Interview with Jessica (pseudonym) pig sanctuary founder

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Researcher – [K]

**K:** To start could you just tell me how your rescue came about?

**P:** Ok, so we had a smallholding and had a three-acre field. We started off with chickens and some reduced ponies and then our neighbours decided to breed pigs for their farm shop, which was literally under my window, because we had an upside-down house. So, I watched these pigs each day and saw that some of them couldn't get to the food because they just put a line of food down at the front, so it was kind of first come first served kind of thing. So, I could identify some of them and started feeding them. Then the owners of the land said that these ones at the back were runts and they'd be no use to them basically. So, I immediately said I'd take them, as kind of a knee-jerk reaction. We had sheep as well at the time that we'd rescued. So, we ended up with our first two pigs which were two saddlebacks. Then they brought [Barb] along as well, erm so we had three to begin with because we were still learning at that stage, but one day they put [Tom] in the field without us knowing, another Middle White. Unknown to me, we had him castrated but three months, three weeks and three days, which is the gestation period for pigs, [Jep] built a huge nest at the bottom of the field. Perfect nest, if anyone was passing, they'd think there was some huge, enormous birds around, like pterodactyls! But she had nine piglets in there, and [Barb] had three. So, I had the fortunate experience of watching the three being born. My view with animals is to really learn about them as much as possible, about their natural behaviours and what they do naturally, against what we hear about how pigs should be kept in farm industries. Kind of, wanting them to behave as natural as possible, but also befriending them at the same time. Which, you know, to me is a privilege if you can gain the trust of an animal, especially one that has been abused or neglected. So, yeah erm, I watched them grown and then unfortunately we were moving, and we had to find homes for some of them, but we kept a few. Then eventually we moved to Yorkshire and erm, they came with us and the wood came up for auction. I'm rushing this along by the way, there's a lot more to it. So, we bought the land, it was a bit excessive for six pigs to begin with, but I had aspirations on the wood, my husband had other plans for the wood. So, one by one, we got contacted about pigs needing homes and it just grew that way really. So, basically, we started from scratch and where we are today is purely through donations and support that we've had.

**K:** Wow, so seems like you had a bit of an unexpected start with all those piglets!

**P:** Yeah! It was the worst thing I've ever had to do, one of the worst things was to, when we moved, we moved our pigs, and we knew we could only take on so many because we had someone looking after them at the time whilst we moved. I would have had them all if we could, but having to separate some of the piglets, because they all wanted to move and jump on the trailer, was one of the worst things I've ever had to do really. I just, you know, we did our best to find homes for them. We got a lot of calls from farmers pretending to give them good homes. So, it was quite difficult to make sure they wouldn't be used for breeding or be slaughtered. So yeah, the original six there's only one left now, which is [Wiggy], he's fifteen years old. He lives at the top of the wood, he's kind of secluded himself, erm whether it's because he's got older and it's old age and he just wants to be left alone now, because we've got two very young piglets who are very lively. Erm, and yeah, he's the old man of the wood.

