

PAW PRINTS

Issue No. 92 | Autumn / Winter 2020



LINA

AND HER ELEVEN PUPS

From birth at Assisi to training with the Metropolitan Police, read about the incredible journey of Lina and her pups!



Assisi Animal Sanctuary is Northern Ireland's largest independent Animal Welfare charity, providing a shelter for up to 200 companion animals including dogs, puppies, cats, kittens, rabbits and guinea pigs.

Check out our Assisi website www.assisi-ni.org

A Message from **ASSISI** CEO

When I last put pen to paper in our Spring/Summer edition of Paw Prints, little did I know what was in front of us – COVID 19!

The Sanctuary closed to visitors in late March as we locked-down along with everyone else. We are still closed to visitors but thankfully started to rehome and take in dogs, cats and small animals again in July once we were able to ensure safety for all concerned as things started to ease.

Whilst we haven't helped as many animals as last year, life after COVID has meant a number of changes to the way we operate and as in all adversity we have found opportunity. Rehoming has picked up really well and we are seeing people by appointment only and doing video home checks. When potential new owners visit they get a great one-to-one service and as a result we have seen many of our long-term residents find loving new homes. Despite the lock-down we have still managed to help over 250 animals through the sanctuary to the end of August and expect to help many more in the run up to Christmas.

Regular readers will also know that we run Chance of a Lifetime working with Dogs Trust to rescue nearly 2000 dogs from pounds each year. This scheme was also put on hold for several months but has just started once again. The good news is that we have not experienced the influx of enquiries to take in stray dogs despite the pounds having been closed for several months. Where have all those dogs gone? Strange times indeed!

I must also, at this point, pay tribute to our animal care staff who came in every day throughout the pandemic to care for the animals at the sanctuary and also our reception staff who were there 7 days a week to answer telephones and offer advice to our community. Sadly we had to close our three charity

shops and staff were put on furlough as well as a number of other colleagues.

As you can imagine, the loss of income over the past 6 months through loss of shop trading, fundraising events and rehoming has hurt. In order to carry on we have had to borrow a significant amount of money to allay the six figure shortfall and we have also made a number of grant applications. A few were successful, for which we are very grateful but sadly we were rather let down by government promises which did not materialise.

On a happier note I am pleased to report that we will survive thanks to the hard work put in over the years by staff, trustees and particularly our supporters. We have a nest egg of funds to see off rainy days and my goodness it has poured for months! We are a bit worse for wear, but will certainly be stronger going forward thanks to your continued support.


It is a truism to say that cash is king for income generation but running a close second are our volunteers. As our shops slowly

get back to trading we have inevitably seen a decline of 50% in the volunteers that have so selflessly kept our shops trading at a profit in the past. I must therefore make a plea to you. If you are able to give us 3 hours of your time once a week, to help our shops get back to full trading in Bangor, Newtownards and Ballynahinch, we would love to hear from you. If you would like to find out more, email info@assisi-ni.org



Nigel Mason
CEO Assisi Animal Sanctuary

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Meet The Team...

Hi, my name is **Leah McBride** and I became a member of the Assisi Admin team back in June 2017

My involvement with Assisi came about by chance when I accompanied my Mum to the sanctuary in 2016 as she wanted to sign up to become a volunteer dog walker. It was my first time visiting Assisi and on a whim I decided to fill in a volunteering application too. I was contacted soon after to see if I would be interested in a regular shift in reception.

I started volunteering every week and loved getting to know all the staff and volunteers, as well as meeting all the Assisi residents. When a full time position became available in 2017 I jumped at the chance to join the team.



Not long after I started the job I welcomed to my home my first Assisi rescue, Bert, a 1 year old rabbit that had been handed in to Assisi by a concerned member of the public. They had found him abandoned in a hutch at the lead mines – a popular dog walking spot not far from Assisi. At the time there wasn't an available space in the small animal unit for him so I offered to foster him until a space became free. Of course when the time came to bring him back I knew that I wouldn't be able to let him go! Since then I have adopted two chinchillas, a female rabbit as a companion for Bert as well as fostering several guinea pigs and rabbits along the way!

I love all the animals at Assisi but definitely have a soft spot for the rabbits. They make fantastic companion pets but unfortunately often get overlooked as people don't realise just how much personality they have! I always make a point to come in early each morning before my shift starts so that I can spend time with the Assisi buns before I

begin my working day.

Leah McBride

Hi, my name is **Suzie McEvoy** and my first contact with Assisi was in the spring of 2015

I had come up to the Sanctuary with my family to do some dog walking and while there, I asked if I could visit the cats – my real reason for agreeing to come in the first place!

I have loved cats my whole life and while I initially thought it would be lovely just to see their wee faces, the reality of seeing all those cats who didn't have homes compared to my own spoiled kitties at home was much different. I realised I wanted to love them until they found their forever homes so I went straight to the office and applied as a volunteer. I was soon helping

out in the main cat unit, and from there moved to the kitten unit. I was helping clean and feed and of course giving lots of cuddles!

I found myself out of work the following year and began spending most of my time volunteering at the sanctuary. A part-time position came up for an admin-based role and I immediately applied for it and then when a full-time position was available I applied for it and have worked full-time in admin ever since, working front of house, answering phones, taking donations and helping with rehoming amongst other things.

People may think that working in the admin side of an animal Sanctuary is not the most exciting, but I love it and I still get the chance to see plenty of cats.

I have fostered several kittens and cats for the Sanctuary, and even



adopted a few! It is a very fulfilling feeling knowing that the tasks I perform are a vital part in supporting the work the Sanctuary does, helping hundreds of dogs, cats and small animals every year.

Suzie McEvoy

Meet The Team Continued

Brian Kelly - volunteer at the Ballynahinch shop

I have been a volunteer at the Assisi shop in Ballynahinch since November 2019 following my retirement from working for 38 years for the NHS and Queens University. I had been a frequent visitor at the shop and with spare time on my hands, welcomed the opportunity to become involved. While I have helped out in all aspects of running the shop, my main area of responsibility has been looking after the donated books, sifting through all the donations and re-organising the layout of our book display.

