

Celebrating those who make a difference



Photograph: Dogs Trust/PA

A PUPPY IS FOR LIFE, NOT JUST FOR LOCKDOWN

THE DOGS TRUST ESTIMATES THAT 130,000 DOGS COME INTO UK REHOMING CHARITIES EACH YEAR. MANY FEAR THIS NUMBER COULD SURGE IN THE NEXT COUPLE YEARS, AS THE TREND OF A 'PET FOR LOCKDOWN' EMERGES DURING THE CORONAVIUS PANDEMIC. LUCY MIDDLETON EXPLORES THIS NEW CRISIS AND TALKS TO THOSE WHO WILL EXPERIENCE ITS REPERCUSSIONS.

One-quarter of UK adults have a dog, with an estimated population of 9.9 million pet dogs. It is clear that these domesticated carnivores are man's best friend in the UK. But with the enormous amount of dogs entering UK rehoming charities each year, it is apparent we need to do more for them.

Hundreds of studies have highlighted the ways in which dogs improve our lives. Evidence shows canines can help boost your immune system. Furthermore, researchers have found that pets can even make you a more joyful and better individual, in addition to improving your mental health. Most pet owners will preach how interacting with a pet can improve your mood, and know of the animal's ability to make us feel at ease. With the current stressful lives we live, having someone beside you, that makes you feel happier, is not a bad thing.

However, dog charities across the UK are warning potential adopters to weigh up the pros and cons, as well as reflect on their own lifestyle, before getting a pet. This comes as dog rehoming organisations report being inundated with potential adopters during lockdown and Google searches for 'buy a puppy' increase by 120 per cent following the announcement of the UK-wide lockdown on March 23rd. With many desperate for animal companionship to help them cope during these exceptional times, this demand may continue to rise and have devastating consequences.



'UP TO 40,000 STRAY AND ABANDONED DOGS COULD NEED HELP DUE TO THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS' - THE DOGS TRUST

The UK's largest dog welfare charity, **Dogs Trust**, is encouraging individuals to consider how their lives will change after the current limitations are lifted, before purchasing or adopting a pet.

The organisation has even briefly changed its famous slogan, "a dog is for life, not just for Christmas" to "a dog is for life, not just for lockdown". As the animal welfare charity expresses concerns about the increased interest in acquiring a dog during lockdown, which may be followed by a rise in people surrendering their new pets when some form of normality resumes.

In addition, the charity fears that changes to our daily routines could mean more dogs develop behavioural issues, which increases their chances of being abandoned, as unwanted

behaviours are the single biggest reason that dogs get into handed into the Dogs Trust. Equally, already-stretched finances may be further strained due to vets costs. Leaving many simply unable to afford the care of their four-legged friend.

The coronavirus pandemic has severely impacted the support and services the Dogs Trust offers. As well as causing big losses in their vital fundraising, which they rely on to help the dogs in their care. The rescue hopes to see these issues resolved after lockdown is fully lifted, but they predict as many as 40,000 stray or abandoned dogs could need their help as a consequence.

SUE HAMBLETT - THE WOMAN THAT LIVES SURROUNDED BY NUMEROUS ABANDONED DOGS, LOOKING FOR THEIR SECOND HOME

In a quaint old stone cottage, located right next to the A1 motorway, Sue Hamblett lives with her 12 dogs and family. These dogs range in all shapes, sizes and temperaments, but still manage to live together in a sort of chaotic harmony. Adjoining the house are 24 dog kennels that can hold up to 50 dogs. Sue remarks: "Luckily, I will never get sick of the sound of dogs barking."



Photograph by Alexa' Animal Rescue. Pictured on the right is Sue Hamblett.

Sue is the kennel manager at **Alexa's Animal Rescue**, situated in the county of Northumberland. Relentlessly, she works twelve hours a day caring for the unwanted, abandoned or neglected dogs. Beginning as a volunteer, she obtained a passion for caring for the canines. So when a job to live on-site came up, she took it.

Living surrounded by numerous dogs may go against the tranquil lifestyle many people are pursuing, but as Sue states: "I would never give it up for the world. It's my dream job and it has taken over my whole life. I would much rather be surrounded by dogs than people. There are so many benefits of being around a dog."

'YEAR AFTER YEAR THE AMOUNT OF DOGS NEEDING OUR HELP INCREASES, AS DO THE NEEDS OF THESE DOGS. UNFORTUNATELY WE SEE A LOT OF NEGLECTED DOGS COMING THROUGH OUR DOORS BUT ALEXA'S ANIMALS STRIVES TO NEVER TURN A DOG AWAY'

Despite adoring her job, Sue expresses her concerns for the repercussions that might occur as the pet for lockdown trend emerges. The desperate need for animal companionship to help cope during lockdown, has seen many make the impulsive decision to get a pet.

