

Playing to win the fight against rabies: A board game that can save lives

January 22 2013



Children in Lipa City, the Philippines, testing the game.

In 'Dog Village' the aim is to successfully raise a puppy that wins the honour of being best dog in the village. It is a fun board game where players have to navigate obstacles and overcome challenges but in this case the players may genuinely be playing for their lives.

"A group of postgraduate students from the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney created this [game](#) to educate children about rabies, a disease that kills over 55,000 people each year in

Asia and Africa," said Professor Michael Ward, Chair of Veterinary [Public Health](#) and Food Safety at the University.

The game is targeted at the most vulnerable age group, children younger than 15 years. The [World Health Organisation](#) reports that 40 percent of people bitten by suspected rabid animals belong to this age group because of their [close relationships](#) with dogs.

The Philippines is affected by rabies and Dog Village or Barangay Dogsville in Tagalog, a main language of the Philippines, is a role-playing game set in an imaginary Filipino village. As they navigate its streets the users learn about [preventive measures](#) against rabies, including responsible pet ownership.

Drawing, music, drama and science are all part of the multifaceted game which was conceived, designed and produced by postgraduate students Robert Barwell, Sarah Jayme, Susan Thomson and Anke Wiethoelter, during a course taught by Jürgen Oschadleus.

Sarah Jayme, who is based in the Philippines, recently trialled the game on sixth-grade students at a school in Lipa City, south of Manila. "After playing, the students exclaimed how enjoyable the game had been," said Dr Jayme. "They also showed they had learnt about rabies, for example that people should consult a doctor if bitten by a dog."

"They picked up on the game's main messages such as the importance of an annual [rabies vaccination](#) by a vet, feeding your dog good quality food and training it."

Impressed, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has expressed interest in mass production and distribution of the game.

"We are excited about the likely distribution of the game to children in

developing countries and hope that it will be a useful addition to the existing rabies preventive methods," said student Anke Wiethölter.

Rabies is a significant veterinary public health problem around the globe. Australia is fortunate enough to still remain free from the disease with the benefit of its natural geographic border; however, the disease is slowly encroaching as [rabies](#) remains a persistent problem in many Asian countries and is now only 350 kilometres from northern Australia.

Dog Village was developed as part of the project management course within the Veterinary Public Health Management postgraduate program at the University, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. Integrating scientific skill and leadership competence, the program has produced 63 veterinary public health graduates, many of whom have established themselves as leaders in their field.

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: Playing to win the fight against rabies: A board game that can save lives (2013, January 22) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-01-rabies-board-game.html>

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