

Bath
Cats & Dogs
Home

Impact Report 2024



Introduction

Nationwide, animal rescue centres are struggling against a rising tide of neglect and abandonment.

It's in this tough environment that we are fighting to improve the fortunes of the most in-need cats and dogs.

National conversations around pet ownership are frequently alarming, with poorly bred puppies and kittens, expensive vet care and dog attacks all prevalent in the news.

The tide is turning though. Research shows people increasingly turn to animal welfare charities like us for advice. And in our region at least, animal charities are the most popular cause to support.

The steps we've taken, both at our rehoming centre and in the wider community, enable us to better respond to these challenges: rescuing the cats and dogs with the most complex problems, and providing essential care for the pets of vulnerable owners so problems don't escalate.

Challenges we face

Abandonment is high, particularly in dogs. Increasing numbers are arriving as strays, and fewer are being claimed by their owners.

The care they need is complex.

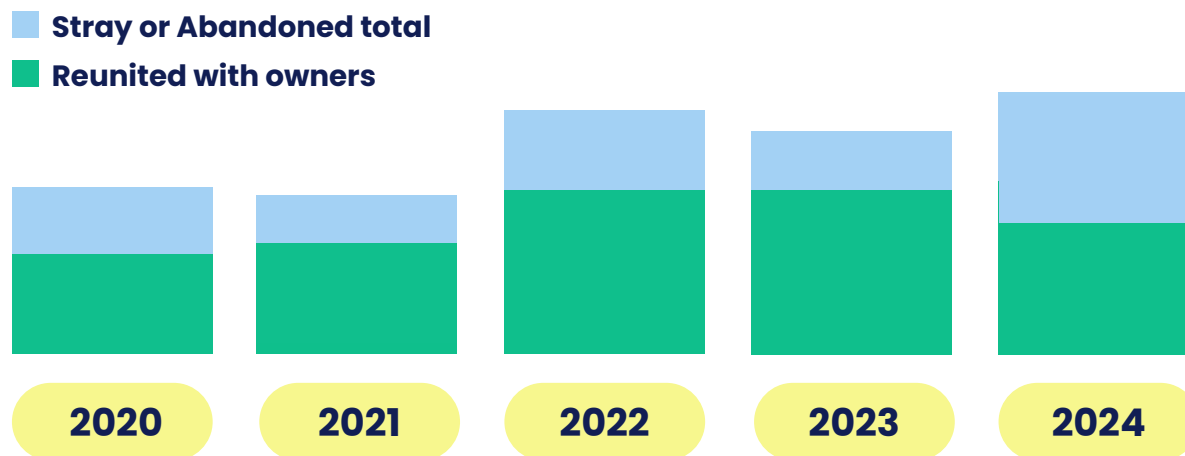
Many animals come to us with severe behavioural and medical trauma. They need more care and longer rehabilitation which means we have had to reduce the number of animals coming in to our care. And because of their traumatic pasts, there are fewer homes that are suitable to their specific needs.

Meanwhile, nationwide, fewer people are adopting cats or dogs.

Our own research shows that 40% of people in our area would consider adoption. However, large national surveys show a decline in choosing rescue over other choices. And pet ownership overall is finally starting to decline after the Covid-boom, meaning fewer potential adopters.



Stray dogs per year



Welfare at risk

National issues shaping 2024

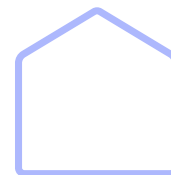


The ban on XL Bully type dogs was brought in.

Many large bull-breed dogs were abandoned by their owners, rather than registered. The legislation was brought in with speed, causing confusion as to who was responsible for formally identifying XL Bullies. Unavoidably, rescue centres that take in strays became involved in the assessment and, ultimately, the euthanasia of these dogs, bringing with it a significant financial and emotional toll.



Hare-coursing continued to be a prevalent criminal activity in our region, particularly around Salisbury Plain. Many lost or abandoned lurchers were brought to us by the Dog Warden.



The cost of living continued to increase through the year, putting pressure on household spending, affecting our supporters and pet owners in our community. This means that people are giving less and we continue to see pet relinquishment for financial reasons.