An unexpected but enjoyable diversion was my lead role as the big man himself on "Santa Paws" day – particularly as I have tended

to admire dogs from afar – and never owned one myself!

I am so pleased that the shop has reopened following the Covid-19 lockdown and I am very glad to be back as I believe the shop provides an important social hub in the town and for the local community in addition to raising vital funds for the animals at the sanctuary.



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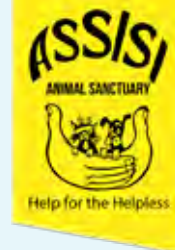
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News from THE SHOPS



Ballynahinch Shop

Tricia McKibben - shop manager

In these strange times, it's been great to be back into our Ballynahinch shop and to see our wonderful volunteers and customers again. It has taken quite a bit of getting used to adapting and doing things differently but, with all the necessary procedures and guidelines in place, the shop has been operating very successfully since reopening at the beginning of July. We have been inundated with donations since then, perhaps as a result of donors doing clear outs during lockdown but it is fantastic to receive them and it means that we continually have a large amount of goods for sale and a constant supply of new and varied items to be snapped up.

As with all our shops, some of our volunteers have not been able to return just yet, due to health issues, age and having to continue to shield.

On a brighter note, one of our newest volunteers, Brian Kelly, has done an amazing job with the book department, transforming it into something akin to a library.

We are delighted to welcome, Brian to the team. Brian joined the Ballynahinch team following his retirement from the NHS and Queens University. He had been a frequent visitor at the shop and welcomed the opportunity to become involved. Brian helps out in all aspects of running the shop, however his main responsibility is looking after the donated books, sifting through the donations and organising the layout of our book display. As a result, the income from the sale of books has greatly increased. Brian has also proved to be very diverse, and keen to get involved whatever the task may be even playing the lead role on the "Santa Paws" day!

Although these are uncertain times, I hope that, here in Ballynahinch, we can continue to trade and provide much needed funds for Assisi and the care and welfare of all our animals. I am truly overwhelmed and extremely grateful for the continued loyalty and support of our dedicated and committed volunteers, customers and supporters, without whom, we would not exist.

Newtownards Shop

Patricia Moore - shop manager

We're back and we are delighted to be to welcome back all our wonderful

customers, donors and supporters. It has been a difficult and challenging time

for everyone and that includes the animals. As you can imagine, funds have been badly affected without our shops up and running.

I must admit I felt a bit frightened when the lockdown was announced and we had to close our doors. It seemed a long time not to be at work and the uncertainty of what lay ahead for us all as the weeks vanished behind us. But here we are, back and raring to go.

Over the last few weeks we had to put in place all the Covid19 safety procedures and follow the government guidelines.

Our shop has been deep cleaned and sanitised and we have allowed extra space for our wheelchair and mobility scooter users – believe me there is room – I have tried – we had a scooter in for sale and I took a tour around the shop to make sure.

For your safety, the shop is deep cleaned before opening and after closing every day.

Donations can be left on Saturdays between 10am-4pm at the back door of the shop only. The donation room has limited space and the items need to be stored for 48 hours before being cleaned, sorted and put on the shop floor for sale.



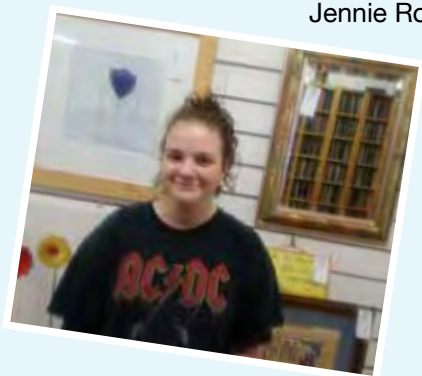
On a very sad note, one of our original volunteers who started in the Ballynahinch shop back in 2012 when we first opened, Margaret Tate, passed away in April. Margaret was a very loyal volunteer and taught me so many things to do with the shop. We shared many a laugh and she is greatly missed by me, the other volunteers and our customers.

I would like to thank our returning volunteers for their commitment and support. As yet, some are unable to return due to family/medical circumstances and having to shield but I hope to see them in the not too distant future.

We really need volunteers even if it is only for a short time. So if you can commit to a 3-4 hour shift once a week, we would be delighted to welcome you on board. Believe me, your volunteering really does

go a long way in helping the animals in our care.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce one of our young volunteers. Her name is Jennie Rose



and she is a pupil at Glenglola school in Bangor. Jennie is working towards her Duke of Edinburgh gold award and for her volunteering activity she wanted to help ASSISI as she is very passionate about the charity and animals in general. Jennie has been with us for over a year now and I have seen her personality and self-confidence grow massively over this time. She is an incredible and very valued member of the team and it is a pleasure to have her with us. If you call in on a Saturday morning you will find her beavering away so

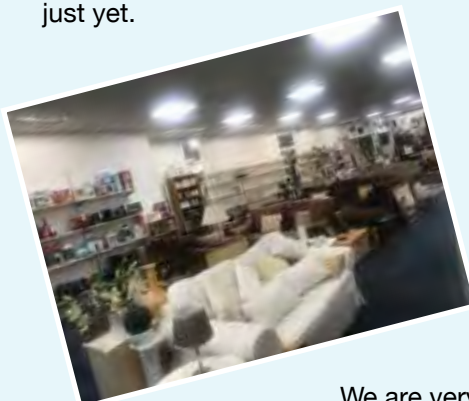
do say hello and have a chat with her.

I also wanted to say to our loyal, vulnerable customers who haven't been able to call in and see us yet, we are all thinking about you and hope to see you in the near future but in the meantime – stay safe!

Many thanks to all of you who have called in to see us, welcomed us back, shopped with us and given us your generous donations – it is very much appreciated and we are very grateful for your continued support.

Bangor Shop **Georgina Craig - shop manager**

We are so happy to be open again albeit we are currently only trading Wednesday to Saturday 11-3.00pm and can only receive donations at the back door on Saturdays as we currently still have volunteers who are shielding and unable to return just yet.