**K:** Bless him. When did you buy the land?

**P:** About five years ago when it came up for auction and we had a lot of issues with local people erm, because they didn't know what we were doing. They used it to walk round, it's an ancient woodland. They were worried about bluebells, what would happen to the wood, so the council wouldn't let us put any shelters up so we had to appeal and the decision to stop us from putting shelters up was overturned by the council. So, in a way, it was a good thing, because it secured the land for the pigs and allowed us to keep them on the land and to have the shelters there. The only downside to that was we could only have twenty. Which is ironic when you think about how many pigs are crammed into family farms and we've got ten acres of land, but we can only have twenty. But on the flip side of that, it's not a bad thing because I think we might have had as many pigs as we have trees in the wood if we hadn't had the restriction on there, but the way to get round, we've not been able to expand and buy any land or rent any land either. So, we're kind of stuck really with the numbers we can have, so we started rehoming some and now we've got a rehoming coordinator, who does all that. She does an amazing job. In the last, oh I can't remember, but I know she started about two years ago and we've rehired about 140 pigs since then. We've got about thirty to forty waiting to be rehomed. These pigs come from all sorts of backgrounds, could be so-called micro pigs that people had bought that have outgrown their area, people don't realise what it entails to look after a pig. Erm, they might be in a council property and they've been given an eviction notice, so they might only have a week or two to find somewhere for the pig to go. Some have come from farms, well one was actually part exchange for a car. She's our largest pig. She's the typical pig that is used for breeding, she's a Landrace, so between thirty and forty stone. But she was part exchange for a car by a car dealer and a farmer, it was two pigs that were exchanged but the male pig died because he just fed them on a diet of bred and it's quite harmful to the pigs neurologically. So, he had a stroke and died eventually at one year old. I don't think at the time, as you know, probably pigs are slaughtered at around six months old, he couldn't bring himself to do it and brought her to us. She had a tiny, tiny metal box that he'd made for her when she was a piglet, and I don't think she could have got her head in it when he brought it. So, she lived in like hay, piles of hay, and tarpaulin for a while until we could build her a shelter. So, we often find that people just want to offload these pigs and they always say that they're going to support and contribute, but invariably they don't. Also, we've had rescued pigs that they've threatened to put to sleep or destroy, so we've rushed, and we've got them. Sometimes, they'll say, "if you don't take this pig, we're going to put it to sleep", which they take the onus off them and put it on to us. So, we find ourselves in difficult situations sometimes.

**K:** Yeah, it seems like it. Could you tell me a bit about what your attitude is towards pet pigs in general, keeping pigs as pets?

**P:** Well, I had [Sonny] with me for two years. He was the first pig that we rescued after the original six that we brought to the wood. I was quite naive because he was eleven weeks old, he was a pet pig sold as a micro pig, I think I sent you a picture, he's on one of them. They couldn't keep him, they had him in like a dog crate in the house and the dogs were trying to attack him. Not ideal environment at all for a pig. So, I naively thought that I could just introduce him to our female pigs, and they'd think they had a piglet and mother him, erm, but I was very wrong. They rejected him and I didn't have a plan B, so I thought "oh I'll have to take him home, I can't leave him on his own" and immediately, my collie dog, mothered him, and she licked him, and she washed him, and they slept together, and they did everything together. So, over time, every time I went to the wood, every week, I'd take the dog, [Sonny] would jump in the car and then he'd be back in the car before I'd be ready to go home again, he didn't want to know the other pigs. This went on for two years, he had his own area, but he didn't want to stay, erm and so, I learnt about keeping, what it's like to have a pig in the house. But he was very lucky because there's always somebody in the house, my mother lives with us and we have a wilderness garden that he could go outside in and he got to come to the woods, which meant he could roll in mud and jump in my car and cover that in mud as well! He could dig for roots, you know, he could experience what it was like to see other pigs as well. So, he had kind of the best of both worlds. But having said that, he still caused a lot of damage in the house. He ripped up the lino in my mums kitchen, probably to find a little crumb of something that had fallen down underneath. He chewed furniture, things to keep him occupied because pigs are intelligent, they have the capacity of a three, four-year-old child. So, they need to be stimulated. I put things in boxes for him to open, erm, so going back to your question, I'd say keeping a pig in a home environment is not suitable. The issue that we've got at the moment is breeders claiming to sell so called micro pigs or teacup pigs, which don't exist. Because they haven't evolved enough, so out of a litter of ten, you might get one, like [Sonny], who was probably the size of a Labrador dog, but twice as wide. Or you might get one like [Koko], whose over thirty stone in your house, and they grow quite slowly to begin with, so you don't really notice the size. Then, for some people it's too late, they become attached to them. Then they keep growing till they're three, then they grow quite rapidly in the second year. So, yeah, we're doing a campaign because we don't know how breeders get away with it, because the legislation around keeping pigs is very strict. The same legislation applies as it does with farm pigs to pet pigs, and so, they're very strict about having a holding number, but we found, where we rescued pigs, you can have a holding number on anything. It doesn't have to be a piece of land. We've rescued a pig from the top floor of a sky rise flat which was kept in a Wendy house. But breeders don't care where they go, you know, somebody pays and they can take the pig, and they don't care what happens to it after that. We know the only small pigs are Potbellies and Kune Kunes. Even then you can get a larger size Kune Kune, so people really need to be more educated about pigs before taking them on. It was worse around the time of Peppa Pig, when everyone wanted one and there was a bit of a craze for pigs. We were inundated with them. But it doesn't matter the size of the pig, they still need the same care and environment, you know, they still need to be able to root, to roll in mud, because they aren't able to cool down themselves, they don't have sweat glands. So, yeah, we want to kind of do away with that myth of teacup micro pigs and make people more aware of what they're taking on. What we do when we rehome pigs, we have a very strict vetting system, so people generally are experienced and knowledgeable about pigs and farm animals, they've got the land, they've got a vet, they're registered with a vet, a farm vet. So, we make sure they go to a forever home and we can offer advice as well.