Our Impact

Expert Care

We give expert care, prioritising cats and dogs that have been abandoned or need urgent and complex rehabilitation.

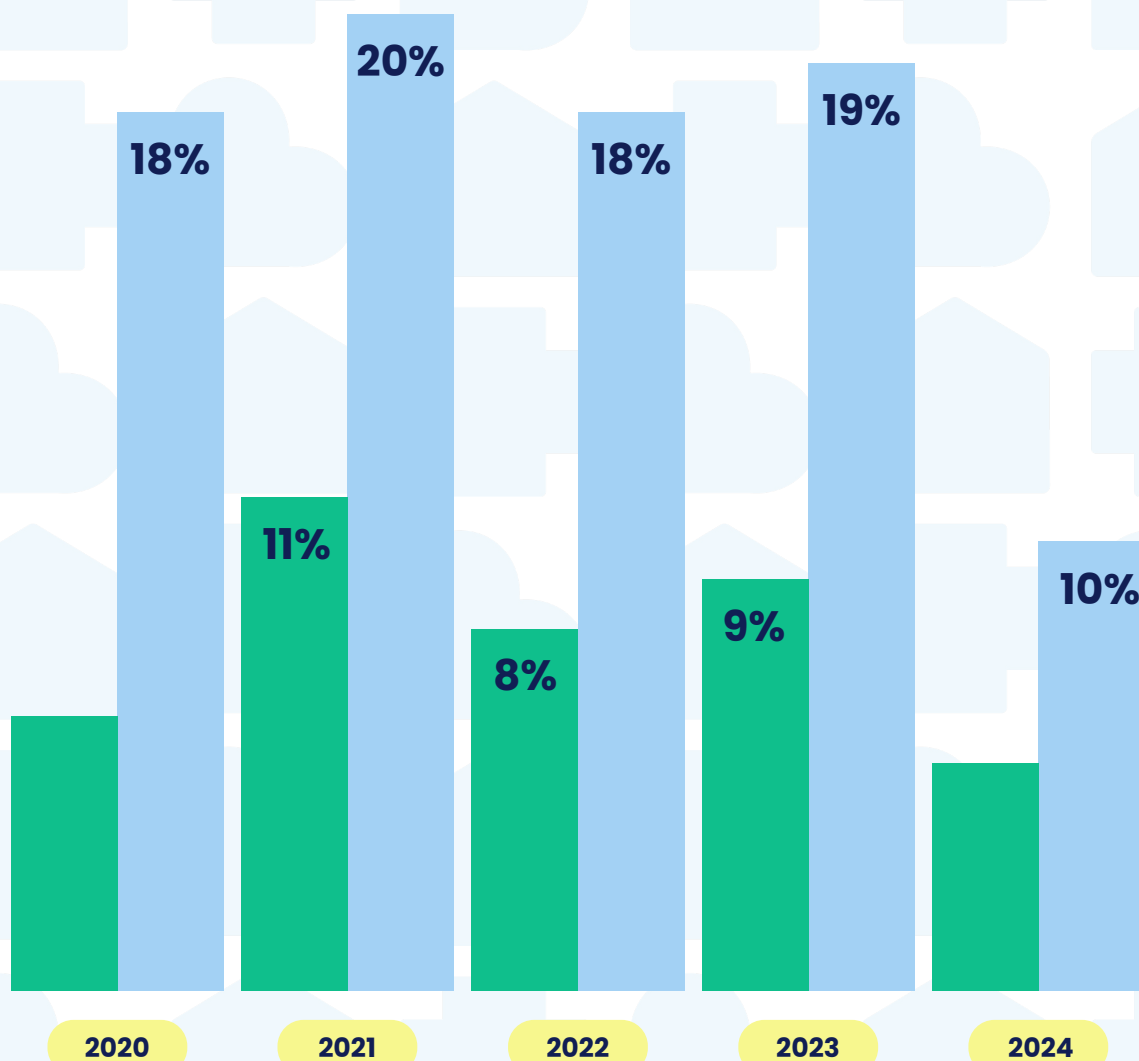
Post-adoption, we continue to provide advice to every adopter, and even medical or behaviour care if their new cat or dog needs that extra support to settle into their new home.