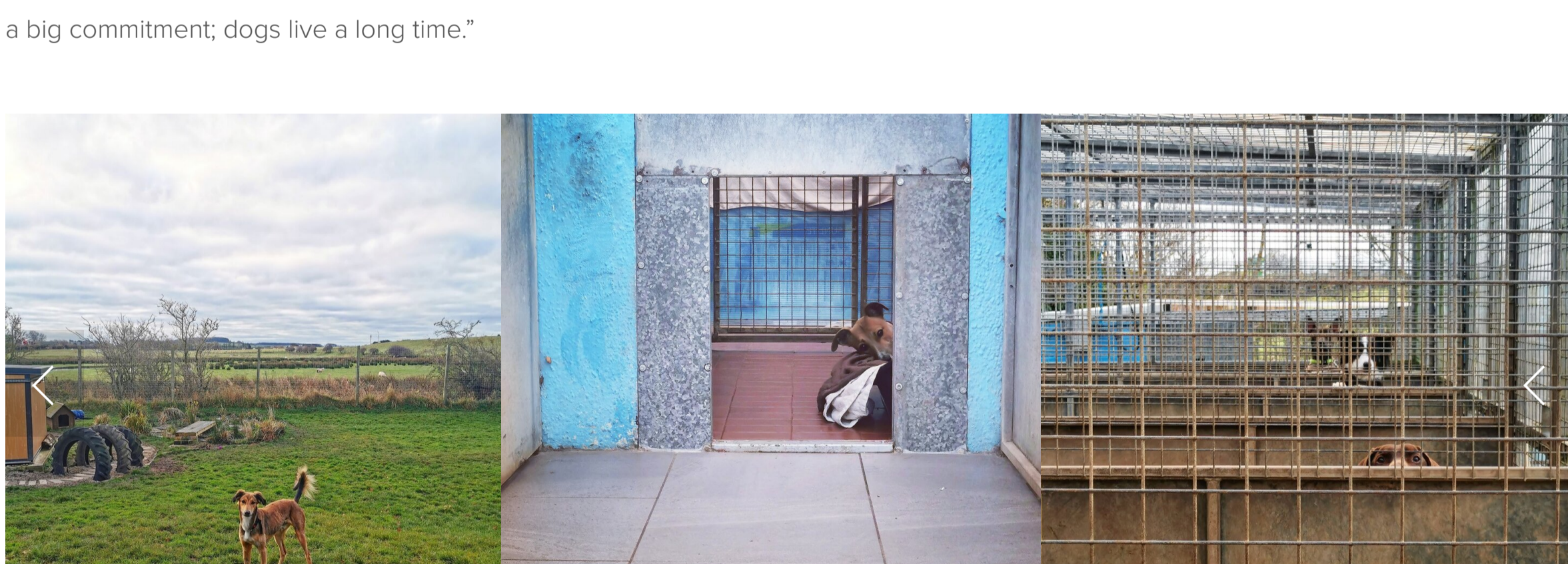
"We haven't yet had a massive increase in dogs coming in. We've had more of the opposite; people wanting to take a dog. We are currently inundated with people wanting a dog because they are in lockdown. But it's trying to solve which people are actually seriously looking for a dog. When you pose the question, what about when you go back to work full time? They don't have an answer. They haven't thought that far ahead. At Alexa's Animal Rescue we aim to find dogs their forever homes.", states Sue.

Lockdown has severely impacted how Alexa's Animal Rescue operates. As Sue states: "We had to close the charity shop and the boarding kennels. All the vital fundraising events have been cancelled. So we have been trying to come up with ideas that you can do online to try and raise money because obviously the dogs still need feed and their medical costs still need to be paid. The money that we're spending hasn't gone down, but unfortunately, the money coming in has."

Sadly, this is the reality for many animal rescues at the moment. The pandemic has stopped crucial fundraising and has impacted on the volunteers that help keep the organisations running. However, the surge in people adopting pets, followed by the fear of people surrendering them, is far more alarming for rescues.