**K:** And is it easy to find those people that have the checklist you need?

**P:** Well, as we're growing, more people are becoming aware of us. We've taken pigs all over the country. So, and people are kind of, as we're growing, we're hoping that we can say, link a pig in Wales to someone in Wales, so we don't have to travel across the breadth of the country with the pig. We have found some amazing homes, as I say, we've rehomed 130 pigs and it's so rewarding to take them from a small backyard to somewhere they've got freedom and land to explore round, and people have got the time, as well. That's another big thing, people have to have the time and commitment. Because very rarely they get ill, but it can be expensive, so people, sanctuaries now, we've outreached to a lot of sanctuaries, and so, if anyone asks them to take on a pig, they'll put them in touch with us, so we've got the connections and people do come to us if they want a pig. They might already have some and they want some more, or they might have lost one so want a companion for on elf there's as well. It's difficult where we've got larger pigs, they're more difficult to home. It's difficult when we've got like, three, that are together. It's easier to rehome a smaller pig and a single pig, like the allotment pigs. For three, four years now we've been trying to rehome them all, and I think we're down from eighteen to two, will be left. So that's taken quite a while to rehome all of them. People respond to, you know if it's urgent or a sad story, we kind of get more people responding to that. But I think eventually, we do find homes for them. Ideally, I'd like some land where those that can't stay where they are and are desperate to be moved and if there's a threat of them being destroyed, we can hold them somewhere until we can rehome them, that would be ideal, my ideal plan really, to do that.

**K:** Yes, well that's promising you're able to rehome lots of them, that's good news. Do you notice any trends over the years that you've been doing it, maybe increases or decreases in the calls you're getting about rehoming, particularly mini pigs but generally?

**P:** Erm, the biggest trend was, as I mentioned, with Peppa Pig and everyone wanting their child, or their child wanting a pet pig.

**K:** When was that?

**P:** Oh, this is going back about two years, but it still happens, because Peppa Pig is still going. But not as much, I think people are more aware now that they can't keep pigs in certain properties and erm, you know, it’s not the kind of in thing to do anymore, to have a pig. Not to mention the damage in your garden, they'll turn it upside down. Lately, it's more around Covid, because the impact of Covid is people are finding that they're prioritising other things. They're worried about their finances, so if they've got a pet pig it’s not on the high list of priorities, if they've got a dog, it’s more likely that the pig is going to go. The other impact is, where we rehomed two Sheffield City Farm, because of Covid they had to shut down. So, we had two days to rescue them because they'd already booked the vet to come in two days before we found out about them. So, they rehired all the other animals, but they couldn't rehome the pigs. Then there was a YMCA, because there was no staff going to the hostel, there were no people going there, there was no one to look after the pigs and they didn't have the funding. So, we rehomed three of them and now we're picking up one from the Wirral. From a college as well, that are also struggling because of staff and funding and students not being there. So, it does have a knock-on effect, Covid, so we've probably got more pigs now wanting to be rehomed than we ever have.

**K:** That's interesting, because I wanted to ask if you'd seen something similar to the puppy boom that happened in lockdown one, where lots of people decided to get a puppy for the same time, because they were spending a lot of time at home. I was wondering if it had been the same with micro pigs.

