

Responsible dog ownership course

An online course by Blue Cross to educate individuals on responsible dog ownership legislation.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Violence (other) Anti-social behaviour Community engagement
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Region	South West
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Education Government department Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	July 2022
Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities Families General public Offenders Victims

Aim

The aim is to offer police and local authorities an out of court resolution and disposal when investigating dangerous dog related offences.

The [Blue Cross](#) charity aims to promote more positive attitudes and behaviours with owners of dogs at risk by:??

- encouraging individuals to have an awareness around responsible dog ownership legislation
- raising awareness of dog body language and to keep a dog as well as other safe
- keeping the community safe
- building rewarding relationships for dog and owners

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- reduce the number of dog bites and strike incidents
- reduce reoffending rates
- improve relationships between the police and the public

- improve community safety
- improve dog behaviour and welfare

Description

The responsible dog ownership course (RDOC) has been running since 2019 and is delivered by the Blue Cross education team. The three-hour online course is delivered on Zoom and is available to any adult who has access to the internet.

The course is aimed towards low-level, first-time offenders who commit offences under Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and [Section 2 of the Dogs Act 1871](#). RDOC places an emphasis on empowering the dog owner through education as opposed to punishment.

Referred users from Wiltshire Police are required to pay £60 (or a reduced fee of £40 if they can provide proof of means tested benefits). Blue Cross can offer support for those who have internet access but are unfamiliar with the online platform Zoom. There is no cost for the force to refer individuals to the RDOC.

Course content

The course content includes:

- knowledge and attitudes towards dog legislation
- awareness of animal welfare
- reflection of dog ownership

The RDOC is designed with varying learning styles in mind and is tailored to optimise understanding for all. The course is delivered in English, but attendees are welcome to provide their own interpreter if needed. Reasonable adjustments can also be requested if required.

Presenters of the course set out ground rules at the beginning of each session to ensure everyone is treated respectfully and the contributions are valued.

The course is routinely updated and adapted to reflect any new trends, evidence, updated laws and course feedback. Blue Cross supplies the user of the RDOC with resources from the course to support continued learning and dog ownership into the future.

Evaluation

An evaluation is ongoing and is being led by Wiltshire Police.

The evaluation is using an initial satisfaction survey which captures new knowledge one day after the course. Optional qualitative impact measurement interviews are conducted eight to ten weeks after the course.

Blue Cross contacts Wiltshire Police annually to collect statistics around reoffending.

Overall impact

As of July 2024, the Blue Cross has had 500 people participate in the RDOC. Within Wiltshire, which sits in the top five police forces and local authorities for referral numbers, there has been a 0% re-offending rate since the course was implemented.

The initial satisfaction survey reveals what attendees felt they had learned across the course (based on 60 respondents):

- Dog law and legislation: 46
- Where to get extra help: 43
- Dog body language: 41
- Muzzle training: 32
- Choices of leads and muzzles: 30
- Keeping children safe around dogs: 28
- Training dogs positively: 22
- Options for enjoyable lead walking: 22
- None of the above: 2

Feedback

The following feedback has been provided via the qualitative impact measurement interviews:

- “He [the dog] is generally less stressed. I am taking control more. When the incident occurred, I was too relaxed and not prepared and thinking that everything will always be okay. He is a big dog and now I understand that”.

- “I am more aware of how she [the dog] is feeling in different situations. She has improved with people as I am reading when she is anxious and giving her space and keeping her occupied through training, which is working well”.
- “The course was very beneficial. It changed me on how to look at what’s going on with her, and how to change things for her and me. I look forward to doing the training with her”.

Learning

- Some individuals struggled to access the internet or have a stable internet connection.
- While a reduced fee is offered, some users faced financial barriers paying for the course.
- Some users referred by Wiltshire Police were deemed to be unsuitable by the Blue Cross.

This feedback has been taken on board, with Wiltshire Police continuing to work with Blue Cross to ensure that education and training on responsible dog ownership is prioritised.

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Tags

Community engagement Crime reduction