We take a holistic approach, giving every cat and dog a behaviour assessment and vet check-up, and creating them a personalised care plan for their journey towards adoption.

2024 Highlights

% Return rate

- Returned dogs
- Returned cats



RSPCA.
PAWPRINTS
Animal Activity
Licensing Award
2024 GOLD

- Awarded the **RSPCA Gold PawPrints** Award for excellence in Stray Dog Services.
- **Fewer animals returned to us after adoption.** This is a combination of investment and training in how to rehabilitate cats and dogs with complex behavioural and medical needs, and better matching to suitable homes.
- **Improved veterinary facilities,** allowing more flexibility to accommodate urgent and severe cases, as well as improving recovery times.

Story Jack

On a chilly spring day, the local dog warden brought in a stray – an elderly Jack Russell terrier, underweight, with overgrown nails and skin ravaged by fleas. Although obviously hungry, he could barely slurp some wet food. When Head Vet, Michaela checked his mouth, she was shocked:

“It was the worst dental disease I have ever seen, his entire mouth was infected.

Legally, we can’t treat unclaimed strays. We don’t have their owner’s consent. All I could do was give him pain medication, and clear space in our schedule to operate the moment we hear something.

Jack had to wait a week in that state – the legal minimum to see if his owner would claim him. They didn’t. The second he was signed over to us, we had him in the operating theatre.

As I removed the tartar, many of his teeth fell out of their sockets, only held in by the infected matter. But that wasn’t the worst. As I worked my way around his mouth, suddenly part of his lower jaw detached. A fragment was in my hands.

I won’t lie, it was devastating. It had never happened to me before. The infection had destroyed Jack’s jawbone. We couldn’t move

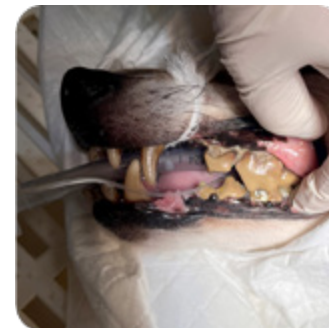
him to x-ray, so I checked by hand for further fragments and sutured the wounds. It was exhausting.

In the moment, you have to push away the anger that someone had let this sweet dog get to this state and focus on what you can do for him now.

Thankfully, following that, Jack’s quality of life quickly improved. We started him on soft puppy food, and we were so happy the day he could start taking treats.

It took time for him to figure out how to pick up a tennis ball with just his two remaining teeth, but he had that terrier spirit – ‘I will do it!’

Within two weeks, he’d put on a kilo in weight and regained a zing that had just been a glimmer when he came in. Soon after he was adopted to a loving home with a ready supply of tennis balls.”



Our Impact

Transforming Lives

As we take each cat and dog through their personal care plan, our rehoming team start to identify potential new owners.