**P:** I think the same thing applies. You know, they feel that they've got the time now to commit to other animals and then, the realisation is, again, they haven't done their research, they haven't looked into it. Pigs are intelligent, as I say, but they're not really suitable for children because they're unpredictable as well. They're not domesticated animals to have in the house, they need to be outdoors because it's their natural behaviour to do that. So, people maybe, I mean [name], our rehoming coordinator deals with people every day. People who tell us that... the main reason for people not being able to have pigs is that they've outgrown the area that they've had for them, or their moving house and they haven't got anywhere suitable for them anymore. Those are kind of the main reasons for not keeping their pigs, some of them, they might have had for three, four years already and then they're relinquishing tier care of the pigs. Which, you know, I find quite difficult because, another thing is people don't realise how long they live for. Basically, the larger the pig, the shorter the lifespan. So, [Koko], being our largest pig, she can live until she's about fifteen to twenty in the right environment. Because they are prone to the same health conditions as we are. So, they can get arthritis, rheumatism, pneumonia. and if they're kept in damp conditions, they're more likely to get those. We've had a spate of issues lately. Vets don't know what ailments pigs get when they get older, we found that out because... we no longer call the vet out, we try and diagnose ourselves because all they tend to do is offer antibiotics. So, we'll do our research, we've done training, we'll provide the vet with a poo sample or urine sample and try and detect it from them. So, we've got pigs at the moment, we've got some gastro issues that we're not sure how they managed to get those conditions, so we're treating those. And so, it's a bit of the unknown really as they get older, we've had pigs die of cancer as well. A lot of the times they get leg ailments, because of the weight, you know it's carrying that weight and if they twist, it can cause damage in the legs. We've had one with a spinal injury because of a fall, which is really devastating. So, I forgot what the original question was, because I do go off on a tangent!

**K:** I can't even remember what my original question was! But that is interesting you say that, because I suppose farm animal vets are taught about animals in the livestock industry and pigs don't grow to be adults in the livestock industry, so it's all new kind of veterinary science for a lot of vets I suppose. Which is probably a good thing, your kind of sanctuaries are allowing more to be known about the ailments of older pigs.

**P:** Yeah, it's been a learning curve for us. But also, very frustrating with vets. Because we've actually changed vets and we're with a bigger practice where there's a few vets, so at least we feel like we can get different opinions if we're not happy. We've got a welfare team, so we do research training as well, we seek advice from elsewhere if we're not sure. Erm, we do feel really frustrated because in the farming industry I suppose they get a 50/50 chance, because obviously, it's going to cost them money to treat an animal and generally they're just given antibiotics, and if they get well, or albeit if they don't, you know, it’s not a good outcome for them. So, beyond that really, I think vets are very limited in what they know and how they can treat animals, and we want to, well we've had experiences where symptoms have gone on and on and we've tried various treatments that haven't worked. In the end, we've come up with suggestions and looked at natural remedies as well. Mainly preventative remedies, because once an animal is ill, it's not going to get better without the right medicine, but you could prevent illnesses, you could prevent like rheumatism through giving turmeric, black pepper, we put cider vinegar in the water as well, because it all helps the joints. We're raising funds at the moment for next winter, to have shelters that are more insulated and erm, stone on the floor and round the edges and we want to get electricity as well. So, to avoid draughts and damp rising through the ground as well, because obviously we want to prevent pigs being unwell, not only for them, but the costs of vets coming out as well, just a call out charge is quite... our vet bill is one average £1000 a month.

**K:** Yeah, it can rack up quickly.

**P:** Yeah, so if we can get that down, all the better. But the most important thing is finding the right treatment for the pigs. We're injecting them ourselves now if we have to, rather than each time getting the vet out. Like Thelma at the moment needs injecting every day, so we're having to do that. With a few pigs, we've found have large calcium deposits in their urine, erm it's quite white, so we thing they've got a urinary tract infection, which can make them quite ill. Well, it can make us quite ill as well. So, yeah, we're having to give antibiotics to them, and then there's the risk of diseases through airborne diseases, diseases that you can find in the soil, erm, diseases caused through other wild animals, like rats. That they could contract if you're not careful about having a clean environment and reducing the numbers of rats, which is a bit of a contentious issue really, for a vegan sanctuary,

**K:** Yes, it must be difficult to navigate those issues.

**P:** It is, but the priority is the pigs and the pigs health. You know, we're learning as we go along, really.

**K:** It must be difficult for more amateur pig owners who don't really know what they're doing, it must be a big challenge how to find out what is wrong with their pigs, and I'm sure a lot of them go for antibiotics because it's an easy option.

