

The Friends of Assisi Animal Sanctuary

Trustees' Annual Report

Year Ended 31 December 2023

The Trustees of The Friends of Assisi Animal Sanctuary present their annual report and the audited financial statements for the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.

The Trustees have adopted the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP), "Accounting and Reporting by Charities" (FRS102), in preparing their annual report and financial statements.

STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

The Friends of Assisi is a charity registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and is also registered as a company limited by guarantee.

The Charity is governed by a Board of Trustees whose members act in a voluntary capacity. New appointees are inducted in the aims and objectives via the strategic plan and are provided with copies of the governing documents of the charity. Training is available via NICVA.

The powers of the Trustees are set out in the Articles of Association. In relation to financial management, they have the power to:

- accept gifts and to raise funds;
- enter into contracts to provide services;
- buy, or take on lease or in exchange, hire or otherwise acquire any property and to maintain and equip it for use;
- sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of all or any part of the property belonging to the Charity;
- borrow money and to charge the whole or any part of the property belonging to the Charity as security for a grant to discharge of an obligation;
- establish or support any charitable trusts, associations or institutions formed for any of the charitable purposes included in the Charity's objects;
- acquire, merge with, enter into any partnership, or joint venture arrangement with any other charity;
- draw, make, accept, endorse, discount, execute and issue promissory notes, bills, cheques, and other instruments, and to operate bank accounts;
- set aside income as a reserve against future expenditure;
- deposit or invest funds and to employ professional fund managers on such terms as the Trustees may from time to time decide.
- invest the monies of the Charity not immediately required for its Objects in or upon such investments, securities or property as may be thought fit, subject nevertheless to such conditions and such consents as may for the time being be required by law and in the same manner and subject to the same conditions as the Trustees of a trust permitted to do by the Trustees Act (NI) 2001.

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TRUSTEES OF THE CHARITY

The Directors of the charitable company are the Trustees for the purpose of Charity Law. The Trustees who served during this reporting period are as follows:

Kieran McCullagh
 Tessa Barrett
 Brónach Kelly (resigned 17/07/2023)
 Richard McMullan (resigned 14/08/2023)
 Ian Morrice (appointed 22/01/2023 - resigned 14/08/2023)
 Billy Ellis (resigned 30/08/2023)
 Brian Bingham (resigned 03/09/2023)
 Rosie McKerr (resigned 03/10/2023)
 Simon Doherty (appointed 04/07/2023 - resigned 04/10/2023)
 Rosemary Glendinning (appointed 05/10/2023)
 Tony McCrory (appointed 08/10/2023)
 Joan Cochrane (appointed 08/10/2023)

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The Trustees (who are the Directors of the Company for the purposes of Company Law) are required to prepare the Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements for each financial period in accordance with applicable law and the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Accounting Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company Law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each accounting period which give a true and fair view of the affairs of the company and of the incoming resources and application of resources including income and expenditure of the company for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to: -

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP(FRS102);
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

VISION

The vision of the Charity is a future where Assisi is Northern Ireland's leading animal welfare charity and brings about a day where every companion animal has a happy home for life.

AIMS

The Charity's aims, as set out in its Articles of Association, are specifically restricted to animal welfare and the advancement of education in matters pertaining to animal welfare, care and treatment for the benefit of the public

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in Northern Ireland and its environs of the Republic of Ireland by associating with the statutory authorities, voluntary organisations and inhabitants in a common effort to:

- relieve the suffering, distress, and maltreatment of stray, neglected, unwanted or vulnerable companion animals that need care and protection by the provision of a rescue and rehoming service and a sanctuary for the care, protection, treatment, security and temporary or permanent accommodation for such animals;
- foster and encourage the formation of humane attitudes among people towards companion animals, especially those that are sick or stray or in need of assistance, and to this end provide practical assistance to such animals;
- educate the public in matters pertaining to animal welfare and the care and treatment of companion animals.

MISSION

The Charity's mission is:

- to keep as many animals in their homes as possible by providing support and advice to owners;
- to rescue and rehome needy animals by providing modern facilities with well trained staff and volunteers;
- to provide animal welfare education and leadership to all touch points within Northern Ireland.