We are very keen to get back to our usual full time hours but we need help for us to be able to do that. We need some new volunteers, so if you have a few hours to spare call into our shop to see how YOU could make a difference.

Our Bangor store has had a mini makeover. We are now a Homeware and furniture store and no longer sell clothes or shoes - however we're still happy to take donations of these which we will



send on to our Ballynahinch & Newtownards stores.

We have a HUGE range of homeware including electrical items which are PAT tested weekly in store. We also have a fabulous range of jewellery from Pandora bracelets & charms to Vintage pieces making the perfect gifts.

We are the largest charity shop in Bangor and our stock changes quickly, so to avoid disappointment a deposit can secure any item - just ask in store.

We are delighted to welcome our newest volunteer, Agnieszka who hails from Poland and has lived in Northern Ireland for 10 years now. Agnieszka is a keen cat lover and is affectionately known as the crazy cat lady!

Aga joined our team in February and has been a delight and a ray of sunshine as she welcomes everyone into our store with a huge smile and always has plenty of chat.



News from THE CATTERY

The benefits of adopting an older cat

Kitten season always sees an influx of people looking to adopt a kitten or kittens. But often the reality of having a kitten in the household is more than people expect.

It is actually like having a new baby in the house and almost just as demanding. Kittens need a lot of attention to ensure that they are well socialised and they also need three regular meals a day.

They are active for short periods of time and then sleep, they need their own room to settle into the house so that they are familiar with using a litter tray and it is their space to retreat to if the house gets too busy or noisy. They should not go outside until they are neutered/spayed and are big enough to defend themselves should they be approached by another cat. We often get older cats (8 years plus) coming into the sanctuary who have had a past life with an owner who has cared for them but whose circumstances have changed and they can no longer care for their cat. Others come to us after being found as strays and having found life tough, are just in need of some TLC.

We recently had a cat handed in to us whose owner had died and he had nobody who could home him. Apollo touched everybody's hearts when he first arrived because he had very watery eyes, looked like he was crying and looked so very sad. Apollo as you can see is a lovely older guy. He is 13 years old and loves to give kisses and just loves nice tasty food and treats.

In an older cat like *Apollo, it is easier to assess their temperament. With kittens, it is a little more difficult;



we do not know their true character until they are older. A kitten can be boisterous and might not like to be handled too much. While this may change as they get older, there are no guarantees and that could remain their true nature.

An older cat tends to be more settled and just happy that they have a home and someone to care for them. Kittens will explore and climb, sometimes curtains or the back of the sofa – be prepared for complete destruction of your home – this is fun and playtime for them! If you let a kitten play with your hands, those little nips are fine but this can carry on into adulthood and it is not fun when a 6kg cat bites your hand.

Cats make wonderful pets, they can be very loving and affectionate and can be a lovely addition and member of the family, but, similar to dogs, they need a lot of care, love, attention and commitment to enable them to adapt to their surroundings and make sure that they are well adapted to your family situation.

*We are delighted to report that Apollo was adopted just recently and has now gone to his new forever home.

The Happiest of Tails

Sometimes we get cats in to the Sanctuary that are here for a mere matter of weeks – and then there are the ones like Checkers and Chica, a lovely brother and sister duo that came in to us in March of 2016. Found straying in the countryside when they were just 12 weeks old, they were small, scared and very shy around people.

From the day they arrived, they loved to play and once they completed their isolation period they were moved to the main run. It was here, with the help of our amazing cat team and dedicated volunteers they began to learn that people were not as bad as they had first thought. One of our volunteers in particular, Jenny, has a knack for working with just this type of cat and with her regular visits, feather toys and chicken treats, the pair slowly started to come out of their shells and show us their personalities.



Chica came around to human contact much faster than her brother, and could often be found waiting at the door or staring from her place at the cattery fence with her big eyes, enticing you to come in and give her attention. Checkers didn't really like to be touched but he still enjoyed playing with anyone who was holding a feather on a string.

However, they were still a little shy around new people and sadly were overlooked time and time again. As they aged, it became harder to generate interest in them, as can unfortunately be the case for black and white cats. They also developed some medical issues which were easily controlled but again made them slightly harder to rehome.

They didn't let this stop them from becoming a dominant duo in our cattery. They were excellent at looking after the other cats and could often be found cleaning, playing or snuggling with other cats, showing new residents the ropes and keeping the boisterous ones in line.

After almost 5 years with us, we were contacted by a lovely lady with several years of cat experience who wanted to adopt two cats that had been overlooked by everyone else, and Checkers and Chica were her first and perfect choice. She made her application, came to meet them, and the rest is history. There were quite a few tears shed by the cat team the day they went to their forever home, sad to see them go but happy that they were about to start a new adventure.

The biggest surprise was how quickly the people-shy Checkers took to his new mum, following her around to play or have cuddles, a bit of a shock for those of us who had tried to get a hand on him for years and failed. He's clearly a one

woman cat. Chica took a little bit longer to come around, which was understandable as the cattery was the only home she had known, but she is now finding her feet, settled in her new home, and is starting to give her infamous big eyed look for cuddles.

Although it took a little bit longer than most, this happy rehoming has been one of the best we could have hoped for and just goes to show there is a home for every cat out there. Our cat rehoming team will look for as long as it takes to find the right home for all our kitties.

If you are interested in rehoming a cat or kitten from the sanctuary, please visit our website and complete our online adoption form.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Kittens that needed help

This year kitten season started very slowly and we thought that maybe just for one year we would be taking in fewer kittens than before. I think we were being a bit presumptuous. Suffice to say, we have been really busy these last couple of months with people wanting help with unwanted kittens and the majority



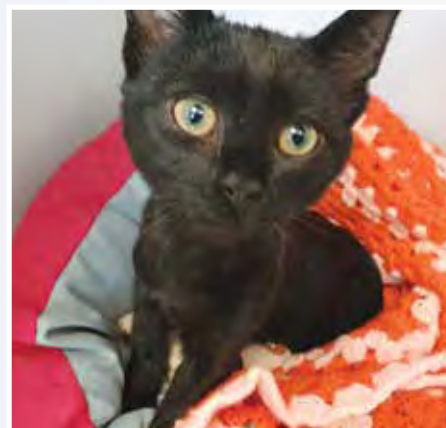
that have come to us have been sick or underweight and have needed more care than most normal kittens.