**P:** Well, they would do yeah. But same with us, not all antibiotics work on pigs and that's another thing we've found. There's only certain antibiotics like Penstrep, but then if you overuse them then they're going to build up immunity to that. So, it's not going to work after a period of time and so, erm, it is doing the research and a lot of the time, people will ask us for advice. I mean it might not just be for health, it might be about cutting their nails, dietary questions. We've got a pig whose gluten intolerant and that's just found out through trial and error, of changing his diet as well. We've got a pig that has allergies, again, that's trial and error. Erm, which probably wouldn't be detected normally, it would just be seen as a pig that's not well to treat with antibiotics, because that seems to be the only option really. Erm, so, yeah there's all sorts of reasons for pigs being ill. It could be down to diet, the environment, it could be stress related as well. They are sentient beings, they do get stressed if things change in their environment and that could affect their health as well, so yeah, we just try to... well a farmer, he's givens some new-born piglets, we've had three, unsuccessfully we've tried to keep them Alvie, but that's mainly because the farmer took them away from the mother too soon and dint keep them warm or feed them. So, the last one we had, Phoenix, he was doing really well. But he needed intensive care, so he had to be kept in the vets overnight while they put fluids under his skin, he was cold, so we had to be kept warm, he needed to be tube fed as well. So, we did all that and he was doing well, he was making good progress, but because he was only kept on a concrete floor, he had these abscesses in his trotters, on the pads, they would have affected him for the rest of his life, he would have had issues with walking because of these abscesses. Erm, and then in the end he went in for an operation to be castrated and he had a hernia, but the hernia wrapped itself around his intestines and couldn't be removed so he had to be put to sleep. I mean, that was horrendous, because he was doing so well. That's another thing, watching piglets being born from day one, they're alert, they're running around. [Barb] had her three piglets in a big stable. So, when she sat up to make herself comfortable, they scattered to the other side of the stable and she got herself comfy and grunted, and they came back to her. That was on day one. So, when farmers say you need birthing crates, you don't need birthing crates, because if pigs have enough space, they're very good mothers, they wouldn't crush their piglets, but because they don't have the space in the factory environment, enough to turn around, then they put them in the birthing crates where the mother pig can't move. It's all metal, it's all clinical, it's all cold, concrete floors, no bedding for the pigs as well. So, quite miserable existence. But really, it's just for convenience, for the farmer, and in order to have more pigs in a certain space.

**K:** Yeah, do you ever get erm people taking pigs from farms and handing them over to you?

**P:** Yeah, we've had a few approach us and we found places for them to go, because we don't want to risk the pigs that we've got. If we get in trouble with the police, the council or DEFRA for taking on these pigs that have been taken, you know, we don't want to be associated with that because we don't want to effect the pigs that's we've got. So, we have been involved, but we generally advise them not to do it, because I mean we find that one of the reasons is that they kind of use it to glorify themselves. It's a case of "look at me, aren't I great, I've taken these pigs out of there". But then they don't have a plan of where they're going to go, what they're going to do with them long term. They have pictures of them in their bedrooms on their beds with them, which again is giving the wrong impression. I think, they're also giving themselves a bad name by breaking in because there are thousands of pigs and you just can't rescue them all, if you're making people aware of what goes on and the industry, and raising that awareness, and I myself have contacts with farmers and I try and talk to them, change their views, change their way of life. There's different ways of raising that awareness and changing people’s minds and informing them of what's going on, that I think are more effective. It's hard when you know that they're out there. I think we're heavily burdened as vegans, because we know far more information than most people know about what goes on, and we feel that if you try and put that across, and challenge people, they take offence to it, so it has to be done in a very sensitive, diplomatic way. It's all about educating, people visit us and the pigs, we welcome everybody and just talk to them naturally, if they ask questions, we talk to them. But it's about getting to know the pigs, seeing them naturally, learning about their behaviours, their personality. A very much hands on approach. Pigs love attention, they love food. But not all food, that's a myth as well. So, I think it's far better, we go to schools and colleges, we talk to pupils, we go to animal welfare colleges, we have groups of children come to the wood and I think it's a far better approach doing it that way, than the activist approach. I've even been to, like rallies and been to marches in London and the speakers told people to go in there, "we need to be more activist, get these animals out, take them to your sanctuaries". Which, is the last thing that sanctuaries want, is more animals! Because they're struggling as it is, then to take the risk of taking them on when they've been illegally taken is putting them at risk, and their animals at risk, so I think there's far better ways to get the message across.