VALUES

The Charity has a set of four values underpinning its approach.

1. *Caring and Compassionate*
We will always do the best we can for every animal within our sphere of influence.
2. *Dedicated and Committed*
We will strive to embrace change and look for new initiatives to deliver better animal welfare.
3. *Professional*
We will train our people and treat everyone with respect.
4. *Ethical*
We will always strive for improvement through our policy making via research, honesty and maintenance of the law in all we do.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Trustees have a duty to identify and manage the key risks that affect the Charity's ability to continue to function. The Charity Commission defines risk as "that which, if it occurs, would have a severe impact on the operational performance, objectives, or reputation and which has a high chance of occurring."

The Trustees undertook an assessment of the Charity's business risks and divided these into four categories viz reputational, financial, compliance and operational. A risk table was produced which quantified risk in terms of impact, multiplied by risk of occurrence and giving a risk assessment score which is categorised as either high, medium, or low. The risk table is reviewed annually. Trustees were required on joining to make a declaration that they have no personal or professional loyalties that would prevent or could be perceived as preventing them from making decisions only in the best interests of the Charity.

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PUBLIC BENEFIT STATEMENT

The Charity has carefully considered the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's Guidance on Public Benefit to ensure that the activities it undertook during the year have helped to achieve the Charity's objectives as well as providing public benefit. The public benefit requirement as defined in the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 (as amended) states that to be a charity in Northern Ireland an organisation:

- must have purposes which fall under one of 12 descriptions of purposes listed in the Charities Act and
- the purposes must be for the public benefit.

Assisi's charitable purpose falls under the 'advancement of animal welfare'.

These benefits are the promotion of the capacity of people for compassion by caring for injured or abandoned animals. This is achieved through the reduction of the number of dogs unnecessarily destroyed in our local council pounds, the provision of pet food to food banks and other charities that deal with those who are temporarily homeless or who are experiencing some financial hardship, relieving stress on people who may be struggling to feed and care for their pets. This is also achieved through the rescue and rehoming of stray or unwanted companion animals and educating the public in relation to animal welfare and the care of companion animals.

Our purpose does not give rise to any harm.

The beneficiaries of these purposes are the public throughout Northern Ireland.

PLANS AND PRIORITIES

The Charity has a Strategic Plan for the period 2019-2024. It sets out the plans and priorities under six headings:

- Finance
- Animal welfare
- Education
- Communication
- Commercial
- People

The Strategic Plan was prepared pre the Covid pandemic and has had, of necessity, to be scaled back. The annual Business Plan was also subject to frequent amendment during the year. The Trustees are currently formulating a Strategic Plan for the next 3 years 2025 to 2027.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST OBJECTIVES

1 FINANCE

We were selected as Community Partner with Pets at Home Bangor, received grants from ADCH (Association of Dogs and Cats Homes), Mars and the Maureen Boal Trust and were also selected as Charity of the Year (COTY) by IQ-EQ and Gallagher Insurance.

We held our first Gala Ball in quite some time, in the Clandeboye Lodge Hotel, with over 100 guests enjoying a great night's food, entertainment and auction, and raising over £20k net income. Special thank you to Victoria Frazer for organising and hosting such a tremendous event.

Several external events took place during the year including a pizza night at a new Little Wing restaurant in Belfast with all proceeds going to Assisi. We also held our usual annual fundraising events such as the Poker Run, Summer Fair, Doggy Reunion Day, Winter Market and our 3 Santa Paws events. Street collections were carried out throughout the year.

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2 ANIMAL WELFARE

Several sites were investigated as potential new locations for the development of a new sanctuary but none of these were progressed.

During 2023 the Assisi Outreach Programme continued to help hundreds of households throughout Northern Ireland to keep their companion animal within the family unit without them being an additional drain on very limited resources. Assisi Outreach was able to achieve its aims by working with other organisations such as local St Vincent De Paul, Community Advice etc, who contact Assisi Outreach with a referral for their clients who have a companion animal in need of food and other items.

Assisi Outreach also provided pet food to various food banks across the province, in Ards, Belfast, Newry and Portadown and to Team Haven, (a charity that provides meals to the homeless 6 nights a week), for those who are homeless and have a companion dog.