If the kittens are sick or underweight we do not let them stay at the sanctuary because we like them to have constant care, so either a staff member takes them or we would ask one of our willing cat fosterers to look after them and nurse them until they are well.

The kittens pictured above are all from the same home; they are; Darren, Dean, Dustin and Domino - they are all super friendly and well socialised but because of their colour the previous owner could not find them homes.

Peri came in with his mum and siblings but at 6 weeks old he only weighed 0.28kg and was at deaths' door. A staff member took him home and syringe fed him to build his strength. As you can see, after a rough start, he is starting to look like a healthy boy.

A special thanks to all our fosterers and staff who help care for our very young kittens in their homes to ensure they get the best start in life.



News from THE WARREN

Charles and Hudson

Charles and Hudson are two Guineas that had been at the sanctuary since October 2019. They had been continuously overlooked mainly due to their age, and some nutritional/medical needs. They were originally admitted alongside 2 more brothers, Hank and Bobby but they unfortunately didn't survive.



The two remaining boys had been turned down time after time and their future started to look like they would be living out their days at the sanctuary. However, a lovely family came forward; having previously cared for Guinea Pigs with needs. They offered Charles and Hudson the chance to live in a forever home and they are now living their life together in their cozy home and loving new family.

Poppy

Sadly, Poppy rabbit was handed back into us in January 2019 after having been rehomed previously in 2014. She had lived with her bun partner who unfortunately passed away, resulting in her being re-admitted to the sanctuary.

Poppy was not coping well at all with the change and we had to put her on some medication to help her stomach. Thankfully she started to pick up and was doing much better, so we decided we would do our best to find Poppy a new partner. Unfortunately Poppy did not take to any bun partner we attempted to pair her with.

When Poppy was originally admitted to the sanctuary, she came in with 3 other sisters, Lily, Fern and Willow. Poppy took a shine to a male bunny looking for a female partner, which is why Poppy left her sisters. The other 3 girls found a lovely home with a very kind family, where they have been able to run around and live their lives as the half wild bunnies they are in their apple orchard!

The owner of Lily, Fern and Willow has now offered Poppy the opportunity to live alongside her 3 sisters again, and we are all hoping they will get on and accept each other once again.

Vaccinating your Rabbits

Last year we wrote an article about vaccinating your rabbits against RVHD2 – Rabbit Viral haemorrhagic Disease 2. Unfortunately, the RVHD2 is prevalent again and the strain is once again circulating.

If you haven't already, we would urge you to ensure you get your rabbit vaccinated. A two yearly vaccination may save your rabbits life. Most people are already aware of the likes of Myxomatosis and VHD, which they will have their rabbit vaccinated against with the Nobivac. However, many people are still not aware of the less commonly known second deadly strain of RVHD, which is known as RVHD2. This second strain is NOT covered with the 'Nobivac', it is only covered with the 'Filavac'.

This disease is extremely quick acting, and unless your rabbit is vaccinated against RVHD2, it is at definite risk of being infected with the strain.

Please contact your vet to find out more about the Filavac/ Eravac and protecting your rabbit against RVHD2.





General Care for Small Animals

A common misconception for Rabbits and Guinea pigs is that they do not need too much care due to their size. This could not be further from the truth!

Rabbits and Guinea Pigs need the same, if not more attention than some other animals! If they are not checked regularly many issues can occur. Here at the sanctuary, all our animals are thoroughly health checked once a week, this includes monitoring weight which is especially helpful to keep an eye on some of our more elderly residents, or those who require a bit of medical care. Rabbits and Guinea's health can deteriorate exceptionally quickly, so it is important to catch anything unusual early so that it can be addressed immediately.

Below are some helpful tips on how to carry out regular health checks and what to look out for in your small furry pet:

- **Weight** – Placing the animal on the scales, ensure your hands are nearby but not on the animal, just in case they try to run off. Check their weight against their previous weight record.
- **Ears** – Whilst we can't see into the bottom of the animal's ears, we can check as deep as our eyes can see. If ears are dirty or scabby, this could be a sign of ear mites. A vet visit will be required to confirm and start any necessary treatment.
- **Eyes** – Eyes should be clear from any discharge whatsoever. If eyes have watery discharge this could be a sign of a small irritation. Ensure the eye is clear from any pieces of hay that could be the problem. A cotton ball and some warm water can help to soothe the eye and wash away any irritations. If an eye has milky/yellow/green discharge, this is a sign of infection and will require veterinary attention. If the eyes water line is red in colour, this can also be an indicator of irritation and possible infection.
- **Nose** – As these animals rely on breathing through their nose and not their mouth, noses should be clear from any discharge. If any discharge is seen, the animal may require treatment to clear up any respiratory infections.
- **Mouth and Teeth** – Mouths should be checked regularly for possible wounds or sores by

carefully opening the mouth and checking lips. Front teeth should also be checked, and should be level top and bottom. Please note that without veterinary checks, back teeth cannot be checked. It is important to have teeth checked by a veterinarian at least twice a year to ensure their teeth have not grown in such a way to ulcerate their cheeks or penetrate their tongue. Any dampness around the mouth or chin can indicate dental issues.

- **Nails/Feet/Pads/Hocks** – It can be a little difficult to check these areas, so having two people is always recommended. Nails should be short and trimmed near the quick. If not maintained, nails can grow uncomfortably long, curling round and sometimes even penetrating the foot. Feet and pads should be dry and clean, with no sores or wounds. Rabbits can be prone to hock sores, and if not treated, can turn into nasty infections.
- **Body, Coat & Bottom** – Place your hands over your animal's body, checking all areas for any unusual lumps or bumps. Rabbit's fur can often hide a lot, so take your time in searching through their coat. As you look, keep any eye out for any mites, any animal can be prone to infestations, and should be treated as soon as they are spotted. Long haired animals will need more care with their coat, ensuring matting and tatts do not occur. Checking bottoms can be a tricky task, be careful how you handle your animal, as spines are incredibly delicate. Bottoms should be kept clean from any urine and faeces stains.