**K:** Yes, you can save one or two animals, but some outreach may be able to save thousands more.

**P:** Yeah, that's right. I mean, telling the story of our pigs and where they've come from and the message that normally they wouldn't live longer than six months. Erm, they're kept in really unsuitable conditions. I mean, looking at the statistics, you know, I think it's like 10 million pigs a year are slaughtered, 10 million is an awful lot. Just telling people, if you just didn't eat meat for one day a week, that would make a huge difference to the numbers of animals that are slaughtered. I think if you don't eat pigs for a year, so if you don't eat animals for one month, you save thirty. And that's just one month. Not to mention, your health, the environment and you know, there's different aspects why people stop eating meat. It's not always because they're compassionate about animals, sometimes they care about the environment, sometimes they care about their health. So, there's different aspects to it.

**K:** Yeah, and one thing I am interested in is whether pet pig owners, or anyone who decides they want to have a change of lifestyle and get a smallholding or something like that, how their attitude to meat might change if they were a meat eater beforehand. Do you have any testimonies from owners about that kind of thing?

**P:** We have from volunteers, erm, to be honest, I think people who have smallholdings and look after animals generally don't eat them. I know farmers who don't eat their own animals, who don't eat their own chickens, which is a bit of a contradiction when you think. But you do get attached to them, so ... I've not come across anyone who keeps animals that eats them. I know there are some sanctuaries that are not vegan and have open days and sell meat products, which I find a bit hypocritical. But we've had volunteers that weren't vegetarian or vegan that are now vegan. We've had people come and visit us and get to know the pigs, had children that have gone away saying they're never going to eat meat again, but that's down to their parents really. We've got people who eat meat that won't eat pork, so they kind of differentiated and you could say that's speciesism. But, you know, it's hard to look after pigs and then go home and have a bacon butty. You'd have to be quite a hard person to be able to do that. So, I think we do change minds, we do change. It can be life changing for some people when they come. We know people use it to encourage relatives, friends... often we get "oh my mum won't change" or "my friend won't stop eating meat, I want to bring her to show her". So, we get a lot of that. I think it’s very hard to have animals as pets and then, particularly if you name them, I know some farmers who have done that, but generally I don't think you can. I challenge anyone to raise their own animals and kill them themselves, even farmers struggle to take animals to slaughter. They might take them to market when they're young and let someone else bring them on and take them to slaughter. Because the highest suicide rates are farmers and vets actually. So, they find it difficult. I do struggle with it, because we've rescued some calves and we've supported rescue, in rescuing three calves in the dairy industry. Farmers say they don't like shooting the calves, but they still do it because it's their livelihood. I do think, and some farmers have changed their way of life and become vegan because they can't do it anymore, so you kind have to switch off from that. But there's always particular animals that they become fond of, that they struggle to have slaughtered. So, for them, emotionally is very difficult. I'm not condoning farmers at all, but it's what they've known all their lives. It's no good saying stop farming when they don't have an alternative for their livelihood. So, again, it's an ongoing thing. It's going to take time, a lot of time, but we're heading in the right direction.