We continued to work with individuals who TNR, or those who run small rescues, providing cat/dog/kitten/puppy/food for German Shepherds, Greyhounds, Huskies etc. Individuals who foster kittens that are just hours or a few days old, received baby milk, mousse, and kitten pouches during kitten season throughout 2023. We also supplied rabbit and guinea pig food to individuals and rescues.

Assisi Outreach continues to reach out into the local community, supplying thousands of meals and providing support for companion animals outside of Assisi's gates.

There was a high demand for intake of animals during 2023 and rehoming was slow. This could have been in part due to a greater move from home working back to office based, along with the continued increase in the cost of living. However, staff were very successful in finding forever homes for quite a few long-term animals.

Rehoming	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cats	121	87	114	192
Dogs	157	104	88	106
Rabbits	30	29	28	46
Small Animals	84	105	68	102
Totals	392	325	288	446

Some stories of note from 2023

Dogs

- Dutch, a Malinois x Shepherd, came into our care in April 2023 when he was in danger of being PTS as he had been left with a relative who was unable to cope with a large hyper energetic dog that had never had any basic training. Staff had a very difficult time managing Dutch due to his strength, his stress levels which resulted in a tendency to bite and grab, his reactions to other people or dogs and his reluctance to enter his kennel or be left alone. The staff worked tirelessly to find the right place for him and in November/December 2023 they were put in contact with a rescue in England who were prepared to take him. A recent update advised that he has been accepted into the Northeast England Police service and is doing fantastically well.
- Chloe was one of our Golden oldies here at Assisi. She came into our care in December 2021 showing signs of behavioural issues which being older we knew could be pain related. After vet trips and tests Chloe was diagnosed with arthritis and we saw her become slower but never less happy and she always greeted staff with tail wags and barks to say hello. In 2023 Chloe became extremely ill with kidney disease and, as she seemed to be going downhill quickly, we feared that she would spend her last days in the kennels. Thankfully, an angel appeared in the form of Lauren who offered to foster Chloe long term and she was able to enjoy her new home for nearly a whole year before the kidney disease took over and it was time to sadly say goodbye to the best girl.

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- When Daisy came into our care last year staff suspected that she was pregnant. A scan confirmed that she had 5 visible puppies, so we prepared to have her in a foster home. On the 17th of October Daisy decided to go into labour a bit earlier than planned. Two members of staff stayed overnight with her and while she showed all the signs of labour no babies arrived. The vet visited on site during the night and gave Daisy an injection to help move things along but eventually in the morning Daisy had to then go for an emergency section. At around 11 that day we got the news there was 7 healthy pups! Unfortunately, late one afternoon a few weeks later, two of the pups fell ill and had to be rushed to the vets. The two pups, named Kevin and Peter, were having seizures which was very distressing for all the staff. Thankfully, they both recovered but Kevin just didn't seem to settle until we brought mum Daisy back to him and his cries soon stopped. He was definitely a mummies boy, so we ensured that they were adopted together.
- Mylo was abandoned on site one morning at the start of February 2023 with a note beside him to say he had some form of bones in his stomach and needed an operation. While staff read the note poor Mylo began to try and go to the toilet and had to be rushed to our vets where he underwent surgery to remove the bones. He was successfully rehomed to a lovely couple who take him everywhere with them so he will never be left behind again.
- We liaised with local pounds taking in 7 dogs during 2023, building good relationships to help more dogs in the community and further afield.
- In 2023 there were 6 long termers rehomed that had been with us for 1 to 2 years, Alice, Rosco, Arnie, Samson, Lexi, and Gizmo. All had different reasons as to why their stay was longer than others, but they all deserved a loving home and we never stopped looking! They are all doing amazingly well in their new forever homes.