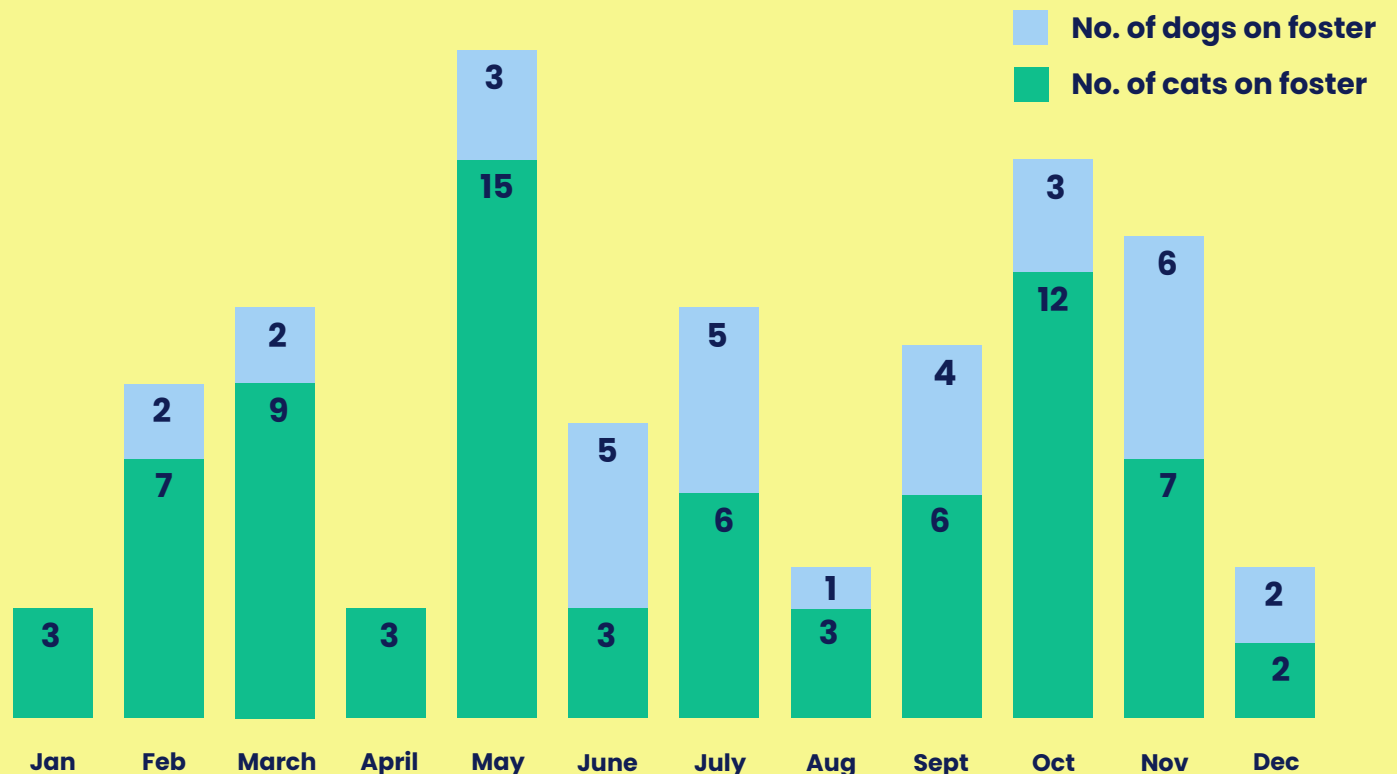
We are hugely grateful for the hundreds of adoption applications we receive, and we consider each one very carefully. We look to match the household, and their lifestyle, with the needs of the dogs or cats in our care.

We encourage anyone who's interested to consider adopting, regardless of their circumstances. Ultimately there is a rescue pet out there for anyone with an open mind and patience. We give advice and support, and a realistic idea of what to expect. Once a potential adopter is ready, we introduce them to our expert animal carers and behaviour assessors, and then to cats or dogs that might be suitable.

The process is rigorous and designed to ensure the adopters see every aspect of their new pet's behaviour before taking them home and give everyone the best chance of success with their new family.

2024 Highlights

- We rehomed 198 dogs and 307 cats during 2024. The numbers are slightly lower than our five-year average (dogs – 211, cats – 410), reflecting our focus on helping the most in-need cases, and the additional challenge that brings to rehabilitate them.
- Rising to that challenge, we invested in both veterinary and behavioural support, and we've seen a significant increase in the numbers of cats and dogs successfully settling in their new homes.
- In part, that success is down to our foster scheme, which we expanded in 2024 to help animals, like Artemis, who struggle in a kennel or cattery. We recruited and trained a group of 40 foster volunteers who, between them, cared for more than 160 animals over the year.



Story Artemis

In the depths of winter, we were brought a stray cat – scruffy and listless, with blood around her nose. Her abdominal wall was ruptured – an injury often caused by being hit by a car.

Given the urgency of her injuries, we had to operate before we could assess her more fully.

As she came round, we noticed her scratch her face repeatedly. We found she had severe facial dermatitis and an ear infection, so we started her on medication and fitted a cone to prevent her scratching.