**K:** Yes, I hope so. It's interesting to hear how experiences and developing relationships with people can be life changing for people. Going back to pet pig owners, what would you say the main challenges are to keeping a pig perhaps for the first time?

**P:** Just thinking of some of them that we've had... I think the work that's involved, if you're keeping them the house, they've got the potential to cause a lot of damage. They are going to damage of your house for sure. You can't expect a pig to behave like a dog, erm [Sonny] who lived with us, he would go to the door when he wanted to go out, but he would be very destructive in the house. I think not having the right environment, so having a small garden where it's going to turn into sludge and mud when they put them outside. Not being aware of the dietary needs, that's another thing and then, maybe having health issues that they can't afford. Having neighbours who complain about having pigs next door. That happens a lot. Erm, generally if the pig isn't happy it will let you know and will destroy, like it's quite capable of knocking a fence down and getting out. They're very strong willed and strong minded. I think people find out they're not suitable in a garden, they're not suitable in a home... I mean pigs will live off whatever you feed them. But it's not a healthy diet and a lot of pigs get overweight and obese, and they get more health problems. We had one, who had lots of health issues, the owner was moving to the Isle of Man and could no longer keep him. So, trying to get his weight down was quite difficult really. He constantly wanted to eat everyone else's food and he was on various treatments for skin allergies, which I think, was attributable to the poor diet he had. He had a lot of skin issues and needed a lot of treatment and care. So, it can be quite time consuming as well. They're not suitable for children, because if they're not happy they can bite. They can give you a head butt and if that's a big pig it can send you flying. So, if DEFRA were to find out, then you wouldn't be able to give pigs food from a kitchen that's not vegan. You couldn't give a pig food if it's straight from a supermarket or it's found in an orchard, because of the risk of contamination with meat. So, there's certain restrictions on the food you can give them. So, you'd have to be quite strict about that. Then there's all sorts of issues really. Yeah, so really, the size that they can grow, the damage they can cause, the health issues they can have, the cost of keeping a pig if it does have health issues. Knowing what diet to give it, as I said, one pig died because it had a lot of bread. They need a large space to be able to root around and they need to be able to roll in mud for their skin and to cool down. Erm, so there's quite a few reasons why not to keep a pet pig.

**K:** And talking about the DEFRA regulations as well, do you think many owners are actually aware of them?

**P:** I don't think so, no. Because they came to us and they brought their vet, they brought the council as well, and they questioned everything. They said to us that there were certain things we had to do. Keeping pigs as well, you've got to keep records of their medication, you've got to, when you're moving them, you've got to have the special moving and handling license. You have to have a holding number, you have to know what food to give it. I suppose, you're looking at health of the animal and also, if you're living in a small community, it's the people that are around you as well. Because they are clean animals, they don't make a mess where they live, they do it outside, so they need an area for that. But you've still got to find an area where that will go, because you can encourage flies, where pigs are, they drop food, it encourages rats as well. So, you've got to be careful of that. So, yeah you really need to get advice from somewhere before you consider taking on a pig. Erm, we have turned people down if we don't think they've got the space, if it’s not the right environment, or it’s the wrong reasons for wanting pigs. So, you know, we can advise about that. We can come out and vet it. So, they say, on average, a pig needs an acre of land. They're going to turn it up when they root, so you need to be able to partition it off to give that bit of land a chance to rest then change it over as well. You need variable land as well, trees to scratch on, erm, watering holes for them, things that they can explore and find interest in, so they don't get bored and wreck everything. So, yeah, you really do need to find the right information and I don't think breeders are the ones that are gonna give it. They're not particularly interested in that, they're just interested in making money.