Cats:

- Donald and Daisy were abandoned at the gate of Assisi in September 2023 and happily were rehomed the following month.
- September 21st was a sad day for the Assisi team. We said goodbye to our gorgeous girl Ebony who lived in Harmony House. Ebony came to Assisi in 2015 as a stray who, on admission, turned out to be a semi feral cat and to her, humans were only useful for bringing her food. Over the years Ebony realised that the people who brought her food weren't actually too bad and she started to trust certain staff members. She will be sorely missed by all the cattery staff.
- Rambo arrived in Assisi in 2021 as he had been showing aggression in his previous home. Staff and volunteers worked on his behaviour and in 2023 he went to a loving home where he is very settled as his personal space is respected.
- Roger, a lovely grey kitten came to us through Animal Welfare at 8 weeks old. Staff noticed that he was suffering from severe allergies and, following an allergy test, it turned out he was allergic to almost everything, including himself as he was allergic to cats! He was put on a strict Z/D diet, but this expensive specialised food reduced Roger's rehoming chances. Eventually, in February 2023, he found a loving home with a lovely couple who were prepared to bear the cost.
- At the start of 2022, Toto came to us as an injured stray. He quickly became a staff favourite but unfortunately, he seemed to really dislike men, and this limited the number of suitable homes. Happily, after a year and a half, Toto finally found his forever home and settled in as the man of the house.
- After 10 months at the sanctuary Josephina, who was abandoned at Jubilee Vets, found a lovely home and has been thriving ever since. Staff suspected she had been mistreated as she was initially terrified and this exhibited as aggression but, thanks to their dedication in providing her the love and security she needed, she was able to find her new home.

Smalls:

- Gottmik originally came into our care from a private home where she had been kicked, whacked, prodded with a metal pipe, and picked up by the ears. When her owners were fed up with her, she was given to their neighbour who brought her into our care. She was understandably wary of people, especially legs, feet and hands and it took her some time to finally start trusting the staff, though she was still very uneasy with people moving their legs or feet around her. She was adopted by a family who fell for her quirky ways and was bonded with their rabbit Bowie. Unfortunately, after 6-months in her new home she went downhill and passed away at the vets. A post-mortem revealed that the blunt force trauma she had experienced in the past had done enough damage that her organs couldn't fully recover from it.

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- Buckthorn was found by a couple who were walking in the countryside. They brought him to us, and the poor thing was in an awful state: he was skeletal, and his fur was matted right down to the skin. In our care he was given everything a rabbit should have and he slowly started to gain back his weight though an x-ray revealed that he had arthritis causing stiffness in his back legs. After months of work, Buckthorn was ready to be rehomed and he is now living his best life with his lady friend as a house bunny!
- We don't often hear of stray guinea pigs, but it does happen. A lady called us to say that a guinea pig was coming into her garden and squeaking at her for food, and she had been unable to find an owner despite checking homes in the area. We were concerned that we would not be able to find him but as soon as the lady came out to her back garden with veggies; from a bush out strutted a guinea pig. After 30-minutes in the cold wintery night we finally caught him and named him Bush Pig! Bush was bonded with another male guinea pig, and 6-months later both were adopted!

3 EDUCATION

2023 saw an increase in the number of school and youth groups requesting talks and presentations, predominantly within the primary and early post primary year groups. All talks resulted in both financial and goods donations with quite a few schools and groups organising their own fundraising activities for the charity.

4 COMMUNICATION

During 2023 there was a concerted effort to consolidate our communications.

Our volunteer and supporter E-newsletters were improved and sent out regularly throughout the year with 6 editions of each and the Paw Prints magazine continued to prove informative and popular with supporters and shoppers alike. The covering letters of appeal for donations proved very successful. The winter edition included our Christmas brochure which again proved popular with multiple orders for Christmas cards and other available merchandise. The magazine is also popular at various events with increasing interest in the digital version which facilitates online viewing.

The Bangor Spectator continues to provide a monthly opportunity to promote and highlight long term animals needing homes. Other media activity involved various local radio and television interviews with BBC & UTV and continued growth across all our social media platforms.

Throughout the year we attended multiple events around the province ensuring a presence at animal related events. At our summer fair, we set up an advice and information stand with animal welfare staff on hand to provide help to the public.

We continued to play our part as one of 6 charities working together on the NICAWG group, driving improved animal welfare legislation in Northern Ireland.

