

A career in canine capers

Kathy Kopellis McLeod does not mind that her clients energetically jump on her, try to grab her shoes, poke her with their noses and slobber on her.

In fact, the 38-year-old professional dog trainer and behaviour consultant, of Dianella, says she absolutely loves it.

"I can honestly say, without any hesitation, that I love what I do," Mrs Kopellis McLeod said.

"I love helping dogs and their owners. The difference I can make to the relationship between dog and owner inspires me to keep doing what I do.

"When we bought our first Siberian husky called Mech (pronounced Metch) over 12 years ago I had a sneaky suspicion I needed training. So off we went to our local dog club to learn about dog training. I loved it.

"Not long after that I became a trainee instructor then soon graduated to instructor level. It wasn't a chore. Too much information wasn't enough. I was like a duck to water."

After doing volunteer instructing at her local club for a few years, Mrs Kopellis McLeod worked for the RSPCA. Increasingly, people asked her for advice on training and problem behaviours.

For 16 years before this, Mrs Kopellis McLeod worked for Western Power as a human resource officer.

"Three years ago I took the brave move to start my own dog training and consulting business helping dog owners in the privacy of their own home across the metropolitan area," she said.

"I haven't looked back — the response has been overwhelming. The support and loyalty from veterinary clinics where my cards are displayed and previous clients is amazing."

Mrs Kopellis McLeod, who has a certificate in urban animal management and recently completed a canine behaviour specialist course, maintains a close relationship with a lot of her clients.

Having experience with many different dogs and their varied problems was the key to success in her job and this took years of hard work to develop, she said.

She has sound knowledge of the psychology of learning and behaviour, and keeps an open mind about changes in training and behaviour modification presented by scientific and anecdotal research.

"I recently attended the Monty Roberts (horse whisperer) seminar and this clarified that I am indeed on track with my training techniques,"



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DOG TRAINER KATHY KOPELLIS MCLEOD, PICTURED WITH HER HUSKY, MECH.

she said. "And importantly, you need to be very good at 'reading' dogs and understanding their language."

Mrs Kopellis McLeod said training dogs was important due to an increased awareness of dog behaviour by the public.

She said people who had bought or been given a dog, as well as long-term dog owners, often discovered their pets had developed annoying or undesirable behaviours.

"I've helped people avoid making hasty decisions about their problem dog — making the difference between keeping or 'getting rid' of their dog."

"I am called for anything from toilet training issues, jumping, biting/mouthing, and general misbehaviour to separation anxiety, aggression and more," she said. "I work closely with

a certified veterinary animal behaviourist for behaviour problems out of my realm.

"I have a special interest in dog-to-dog aggression. Every week I receive calls from concerned dog owners about their dogs' anti-social behaviour. The basis of my training is via positive reinforcement techniques. I have no room for outdated punishment-based techniques.

"Once in a while, you have the odd dog owner who doesn't commit to the training program and hence, the lack of improvement in their dog is of no surprise. But that's a rarity. Most of my clients are serious, dedicated people."

Mrs Kopellis McLeod said she was "obsessed" with learning about dogs in general, and spent her spare time researching topics for clients, reading dog behaviour literature and watching and studying video footage.

When she is not working at weekends, she enters her huskies in obedience and agility trials.

"This is my outlet for relaxation and I enjoy it very much. I have achieved success in both these areas with my dogs."

Mrs Kopellis McLeod will release her first book on dog training this year.

For more information, contact Kathy Kopellis McLeod on 9345 5277.