

Meeka Discovery Trail & Physical Activity Promotion

Background

Meekatharra is a small isolated community located 756kms north east of Perth. The Shire of Meekatharra has a population of 1,500 with approximately 1,100 people living within the town. The remainder of the population is spread among two Aboriginal communities and pastoral stations. Approximately 50% of Meekatharra's population is Indigenous and physical activity levels throughout the community are lower than the state average.

To enhance physical activity opportunities and town amenities, the Shire in partnership with a number of government and Indigenous agencies, has built the Meeka Rangelands Discovery Trail. The 3km long trail enables locals and visitors to safely walk and cycle the unique town environment. The Shire of Meekatharra has developed a series of promotional activities and materials to encourage use of this new facility and increase participation in walking and other physical activities.

Project Objectives

- Increase awareness, knowledge and participation in physical activity among people in Meekatharra.
- Increase community capacity to promote and facilitate physical activity opportunities in Meekatharra.
- Ensure the Shire of Meekatharra's programs and services encourage and facilitate community involvement in physical activity.
- Ensure the Shire of Meekatharra's physical and social environments will support physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

Project Strategies

- Provide leadership and coordination for physical activity.
- Develop programs and promotional events in collaboration with an advisory committee consisting of members from the Departments of Community Development, Education and Training, Sport and Recreation and Health; Police; Yulella Aboriginal Corporation; and local business.
- Implement promotional programs e.g. a targeted pedometer project, a walking program, and 'have a go' days.
- Develop and distribute trail maps (which include physical activity messages and information) through local businesses and facilities.
- Include messages in the local monthly newspaper which promote the importance of being active, the use of the trail for walks and other physical activity opportunities.
- Train local people to develop leadership skills and deliver a range of physical activity programs, with the assistance of the Department of Sport and Recreation.



- Support members of local groups, including Aboriginal Health Workers, the young Aboriginal mothers group and people who care for the aged, to be walk leaders.
- Encourage active lifestyles through programs initiated by Community Development and Youth Centre staff, school and other community groups.
- Target older residents to link their existing groups, activities and programs to use the walking trail.
- Develop a feedback mechanism (path report form or similar) to ensure the trail and other paths are maintained to a high standard.
- Provide physical activity facilities that are appealing, well constructed, clean and pleasant.
- Review pathways and develop a work plan to ensure access and links to the trail and other community facilities, e.g. paths are continuous and in good repair and trees provide shelter.
- Consult and work with community groups to ensure access to resources and facilities in the Shire of Meekatharra is equitable for all.



Project Results

- 40 people participated in the Bike to Brunch event as part of Bike Week.
- 20 children were involved in the Bike Safety Project. This was conducted on the bike training facility, which forms part of the trail.
- An attempt was made to organise women's walking groups, however to date participation rates have been low. Community Health will work on establishing these in the future.
- A pedometer loan scheme has been established at the Shire of Meekatharra's office.
- 20 people participated in the Meekatharra Step Challenge for one month.
- 60 people attended the official opening of the Meeka Rangelands Discovery Trail.
- 5,000 brochures and 1,000 guides/maps have been produced and are being distributed.
- Information on the Meeka Rangelands Discovery Trail is available on the Shire's website at www.meekashire.wa.gov.au/meekatrails/
- The trail has attracted a large number of casual walkers, including locals and tourists.
- 25 residents have participated in a gym training workshop. This included the development of individual training programs to enable residents over 16 years, to participate in self directed programs at the newly established gym.
- 30 adults and children participated in the King of the Hill walk and run event, held on Physical Activity Awareness day 2004.

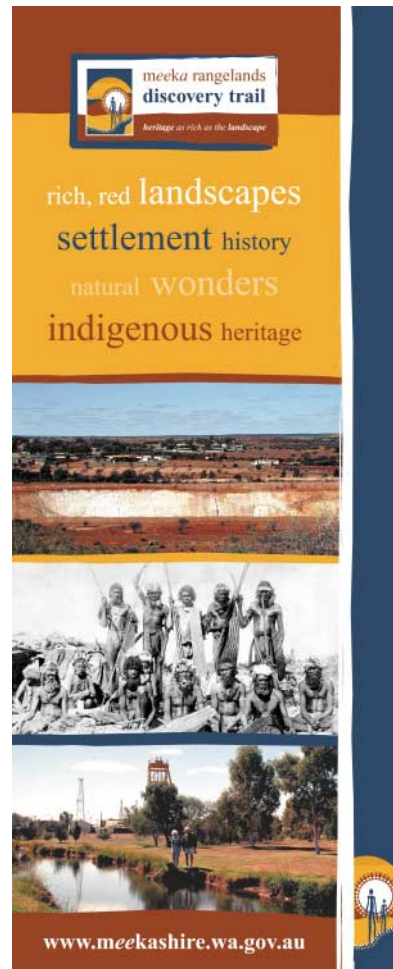


Where to from here?

- An Active After School Communities program will be established with the school and Shire of Meekatharra.
- King of the Hill will become an annual event.
- The Meeka Rangelands Discovery Trail will continue to be maintained to a high standard. Plans are underway to extend the trail across the gorge with a swing bridge and other features to increase its length and points of interest for locals and visitors.
- Yulella Aboriginal Corporation will develop a botanical garden near the trail.
- Weekly social sport and competitions including Auskick, basketball, netball, tennis, belly dancing and kinder gym are planned.

Lessons learned

- Recruiting and training leaders and volunteers for walking and other activities has been difficult. Participation has generally been high when activities are organised by staff from the Shire or school.
- Improved facilities have led to increased participation in unstructured physical activity programs such as walking and gym.
- There has been a noticeable increase in participation in physical activity by community members. It is felt that the support for physical activity, in conjunction with other community development strategies, has contributed to a decrease in antisocial behaviour and issues.



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