If you are not used to checking an animal over, it is advised you ask your vet to show you how to do these things safely so you do not unintentionally cause harm to your animal. Checking your animal daily by a visual check as well as a weekly thorough health check is recommended, this will help to ensure your animal is in good health and treated immediately if there is an issue.

News from THE KENNELS

There was a lot going on in the kennels during the early part of the year and before lockdown. January, February and March was spent dealing with our Dutch Herder, Lina and her 11 puppies, helping raise them and working hard to find the right life and future for them all. Read our feature story on Lina and her pups to find out more about the work that was involved in finding and placing these working dogs in suitable homes and places of work throughout the UK.

When the Covid19 pandemic hit and we went into lockdown, we had to make a lot of changes to the way we worked at the sanctuary and how we handled rescues and re-homing.

During that time we set up and offered a scheme in partnership with the Belfast Trust to facilitate taking in the animals of any NHS staff that became sick.

Thankfully we did not have to do this, however, unfortunately we did receive some animals from patients of the trust who were struggling or had become sick. We also accepted some animals that belonged to NHS staff whose working hours and time away from home changed so drastically that they could no longer care for their pets.

We have been incredibly busy during lockdown. Without the support of our valued volunteers who help us massively on a daily basis, the team had to undertake their usual day to day tasks and all the tasks that volunteers would usually have helped out with. We also found ourselves getting involved with taking in and locating the owners of some stray dogs as there was no warden service during the whole of lockdown and this put further strain on all rescue organisations.

Now with the current ease of lockdown and things starting to resemble some sort of normality, we have at least been able to start re-homing again albeit in a very different way and format to before so that we adhere to social distancing and all the other legislation required of us. But at least we are able to start accommodating the numbers we used to and we are able to continue with our schemes which offer help to look after animals for those who are dealing with homelessness or are trying to escape domestic abuse and other difficult situations.

It has been good to see that some of our longer term dogs have over the last while finally found their forever homes.



A Tribute to Vern

On May 19th 2020 Assisi lost one very special boy. Vern was much loved at Assisi and he never failed to brighten up a room when he walked in - everyone at the sanctuary, staff and volunteers alike, just adored him!

Vern arrived at Assisi in 2009 and like a lot of animals that come to us, he had many issues that he needed help with. So every day, staff worked with Vern to help him through his issues and help him gain trust.

When we felt he was ready, Vern was put up for rehoming but sadly his rehoming didn't work out and he returned to the sanctuary with behavioural issues. This pattern continued and after being rehomed to four different homes with each one not working out, we began to wonder what could be wrong with Vern to be acting in such a way as he was so good when he was at the sanctuary.

We decided to book Vern in with our vets for an examination to see if he was in some sort of pain that may be causing some of the issues re-homers were encountering. And what a shock we got! Our vets discovered that there were numerous gunshot pellets embedded in his body.

These had clearly been there for some time and would have



been something he encountered before arriving at Assisi and were gradually becoming worse and more painful for him the older he got! From his ears to his back end, he was riddled with small pellets! This explained a lot about his behaviour and the incredible pain Vern was in.

When Vern came back to the sanctuary that day he naturally received a lot of TLC as it was a sad day for all of us to discover that he had encountered such hurt in his past and that he was in such terrible pain every day.

It was then that we took the decision that Vern would remain at the Sanctuary, where he was happiest, and that all of us would take care of him, love him and make sure that the rest of days would be comfortable and happy.

Despite how sore and sometimes grumpy Vern might've been over the years, he really did create a special bond with everyone at Assisi and for that matter, everyone that came in contact with him. Vern was a little dog with a giant personality and a perfect charmer.

In his younger days Vern enjoyed the company of female dogs and became known as the bachelor amongst staff and volunteers. He would chase the broom around as the staff cleaned and we liked to think he was helping us. Vern absolutely adored the beach and had lots of trips there with staff and volunteers from the sanctuary. He enjoyed sunbathing in the summer and in the winter cuddling up in his bed by the heater.

Vern really did capture the heart

of everyone he met, from those who sponsored him to those who only knew him from



photographs and Facebook posts. He was a gentleman, a character, a one off and he is very much missed by all who knew him. All of us at the sanctuary are glad we got to spend the time we did with him – it was the greatest pleasure to work with him, know him, love him and care for him and just be his friend.

We were overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and support when Vern passed and all of us here at Assisi would also like to thank you all so much your thoughtfulness and for your continued support for Vern throughout the years we had the pleasure of knowing him.

We were Vern's forever home and family. We love you Vern forever.

Connie Gilmore



LINA

THE DUTCH HERDER

On the 19 of November 2019 the dog unit staff at Assisi received a call about a shepherd cross and her puppy that needed help after they had been removed from a house by welfare.

We naturally agreed to take them but when they arrived with us, it was obvious that they were in fact both Dutch Herders. The puppy, 4-5 months old at the time, was very nervous and afraid of the outside world as she had spent several weeks inside the pound on her own.

Due to their extremely high activity levels, intelligence, strength and endurance, Dutch Herders are a very challenging breed of dog and are normally best suited to a working life.

Given the breed, we knew that they were going to be a challenge. They would require a lot of work and special treatment to ensure their stress levels stayed at a minimum. We try to achieve this with every dog that comes into our care.

We began by working with Mila

the puppy to try and get her used to the staff. Handling her was almost impossible as she was just so terrified of everything. Over the course of a few months it was proving that, even with a behaviourist on site working to help Mila get used to sounds and objects, the progress was incredibly slow and living at the sanctuary with constant loud noises was just proving to be too distressing for her. Through a recommendation from Jo-rosie Haffeden, a very well-known and well respected behaviourist and trainer, we found Mike and Jenny who own their own dog behaviour and training business. They had an incredible amount of experience in dealing with nervous dogs so at the start of January 2020 we drove Mila from Bangor to Guilford for her to begin a more settled rehabilitation with them.

