suspicious activities. This particular display is outside the library and has travelled to shopping centres, the Palmerston Festival, NT Expo and gives a breakdown of dollar cost to the community of various forms of vandalism

By Laws

I am currently investigating the introduction of a by-law to prevent the sale of aerosol paint cans to minors (similar to restrictions put on the sale of methylated spirits in the Northern Territory). Businesses need to be consulted to ensure they are on side as well as neighbouring Councils. I am also lobbying the NT Government to support this with tough penalties for graffiti.

4. Tangible Outcomes

This initiative has had a number of measurable outcomes:

- Families getting to know each other and therefore aware of each other – always a good crime prevention strategy and what neighbourhood watch is all about
- Showing kids, particularly those at risk, that community leaders and Corporations care – the Mayor is at every event and even joins in the tug o war! Major companies like Pauls, Woolworths and Coles support the days heavily, Guides, Scouts, Kiwanis, Lions as well. This strategy helps participants with their self esteem and makes them more reluctant to vandalise, graffiti or participate in any other anti-social behaviour
- Encouraging families to get out together in their local park and spend free time TOGETHER in an active and productive manner e.g. Volleyball in the park, rather than going their own way.

5. Cost of Project

The annual cost of the project is very little as all food, equipment, bags of goodies for adopters, labour to put up shade tents, man drink stalls and cook BBQ's are sponsored. Council sponsors AaP to the tune of \$3,000 to assist with purchase of promotional items such as pencils, ruler, compasses (for orienteering activities in the parks) and sports equipment such as footballs, quoits, tug o war ropes – ball, hoops, Frisbees plus costs of erecting the plaque in each adopted park.