**K:** Yeah, and they can sell for a lot I've seen.

**P:** Yeah, they can go for about £500 and there's no guarantees with that as well. I suppose it's like pedigree dogs that people pay a lot of money for, rather than go to a sanctuary or a dog home and get them from there. Then you're encouraging breeders to breed more by doing that. We've also been involved with so-called puppy farms, where people don't get to see where the puppies comes from, it's the same as the pigs. The allotment pigs, initially, these people set off to get these pigs and breed them to sell and then they found that they couldn't sell them, it was hard work, they didn't have the right environment, they didn't have the shelter. So, they lived in two feet of mud, they were being thrown scraps. It was down to the other allotment keepers that took on the care of those pigs, because the breeders didn't have a clue. So, the chances are you wouldn't see that environment, they'd take the pig elsewhere, where you don't see where they've come from. So, yeah, I think always go to a rescue, always go to a sanctuary or somewhere that knows more about the history of the animal, knows more about what it involves to look after the animal. More about the personality of the animal. They're all different, some pigs are very laid back, some are hyperactive, some are moody. Go somewhere that knows more about them and has that experience of and knowledge of looking after them.

**K:** Yeah, unfortunately people do just go to breeders and then are surprised when they have a thirty stone pig and not the mini pig that was advertised.

**P:** Yeah, and as I said, they haven't evolved enough. So, all pigs are tiny when they're born, they stay small for six months, up to a year, don't grow much. Because we've had people say, "oh they do exist, micro pigs, look!" And you ask how old they are, and they say they're only a year old... well they may get a shock when they reach three. So, it is a myth. They don't exist and we don't know how these breeders are getting away with it, so it's something we're going to campaign about and raise awareness about as well.

**K:** Yeah, it sounds like that is something that needs to be done. Have you seen any pigs that might have been initially bought from a breeder and perhaps been rehomed to you that have specific health issues or genetic defects and things like that?

**P:** Erm, yeah. We've had loads actually. We had [Gus], he's been with us quite a while now, he's the one whose gluten intolerant. He has lots of issues with his nails, they keep curling up, so they need trimming a lot. Then we had a few others. They were very timid, they liked to be left alone. [Dorothy] is now on her own, quite lonely, so we're looking to pair her up. She has the allergies, so, we have to treat her with antihistamines as well. She has very flaky skin so we have to rub her with pig oil and, [Bibby] and [Pebble] they had terrible arthritis, really bad to the point where they couldn't walk. Because they weren't getting the exercise, they were putting on weight quickly. So, we had to reduce the amount they were eating, so we tried everything that we possibly could from CBD oil, because we didn't want to keep giving them anti-inflammatory injections, we tried magnets even. In the end, when they could hardly walk, we thought the best thing was to put them to sleep. So, if you've paid £500 for a pig that you're going to have to spend a lot more money on to treat, erm, and also, not have very long because they might not overcome these ailments, it's going to cost you a lot in vet bills. You're going to lose that animal and have to put it to sleep, which is not a nice thing to do.

**K:** Do you see arthritis in younger pigs as well?

**P:** Yeah, definitely. It's all to do with the conditions and the breeding, some pigs are more susceptible than others. Cancer is an issue as well, strokes as well. A lot of the time it's leg ailments, where they might have had an injury and they're struggling to get about. It's difficult for a leg to heal when you've got so much weight on it, and it's sort of difficult to make a pig just lie down and rest. We do have an area, a small area where pigs need treatment, they go in and they're in a smaller, confined area. So, probably a lot of other ailments that I can't think of at the moment, those are the most common we have. And the UTIs.

**K:** They do seem to crop up quite a lot. Is there anything you'd like to add about pet pigs in general before we wrap up?

**P:** I mean, the word pet conjures up like a dog or a cat, which I don't think you can call a pig a pet as such. They're meant to live outside, so unless you've got the right environment, i.e., space, land and you're prepared to put that commitment in. So, they need feeding twice a day, they need a clear area outside, they need an area to wallow in. They need a good diet. You have to be aware about immunisations as well, they need immunisations to prevent from various illnesses that pigs can catch. Even though they're not with other pigs, if someone has been on a farm or with other animals, they can introduce it. Some conditions are airborne as well, some are found in the soil. So, it's just arming yourself with that knowledge and information, not saying that people shouldn't have pigs, but they should be made aware of what that entails, and they should have the right environment and it's a long commitment to look after pigs. As I say, be aware that your pig could grow to thirty, forty stone if you're getting it from a breeder. Unless you're getting a pot-bellied big or a small Kune Kune pig, you're just taking a gamble basically.