All the while, we still had our own challenges with Lina, the older dutch herder. From the start we knew she was going to be a challenge and in the early days of her stay at Assisi, an incident occurred one day in the field that caused her to become startled and overwhelmed.



Fortunately there were no serious injuries but as a result we quickly realised that Lina would not be best suited for rehoming to a family home.

We set about having her assessed and she was deemed suitable for a working life with the prison service. Unfortunately due to the timing of the next course it meant that Lina would have to be kept in the sanctuary for a further 3 months before she could go to the prison service and this was way too long to wait.

While trying to arrange accommodation for Lina on the prison service course we began to notice that she had started gaining a large amount of weight which was unusual for a dog that finds the kennels so stressful. We contacted our vet and asked them to examine her and discovered that Lina was heavily pregnant with a large litter and was due in approximately 2 weeks.

With this surprising news the team began to devise a plan on how to best handle and care for Lina. Meanwhile we looked to see if we could get outside help with a larger sanctuary to take on such a large litter and challenging dog breed. Unfortunately due to the difficulty of the situation and how far along Lina was, there was no other larger charity that was able help.

We sought and received a considerable amount of advice from staff at Dogs Trust Ballymena, senior Dogs Trust TBA's and Blue Cross on the mainland, and especially from our vet, Linda Glenn, Jo-rosie Haffeden, Corrine Wrend, Mike and Jenny from Adolescent dog training and their team. All of these people collectively supported and helped us devise a plan for Lina and her pups – everything from her birthing accommodation to the birthing of her puppies to raising them around mum and their early neurological stimulation plans.



Around two weeks after discovering that Lina was pregnant we moved her to her birthing unit but there was still no sign of puppies. In fact it wasn't until a week and a half after her due date on the 30th of December 2019 that she began to give birth at around 10:30pm. We had installed temporary cameras in the unit to ensure Lina and the pups were safe and to enable us to keep an eye on Lina's behaviour around them as mums can be unpredictable around their new pups at times.

From around 10:30pm to 10:00am the next morning Lina gave birth to 11 puppies, 4 boys and 7 girls. Once the puppies were born, we liaised with Louise at Dogs Trust who is their working dog liaison officer and she was able to ask police forces all over the UK if they were looking for any new recruits to join their teams.

Amazingly the Metropolitan Police (MET) contacted us to say that

they were interested. In February 2020, Lina was transferred to the Metropolitan Police and once they were old enough, the puppies followed in March 2020.

Unfortunately shortly after their arrival to the MET, the puppies contracted Parvovirus. This was very unusual as neither Assisi nor the MET had it on our sites and the puppies were the only isolated cases. It is believed that the only reason may have something to do with the vaccines but we are still unsure to this day. What subsequently followed were days and weeks of uncertainty as to whether or not the pups would make it. Amazingly, due to the care and attention of the MET staff and their vets, all of the puppies pulled through.

A few weeks after their treatment finished and they had made a full recovery, I went to attend their assessment day. Nine of the puppies passed and the MET agreed to take four as new police dogs. Thames Valley Police took one and Bedfordshire Police took one.

This is an amazing achievement for an animal sanctuary to be able to nurture and train puppies, in a shelter, that meet the standards required for them to become police dogs.

The remaining five puppies were transferred to Mike and Jenny who were also taking care of Mila. We are delighted to report that they all got rehomed. Some with the trainers and some moved on to amazing homes to be trained for live air scenting that will enable them to become search and rescue dogs for missing people or be trained as conservation detection dogs for WWF.

Unfortunately Lina suffered a torn cruciate injury to her leg whilst with the MET which meant that she was no longer eligible to become a police dog, but was thankfully rehomed in Peterborough where her owner is managing her amazingly well and she is very settled.

Mila, after all the tremendous hard work and time that Mike and Jenny have invested in her has moved on and is doing very well with small improvements happening every day.

This was an incredibly challenging and difficult case but, at the same time, it has been a massive learning curve for all of us here at Assisi. It has shown us that in such difficult cases, you need all the help you can get and this is a brilliant example of working with other like-minded people and organisations and seeing the support extended for the welfare of the animals involved.



Knowing and understanding the right environment for the animals that come into our care and being able to extend the audience and access services to accommodate working dogs can have huge benefits for the sanctuary and the animals.

To have an outcome that has ensured that Lina and all her pups are now living happy fulfilling lives, is what we set out to achieve and it is such a rewarding feeling to know that we have managed to successfully achieve this.

To all who helped us help Lina and her pups on their journey, Thank You!

Dylan Paton



Time to say Goodbye

Becky was one of 8 puppies saved from drowning and brought to Assisi when she was just six weeks old. Margaret adopted Becky and this is her story of how Becky went on to help so many people and raise a lot of money for charity throughout her life.

As every dog lover knows, the time to say goodbye is the hardest time of all, but I can truthfully say that having Becky in my life for over 15 glorious years was worth every tear.



Becky came to me as one of a number of pups found by the river Lagan in July 2005.

Not the most promising start but despite this she had the sweetest nature and was delighted to discover that her brother Harvey, had been adopted by our next door neighbours. As I had just retired I wanted to work with Becky in some way so we started Obedience classes. I think Becky thought it was really Doggy Youth Club as all she wanted to do was play with the other puppies and greet their owners. When she was a year old we went to The Patch to try Agility but Becky, for the first time in her life, refused to co-operate. Something wasn't right.

It turned out that she had hip dysplasia and a heart murmur. So not much wonder Agility wasn't her thing. Then it dawned on me – Becky may not shine at Obedience or Agility but she had a very gentle nature and loved meeting people, so I applied to Pets As Therapy, a wonderful charity that brings dogs to Nursing and Residential homes, schools, day units, hospitals and hospices. Becky passed all her tests and was soon working with people troubled with Dementia. How

she loved her years at Cranley Lodge.