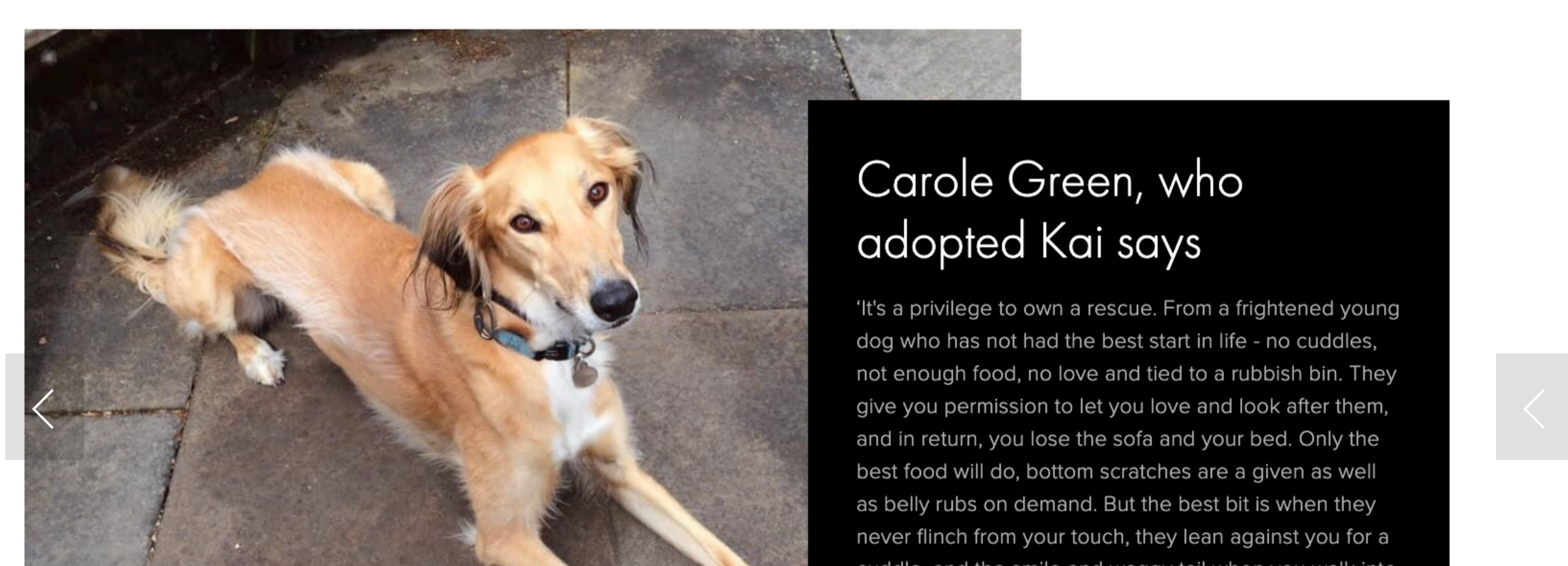
Giving a dog a second chance is one of the most rewarding feelings. Shelter dogs come from varying backgrounds and are generally either owner surrenders or strays. Adopting a dog from a rescue is an incredible thing. Dogs are so appreciative of the adoration and affection you give them and there are so many benefits of owning a dog.

However, before you consider adopting a dog, Sue wants to reiterate: "Make sure you have got the time because they are commitments. You have to think, where am I going to be in five years' time? Am I still going to be in a position where I can take care of this dog? This is a big commitment; dogs live a long time."



Photographs of Alexa's Animal Rescue by Leila Shirvani

HERE ARE SOME OF THE LUCKY PUPS THAT HAVE FOUND THEIR FOREVER HOMES THANKS TO ALEXA'S ANIMAL RESCUE...



Carole Green, who adopted Kai says

"It's a privilege to own a rescue. From a frightened young dog who has not had the best start in life - no cuddles, not enough food, no love and tied to a rubbish bin. They give you permission to let you love and look after them, and in return, you lose the sofa and your bed. Only the best food will do, bottom scratches are a given as well as belly rubs on demand. But the best bit is when they never flinch from your touch, they lean against you for a cuddle, and the smile and waggy tail when you walk into a room. That it is priceless. What more could anyone want?"

'WE ARE FOR THE UNDERDOG AND WE ARE INCREDIBLY PROUD OF THAT'

Alexa's Animals was established by local lady Alexa Nisbet MBE in 1991. With the aim to find new homes for dogs in Northumberland, by working closely with the council dog control units, social services, local veterinary practices, and also neighbouring dog-welfare charities.

The organisation was formally registered as a charity in 2016 and in the last few years, the charity has gone from strength to strength. By obtaining a loan from Northumberland County Council and receiving some very generous donations the charity was able to buy their very own kennels in 2017. In addition to housing their rescue dogs, the kennels also operate as fully licenced boarding kennels, which generates more income for the charity.

Alexa's Animal Rescue relies heavily on dedicated volunteers who assist by providing exercising and training, temporary accommodation in their own homes, undertaking fund-raising, and helping with kennel maintenance. This strong community of modern-day heroes work together tirelessly to ensure the dogs in their care have the best quality of life and make certain they are prepared to find their forever homes.

The charity aims to help as many dogs as possible. Despite being a small rescue, they cater to all shapes, sizes and breeds and try to never turn a dog away. To date, Alexa's Animal Rescue has successfully rehomed approximately 2000 dogs.

If you would like to find out more about Alexa's Animal Rescue or donate, please check out ...

Alexa's Rescue Website - <https://www.alexasanimals.com/>

Alexa's Rescue Amazon Wish List - https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/l/30TRPM7ZH22IO/ref=cm_go_nav_hz

Every contribution, however big or small, makes a real difference to their future.

Also if you would like to know more about Dogs Trust, please check out ...

Dogs Trust Website - <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/>