5 COMMERCIAL

In July 2023, the board took the decision to close the Ballynahinch store after 8 years of trading. Reasons for this were based on high staff turnover, low profit margins, problems with neighbouring tenants and high levels of vandalism in the area. An effort was made to relocate in Ballynahinch however, any suitable properties fell through, and a decision was made to search for properties in other locations, closer to our 3 remaining stores in Bangor, Ards, and Holywood. Commercial rental properties were identified in Saintfield, Comber and Lisburn but the board decided against proceeding with any of them.

While the remaining three stores are doing well, there are some issues with the buildings, in particular Holywood where damp and water leaks are proving problematic and investment in repairs is required.

The search for new commercial properties is ongoing.

6 PEOPLE

There were many staff and volunteer changes in 2023 creating a considerable void that needed to be filled. Seven members of the Board of Trustees took the decision to resign over the period from July to October. Three trustees were co-opted to the Board in October and are up for election at the AGM.

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Following the resignation of the Animal Welfare Manager, the structure of the organisation was reviewed and revised creating Sanctuary Manager and Unit Team Leader posts. This created the opportunity for animal welfare staff promotion and the vacancies were filled by recruitment from within the organisation.

Staff appraisals were carried out and various staff received emergency first aid at work training as well as fire warden training. All staff received Customer Care training and both PSNI Training and a Health & Wellbeing session were also offered. Several staff had the opportunity to attend the ADCH conference and The Dog Campus provided training for our Dog Unit staff free of charge with our dogs having the benefit of mantrailing adventures.

Ongoing volunteer recruitment, induction and training took place throughout the year to try to bring numbers back to pre-lockdown levels and a social event for staff and volunteers was organised in June to celebrate Volunteers Week.

We had the benefit of a number of groups of Corporate Volunteers working several days a week at the sanctuary from March through to the end October carrying out painting and maintenance jobs.

FINANCIAL REVIEW (INCLUDING RESERVES POLICY)

The financial statements cover the year ended 31st December 2023 and are prepared on an accruals basis which is in keeping with the accounts of previous years.

Total income was £1,356,322 which is an increase of £183,708 on the figure of £1,172,614 for 2022.

Income from activities such as general donations, donations by bank mandate, tax claims, collection boxes and street collections etc amounted to £240,168 which was an increase of £14,887, from the 2022 figure of £225,281.

We also received total legacy income of £397,986 which was an increase of £147,912 compared with £250,074 in 2022.

Income from fundraising events increased by £36,135 from £36,105 in 2022 to £72,240 in 2023. Shop income has decreased by £17,658 from £575,097 in 2022 to £557,439 in 2023 while investment income increased by £2,052 from £16,679 in 2022 to £18,731 in 2023. Historically rehoming income was treated as a donation. From the start of 2018 such income has been treated as a sale and included in income from trading activities.

On the expenditure side overall, we spent £1,006,306 on charitable activities compared to £968,266 in 2022 – an increase of £38,040. We continue to keep a tight control on our costs. In total we have spent £1,404,531 on all our activities in 2023 compared to £1,336,267 in 2022.

As such at 31 December 2023, we had net assets of £1,932,038 compared to £1,905,502 at the end of 2022. Overall, we show a surplus of income over expenses for the year of £26,536 compared to a deficit of £277,566 in 2022.

Reserves Policy

The trustees have established the level of reserves (that is those funds that are freely available) that the charity ought to have. The level of unrestricted reserves that the charity aims to retain are as follows;

General Purpose Fund – this is a fund available at the discretion of the Trustees in respect of the furtherance of the objectives of the charity. The level of funds that the charity aims to retain are equivalent to three months operating costs.

Trustee Designated Fund – this is a fund used to maintain and upgrade site facilities. A minimum fund limit has been set at £100,000 by the Trustees.

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DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION TO THE AUDITORS

We, the Trustees, who are the Directors of the Company who held office at the date of the approval of these Financial Statements as set out above each confirm, so far as we are aware, that:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the Company's auditors are unaware and;
- we have taken all the steps that we ought to have taken as Trustees to make ourselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the Company's auditors are aware of that information.

SMALL COMPANIES EXEMPTION

This report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions for small companies under part 15 of the Companies Act 2006.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees

T McCrory
29/05/2024 14:48:04

Tony McCrory
Tony McCrory
Trustee

Date: 29th May 2024