During a family fun day at Stormont in 2012, members of the Pets As Therapy team were working hard to promote the charity when we realised that there was a 'Scruffy Dog' show close by. Volunteers with non-pedigree dogs were encouraged to have a go; as a result Becky won the title of the Prettiest Bitch in NI. What I hadn't realised was that this was the Northern Ireland heat of Scruffts which was to be a new feature at Crufts the following Spring. So it was a surprise to discover that we had to go to the next stage at Earls Court in London in November of that year. Again Becky won, becoming the Prettiest Bitch in the UK. From this, she was invited to attend Crufts in March 2013 where for the first time ever there was to be a Scruffts final to choose the overall best cross-breed dog in the UK. The finalists lined up out in the main



arena and Pam St Clement (from Eastenders) chose Becky. All the food she won, thanks to sponsors, James Wellbeloved, was triumphantly brought back to Assisi.

Of course there was a lot of media interest including a radio interview with Noel Thompson and a report with Mervyn Jess for the 6.30 NI news, (still available on You Tube).



As if all of this were not enough, the very next day, Aine Dolan from the Grand Opera House rang to ask if Becky would like to audition for the part of Sandy in their summer youth production of Annie. All went well and Becky, along with 240 young people from all over NI played to packed houses for every performance.

In July 2014, Becky was still carrying out her Pets As Therapy work and enjoying doing guest appearances (including officially opening the Assisi charity shop in Newtownards) when disaster struck. A ruptured right cruciate ligament meant major surgery and a long recuperation. Six months later she was well on the mend when her left cruciate ligament ruptured, so more surgery and convalescence followed. As soon as Becky had recovered she was back working raising money for charity and continuing her Pets As Therapy work but by 2017 I knew it was time for her to retire. She was still enjoying meeting her friends at Bangor and District Dog Club every Thursday evening but by 2019 even that had become too much for her. Life slowed right down; gentle walks around the block, medication, tasty home cooked food and long deep sleeps were the order of the day but the time finally came when I knew by her restlessness that she was in



pain. There was no more to be done so I made her as comfortable as possible and held her gently as she closed her eyes for the last time.

Yes, worth every tear!

Margaret McKnight
Assisi
Supporter

Thanks to Becky, I have been left with many amazing memories, enjoyed many adventures and met so

many wonderful people. To everyone who helped and supported Becky along her journey, not least her dedicated health care team at Glenn Veterinary Clinic, a heartfelt 'Thank You'. She raised a lot of money for both Assisi and Pets As Therapy, helped so many people when their lives were shadowed with confusion and made everyone she met, smile.



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If you have an interesting story about a former Assisi animal you would like to share and have published in our magazine, get in touch.

Email anna@assisi-ni.org

Alternatively, if you would like to place an advert in the magazine promoting your business contact joan@assisi-ni.org

FUNDRAISING THROUGH LOCKDOWN

Sadly, all our organised fundraising activity that had been booked and arranged for 2020 had to be cancelled or postponed during lockdown. This has incurred a massive hit to our income and obviously a real blow and concern to us as an organisation.

However, we have been amazed by the support we have received from our supporters and from various individuals, young and old, throughout our community who have stepped up and organised their own ways of fundraising to help us out. Here are a few of them:



Thank you to the Emma Kerrigan and Christine Black from ward 6a at the Ulster Hospital.

The collection was organised because they saw our initial post in the Spectator at the start of lockdown and they wanted to help, especially as Christine had adopted a dog from us several years ago that sadly passed away during lockdown.

Mr McCance had been saving coins for several weeks and when counted, he had raised over £90 which he kindly donated to Assisi. A great way to raise vital funds!

A special thank you to everyone who donated blankets, toys, food and all sorts of goodies for our animals over lockdown and thanks to everyone who sent donations from our Amazon Wish List and shopped using Amazon Smile.

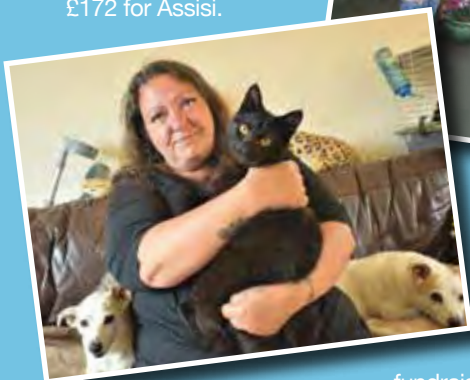
Our new office space above the Bangor shop is now completed and several staff have now moved in.



This incredible young lady found a great way to stay busy during lockdown and at the same time raise vital funds for Assisi. Amber Cousins (17) made some fantastic pieces: chopping boards, coasters and utensils, all branded with paw prints and packaged beautifully. After selling out, Amber raised £172 for Assisi.



A special thanks to Camden Window Suppliers and Ronnie at Kelly's Window Fitters for supplying and fitting our new windows free of charge.



Alana Lewis, who avails of support from our Outreach scheme, and wanted to give something back, organised a Facebook

fundraiser to try and raise funds for the sanctuary. Disappointed that we didn't receive any government funding, she set about raising awareness and got quite a few high profile people involved that helped increase support. A huge thanks to Alana and to Alex Easton MLA for encouraging community support and raising over £1300 for our animals.



A very special thanks to Mackle Pet Food, Dungannon for an incredibly generous donation of 2 pallets of fabulous pet food for our animals.

Thank you

Thank you to our Funders



£9,000



£4,500



£500



£500



£400

The Walker 597 Trust

£300

A total of £15,200, in COVID-19 emergency funding, has been donated from the funders listed. We are incredibly grateful for this much needed support during a very difficult and financially challenging time.

Did you know we now have new Facebook pages for all 3 of our shops. Please check out the pages and give them a like / follow / share.

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www.facebook.com/Assisi.Bangor.Charity.Shop/

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DONOR CHARTER

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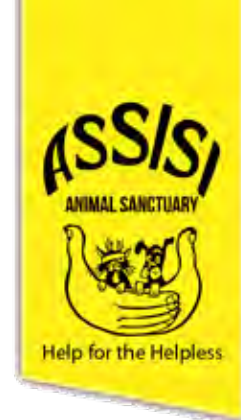
Here at Assisi we take our responsibility of being excellent stewards of our donor's money very seriously.