It took a few weeks to find the combination of diet and medication that allowed her skin to heal, but then other problems arose. Her behaviour changed. She shut down and became very defensive whenever approached. It seemed that the long period of wearing the cone and regularly being given medication had taken its toll.

We brought together our animal care and veterinary experts to review her care plan. We needed to balance her medical treatment with the impact on her mental health.

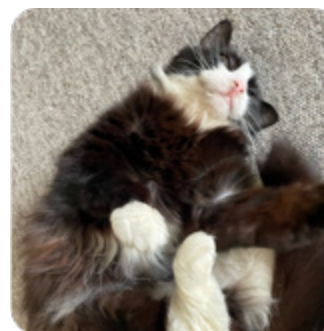
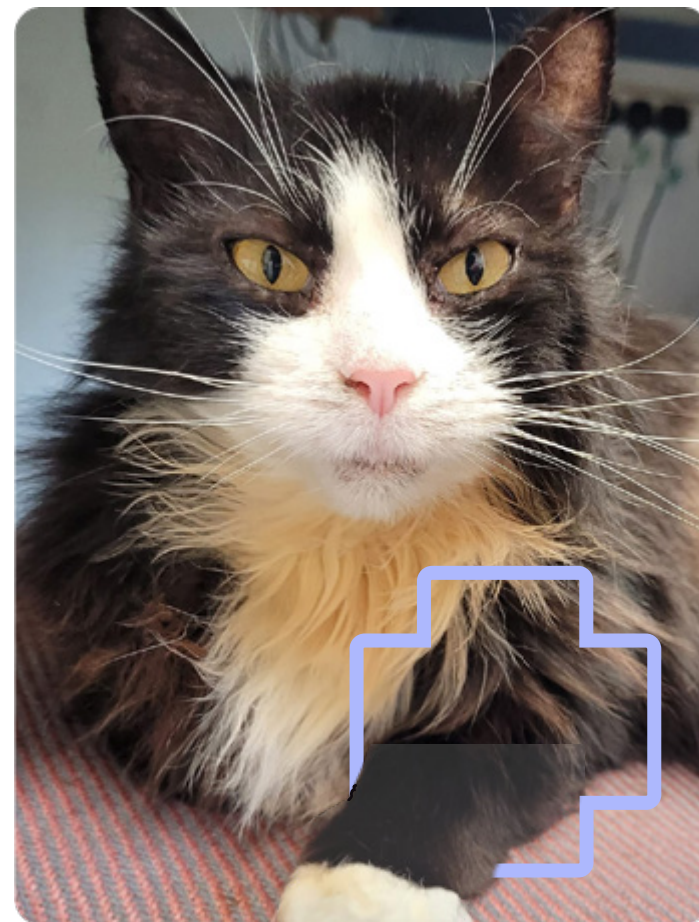
We decided to try her without her cone and stop any medication that required handling her. We knew this approach had risks, but we discretely monitored her and kept her care plan under review.

Thankfully, over the following days, Artemis's behaviour started to change again. She again became relaxed around people and even spent time in our cattery office, where we could keep an eye out for scratching and observe how she reacted to new people coming in.

Cats are very sensitive to their environments, and Artemis clearly showed it. We decided to try her in a foster home. We thought she might do better away from place where she'd been treated, so we homed her with one of our amazing foster volunteers, Lydia.

Lydia's house gave Artemis an extra degree of freedom, which she loved, and we knew she was safe under Lydia's watchful care. And it worked, because just under a year from when she was brought to us, an adopter came forward. At the end of her first week in her new home, we heard how well she was doing:

"She is out exploring the house and has joined me on the sofa for the first time this morning. She already has a few favourite spots and especially likes to sit up on the windowsill in her room watching the world go by."



Story Parsley

Parsley came to Bath Cats and Dogs Home as a stray in January 2024. He was adopted by Liz and Ed in late March.

