



# Even dogs need a park

THERE are wonderful people out there who simply refuse to see handicaps in front of them. They would rather focus on the abilities of each individual they meet, and offer the best support possible for people with disabilities.

Last week brought many lessons for me as I got down to tackle one of my favourite subjects – dogs!

After a three-month "temporary absence" as Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) councillor, I managed to get our Canine Advisory Team (CAT) going again on Monday. CAT is a special committee which looks into issues involving canines in the city and comes up with humane methods to solve the problems. The meeting was packed with representatives from MBPJ and other local councils.

Also present were representatives from the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS), the Malaysian Small Animal Veterinary Association, animal welfare NGOs and pet lovers.

We covered a wide range of topics during the three-hour meeting. The main focus was the need to have dog parks so that pets can have access to regular exercise. Human beings are not the only ones who find it therapeutic to walk in the park; even dogs do!

Canines that are confined at home or in a cage would be better adjusted socially and be less of a nuisance to local councils if they had a park to go to for regular exercise.

CAT decided to set up a committee to identify suitable areas to start a "test-case park" where owners who brought their dogs would be responsible for their pets. This means keeping them on a leash at all times, and promptly picking up after them.

On Wednesday it was another CAT meeting, this time with the Klang Municipality (MPK). I met

up with MPK health director Zulkifli Abbas to talk about the launch of their local pound later this year.

MPK's pound is set to become the nation's first to follow to the letter the guidelines on pound management as set by the DVS. It is hoped that MPK's pound will be a model for other pounds in the country. The MPK pound and PJ dog park will be wheelchair-friendly.

On Friday, the Malaysian Kennel Association and Petpositive met up with DVS director-general Datuk Dr Abdul Aziz Jamaluddin to express our concern over the tendency to target dogs instead of irresponsible pet owners who are really to blame when canines misbehave.

The outcome of that meeting is that the DVS will be coming out with a dog owner's guidebook in October. The guide will also include a chapter on animal-assisted therapy.

My week ended on a positive note when I was invited to a dog seminar where MKA educated an audience of dog lovers on how to bring up their pets responsibly.

During the session on questions from the floor, someone insinuated that the recent dog mauling case involving an elderly jogger in Subang Jaya, may have happened because he provoked the animal.

In response, I pointed out that no matter how much we love dogs, no one should condone an animal attack, especially when a death has occurred.

Everyone has the right to a safe environment outside their homes. Dogs should be used for positive purposes such as for therapy and healing, never for anything that involves violence or injury.

No dog should be let outside its compound without being accompanied by its owner. A problem dog is the result of an irresponsible owner.