Every donation we receive is incredibly important to us and making sure that it is used appropriately, and where it was intended, is equally important to us. We also want to be sure that you receive a timely response to any communication you have with us and that you have complete trust that as an organisation you will receive the best quality care. We will always endeavour to be completely transparent in every area of our work and keep you informed of any changes and new developments as they arise.

As such, we have recently produced our Donor Charter which details our promise to you, our members and supporters.

Assisi Animal Sanctuary Donor Charter (Our Promise)

- Our promise is to treat all our donors with respect, honesty and openness.
- We pledge to effectively apply donations for their intended purpose.
- We commit to being accountable and transparent so that donors and prospective donors have full confidence in Assisi Animal Sanctuary.
- We will take every effort to comply with the guidelines for charities fundraising from the public.
- Our commitment to you is that you will:
 - 🐾 Be informed of the way Assisi intends to use donations.
 - 🐾 Be informed of the identity of those serving on the organisation's board, and have assurance that the board will exercise prudent judgement in its stewardship responsibilities.
 - 🐾 Have access to the organisation's most recent audited financial statements.
 - 🐾 Be assured that your gifts will be used for the purposes for which they were given and that you will receive appropriate and timely acknowledgement and recognition for your donations.
 - 🐾 Be assured that information about your donation is handled with respect, confidentiality and is compliant with GDPR and data protection legislation.
 - 🐾 Be dealt with professionally by any individual representing the organisation.
 - 🐾 Be informed whether those seeking donations are volunteers, employees or third party agents.
 - 🐾 Have the opportunity for your details to be removed from mailing lists and/or databases.
 - 🐾 Be assured that we will never share your data with any third party organisation without your prior consent.
 - 🐾 Receive prompt and honest answers to any questions, concerns or complaints you might have.



Winter Market:

Saturday 21st November

10am - 4pm
Project 24,
Queens Parade,
Bangor

Santa Paws Events:

Sunday 6th December

Newtownards shop
10am - 4pm
63 High Street,
Newtownards, BT23 7HZ

Sunday 13th December

Bangor shop
10am - 4pm
59 Main Street,
Bangor, BT20 5AF

Street Collections:

Friday 4th December - Lisburn

Saturday 28th December - Belfast

If you can spare an hour or two to help out at any of these, please contact Joan on 07900 782870. We would love if you could give us some help with our collections.

Please note:

all events are subject to the changing legislation around Covid-19



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That's why Assisi Animal Sanctuary has teamed up with Will to Give & Bequeathed to offer our supporters a free online Will-writing service.

Assisi is a member of Will to Give, a campaign which encourages people to leave a charitable gift in their Will.

Bequeathed is a free, convenient service that allows you to make the right Will for your needs in the way that suits you best, whether that's online, face-to-face or over the phone

You can now write your Will for free online using the Bequeathed online will-writing platform via Will to Give.

What is Will to Give?

Assisi Animal Sanctuary is a proud member of Will to Give. Will to Give represents a group of over 60 of Northern Ireland's most loved charities with a diverse range of causes including health, medical welfare, animal welfare, aged, education, training and disability, all working together to encourage people to leave a charitable donation in their Will.

What is Bequeathed?

Bequeathed is an online Wills provider carefully chosen by our partner Will to Give to help you write or update your Will online for free.

The service was set up by solicitors and has been reviewed by Northern Ireland law firm Cleaver Fulton Rankin.

Not only does Bequeathed provide a secure way to make or update your Will, you can also write it from the comfort of your own home at a time

that best suits you, including saving it and coming back to it later.

Will to Give pays an annual fee to Bequeathed and Assisi, as a member of Will to Give, can offer our members and supporters this service. There is no obligation to leave a gift to Assisi but we hope that you consider it.

How does it work?

Go to the Bequeathed website at – www.bequeathed.org/p/willtogive Once you are on the Bequeathed website you just need to:

1. Create an account with them.
2. Answer a few questions, such as which country you live in.
3. Start writing your Will, following the prompts Bequeathed gives you. If you have any questions, there is plenty of help available throughout the process. If you need any legal advice, you can ask Bequeathed to refer you to its partner law firm in Northern Ireland – Cleaver Fulton Rankin. You will be able to arrange a face-to-face or online meeting for a fee, which you will agree in advance.
4. Download your Will, print it, and get it witnessed. Bequeathed has guidance on its website on how best to do this during social distancing.

Throughout the process you can easily access all of the expert information and guidance you need to complete your Will online.

Bequeathed will help you to identify any issues where legal advice could be valuable. If you do want legal advice at any stage, they'll put you in touch with their partner solicitor Cleaver Fulton Rankin to agree a price for completing your will.

Who can use it?

This free Wills service is available to people 18 or over who live in Northern Ireland.

We understand your priority is looking after your loved ones, so there is no obligation to leave a gift to Assisi, but we are so grateful to you for considering it.

If you do choose to leave a gift in your Will, you will be leaving a lasting legacy that will ensure every animal that comes into our sanctuary will receive the best quality care and that we will continue to promote Animal Welfare in Northern Ireland.

It's much easier than you might think, visit Bequeathed today to register and start making your free Will – www.bequeathed.org/p/willtogive

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www.willtogive.org

Cleaver Fulton Rankin -

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YOU can make a difference

Legacy Gifts are the biggest form of income for Assisi Animal Sanctuary and make a huge difference to the care that we can provide for animals in our Sanctuary.

Assisi receives no government funding and relies entirely on donations from our supporters.

Making a Will is easy and not expensive, however we urge people to seek legal advice to ensure everything is done correctly.

Please consider naming Assisi in your Will today so that we can continue to improve our sanctuary and provide exceptional services, care and support to more animals in need.

If you require further information about the charity, how the sanctuary works or how your money would be used to benefit the animals in our care, don't hesitate to contact us.