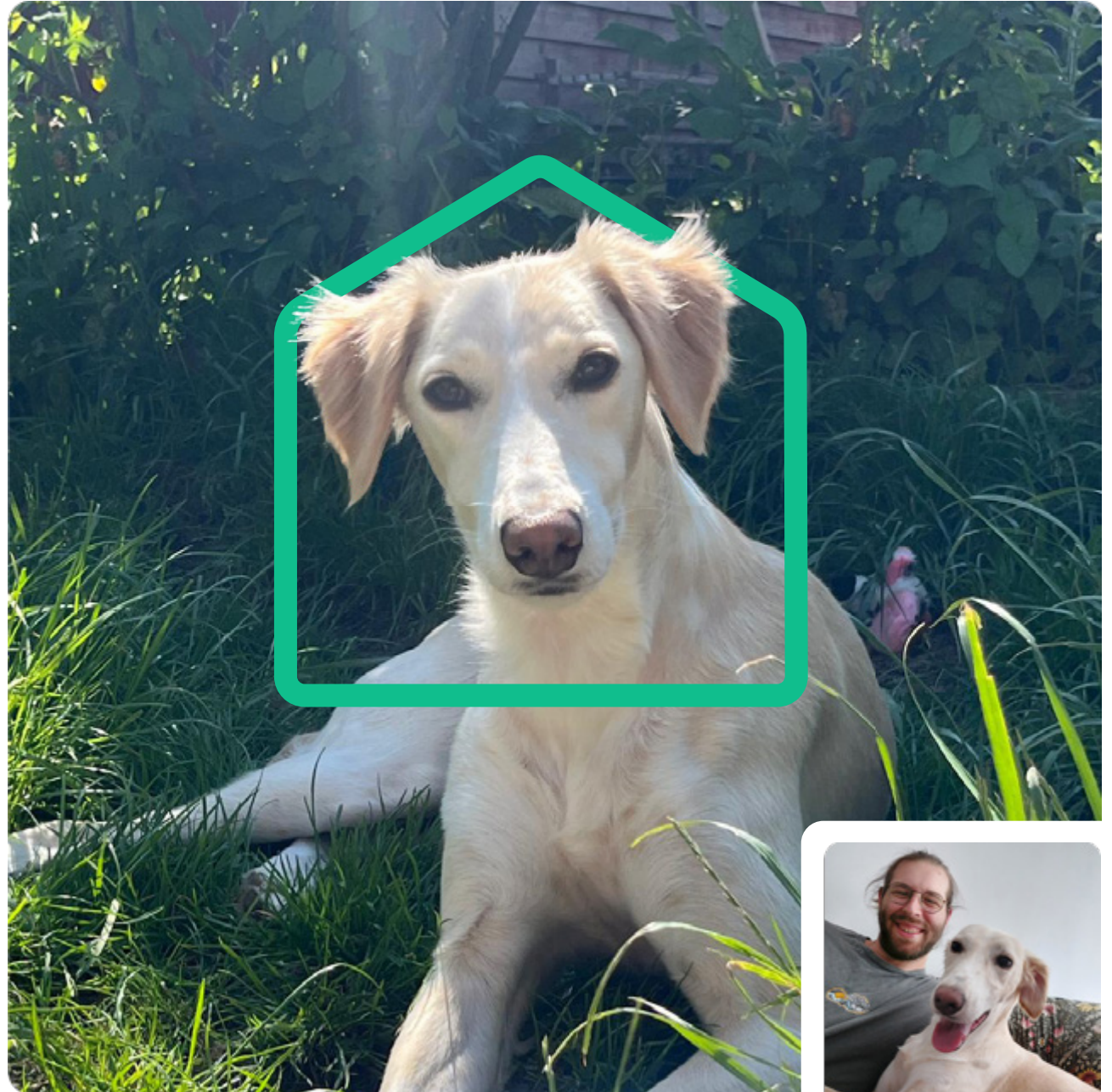
"It was very important to us to find our dog from a place that understood the dog, and was realistic with regards to a rescue's potential complex needs.

The team we met clearly gave Parsley the best support and love they could while he was in their care. And for that I am incredibly grateful.

One said that they never want to assume how the dogs are feeling because they don't know for sure, but if they could guess they'd say Parsley was a happy guy. He truly is.

He loves to sprint around in the fields near our house, and I think the lovely members of your team who knew Parsley would be surprised to learn that he does so off-lead sometimes! He now knows sit, paw, up, lie down, come and wait!

Parsley is such a happy boy and fitted in very quickly to his forever home and family."



Our Impact

Supporting our Community

We believe every cat and dog should enjoy a healthy life and a happy home. And we start by helping the cats and dogs in our community, living with their owners.

Financial pressures mean many pet owners struggle to pay for essential care for their pet. Many sacrifice their own care to feed their pet, but sometimes it can reach a point where problems go untreated.

We help vulnerable owners to access veterinary treatment when it's needed, so problems don't escalate.

We don't want any loving, caring owner to have to relinquish their pet to a rescue centre or worse, feel they have no option to abandon it.

And we provide general advice for less acute cases, because when a pet owner properly understands their pet's needs, then they can lead happy, healthy lives. Our free information online covers health and welfare basics for every owner. Plus, we offer talks to schools, so we can educate the next generations of pet owners.



2024 Highlights

- We had **91 requests** for help with veterinary costs – **up 8%** on 2023. We provided financial help to **48 cases**, giving **£119 on average** to enable vulnerable owners to access emergency care for their pets that would otherwise have **been beyond** their means.
- The **Together Project**, which gives veterinary care to the pets of people at risk of homelessness, directly helped **28 animals** and their owners. We provided 5 on-street clinics and 5 clinics at the Genesis Trust in Bath, plus carried out **18 consultations** at our veterinary suite at Bath Cats and Dogs Home, including **two operations**.
- We provided more than **5,300 meals of pet food** to food banks in Bath, Frome and Trowbridge, supporting some of the most **vulnerable pets** in the community.





Together Project

"With the rising cost of living there is a small population of people who can't access much-needed veterinary services and obviously their animals are still becoming unwell or need preventive care.

The majority of cases we treat are straightforward, but the team has recently seen an increase in cats and dogs coming in with complex medical problems.

What we are doing is making sure these animals are as well as possible and providing their owners with the peace of mind that their pets are happy and safe."

**Dr Nicola Chouler, Veterinary Surgeon and
Together Project volunteer**



Foodbanks

"We are meeting more and more people needing to use the foodbank who also have pets to care for, particularly people finding themselves in this situation for the first time.

We know that without the availability of pet food at our centres that many may use the food intended to feed themselves to feed their animals.

For some this could prevent them having to make the difficult decision to give up their pet."

**Grainne Moher, Bath Foodbank Manager for
Genesis Trust**



Bath
Cats & Dogs
Home

Transforming Lives
SINCE 1937

Our Shop

We were very proud to open a Bath Cats and Dogs Home shop on George Street in Bath.

Despite our long history, this is the first time we've had a physical presence in the city centre. It's fantastic for raising much needed donations, and it is an important place for people to come to find out more about our work.

Our Impact Future Development

As well as measuring the impact of what we do already, we're continually looking both inside and outside of Bath Cats and Dogs Home for ways we can extend our reach and do more for animal welfare.

Last year we took the opportunity to improve our on-site veterinary suite. The new layout allows more flexibility to fit emergency procedures into our schedule, and improved recovery areas for cats and dogs means we can treat more animals each day.

We continued to build relationships and collaborate with other animal rescue centres. With our colleagues from Bristol ARC and Cotswolds Dogs and Cats Home, we highlighted the impact of fireworks on pets and other animals. By working together, we put more weight behind our cause and benefit pets across the region.

Everything we do relies on the support of our community. You are the people who foster and adopt the animals in our care. You are the ones who donate and raise funds for us. And you are there as volunteers, by the side of the staff team at Bath Cats and Dogs Home each day, helping run the charity and caring for our animals.

Which is why in 2024 we asked you what you thought of the charity and the animal welfare sector more generally. Almost 500 of you responded to our survey and confirmed how important our cause is to you. You gave us plenty for us to learn from and, as we plan for the future, your feedback will be at the heart of our decision making.





Bath Cats and Dogs Home is part of the RSPCA network and works closely with RSPCA Inspectors to care for animals where there are immediate concerns for their welfare.

RSPCA.

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