Interview with Kelly (pseudonym) animal rescue charity manager

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Researcher = [K]

**K:** So to start, could you just tell me a bit about how [name] Animal Sanctuary came about?

**P**: Definitely, yeah. So, um we were founded in 2017 by two benefactors who were really interested in helping farmed animals in particular. Um, one of the benefactors had been vegan for about thirty years prior, so she had a really deep-rooted kind of passion for helping farmed animals. Her partner wasn't vegan at the time but has now leant towards more towards veganism since being involved in the charity. Ultimately, they were in a very fortunate financial position in order to be able to start a sanctuary because, as we all know, sanctuaries are incredibly costly to run. Particularly as a charity as well we don't really have much of an income, so in order for us to start anything we had to have their backing. Which they gave us which was very great. So, they purchased the site um and it's a 92-acre site, it's home to pastureland, forested woodland, um spring fed pools, it's really beautiful and it's um perfect to provide homes for an array of different species. So, we've actually got around 370 rescued animals at the moment and they include pigs, sheep, horses, goats, chickens, ducks, geese, um and we hope to rescue more in the future and kind of expand on that species range as well. So, we want to get some donkeys, we have got alpacas as well, and we're actually building a really large rabbit enclosure at the moment as well because we want to touch on that species being farmed and used as commodities as well. So, our main kind of ethos is to promote realistic change in the communities that we meet. So I think traditionally, veganism has been perceived as quite militant, and now we want to kind of start the conversation again and do it in a much more inclusive and approachable way, so like, we never force our views on anyone and it's more about like, providing fact-based, erm evidence really to promote change that way and to build positive relationships between our visitors and the animals, and hopefully that will create like organic change, rather than forced [laughs] change or perception, so yeah ... that's what we do!

**K:** Wow, seems like you've got a lot going on there. Lots of different animals, lots of different projects going on. Um, but that's really interesting, kind of the ethos of the sanctuary, would you say that veganism is kind of a central facet of that ethos?

**P**: Um, you can kind of look at it from many different ways to be honest with you. I personally, am not a vegan but I really like the movement because my background is in environmental science and I know that the way we view our food at the moment is really unsustainable. So for me, although I'm not driven by you know... animal welfare as much as say, the owners of the charity, I'm really driven by environmental aspects of reducing our consumption of meat and dairy. Erm but also, I am a massive animal lover and I think that we need to increase our welfare standards for all of the farmed animals that we keep, and I am particularly opposed to factory farming. That's just abhorrent in my opinion.

**K:** Yeah... Sure well that's interesting to hear about the things that kind of drive the sanctuary, and the vegan movement is a big one you can draw on I suppose... hopefully it will help you in the future. Could you tell me a bit more about your role at the sanctuary, just kind of an overview?

**P:** Yeah sure, so I used to work at a University doing Environmental Science teaching, working with the undergrads there. I then transferred to get a secondary science teacher training qualification, so I worked in a school for a couple of years teaching science there. But then I realised that I wanted to work at the sanctuary because I wanted to work with animals as well. So my job really, is to manage the visitor programme and that includes educational field trips and workshops for erm... it could be disabled adults, it could be special educated needs children, so we work to build confidence with them by working with the animals, or we could be teaching them about sustainable practices, climate change and how animal agriculture can contribute negatively towards that. And we also try to highlight the best practice animal welfare and husbandry techniques, so yeah, it's my job to communicate how we care for the animals and how we interact with the animals to the public.

**K:** Yeah, that's an important job to do I suppose. There's lots of things you can use with animals to kind of educate, like sustainability, food production... there's loads of things going on. So how long have you been at the sanctuary as well? Where you there at the beginning or…?

**P:** I actually volunteered with them at the beginning in 2017, and then I went away and did my training and then came back in employment in 2019.

**K:** Oh okay, okay. So, you've been there a couple of years. Do you know kind of in the beginning of the sanctuary, if we talk about pet pigs now more specifically, where they on the radar at the beginning**?**

**P:** Yeah, I would say so. So, the founders, that couple that I spoke about at the start, they're particularly passionate about rescuing pigs and I think that's probably because they keep pet pigs themselves, but they're fortunate enough to have the right environment to keep them. So, they've got, you know, a secure outdoor large enclosure with secure fencing and stuff like that, and they're actually quite savvy I would say in how to keep animals. So, they were already aware of the issue of pet pigs, but I would definitely say that when we started rescuing them we were inundated from the start.

**K:** Really?

**P:** I think word spread really quickly when we opened that, you know, there was a brand-new sanctuary with lots of space, and then suddenly, it was just hundreds of calls [laughs**].**

**K:** Yeah, I can imagine. So, you say the issues were, well the benefactors knew about them to begin with, from the information you sent me, it seems you did get quite a few pigs specifically from pet backgrounds, erm I imagine you probably get way more calls as well, than those you can actually take in. Do you think over time you've seen a change in the numbers, of either pigs you have taken in or even just enquiries about taking new pigs?

**P:** So, for us, erm we erm really prioritise like our animal welfare so, what we always try and do and make sure we do have the facilities and we do have the space to take on more animals. So that obviously compromises how many new cases we can take. At the moment, we are at absolute full capacity, and we are not able to accept any other animals, erm, particularly pigs. Whereas three years ago, we were in a position where we could say yes much more frequently. So, I would say in terms of the number of requests, it's always been quite steady. Pigs have always been frequently looking for homes, but as I was saying before, word definitely spread when we opened that there was a new sanctuary on the block and people were jumping to get in there first. To be honest with you, that's what happens with us now. I became aware of a new sanctuary that opened a month ago, and now whenever we get calls for animals, I always refer them there because I know that they're gonna have space.

**K:** It seems from your website as well, I've had a look at like, the pigs' profiles, and it seems you've got some with a lot of different backgrounds, I'd like to talk about that maybe a bit more later if we have some time, about ones that perhaps weren't pets. But thinking about the breeds that you see, I know the "micro pig", I put that in air quotations, is quite common, why do you think that is?

**P:** Definitely because it was popularised by celebrities I think, one that springs to mind… I know this is probably a bit outdated now and shows my age, but Paris Hilton had a pet pig, and like back in the day she was quite well known. I think it kind of glamourised pigs more than they perhaps should have been. Erm, and particularly with an increase in social media usage over the years, people have obviously shared like viral imagery of these "teacup" or "micro pigs" [air quotations used] and, as you're aware I'm sure, there's no such thing as a micro pig. So, it's very misleading for the public. Particularly, when people are like, dressing their pigs up in tutu's, or just showing really misleading imagery. Speaking of personal experience, we've had many micro pigs and one in particular that I'm thinking of, when he was first purchased from a breeder by his previous owner, he was you know, 30cm. But what they don't realise is all pigs are that small when they're first born, and it's only when they start to grow really, really rapidly you realise that actually, that's a Large White [laughs]. So, yeah, I think there's definitely a knowledge gap there. I think breeders are taking advantage of people who erm, don't know the ins and outs of keeping pigs and erm, I just, it's probably a good little money maker for them. Erm, yeah, we have taken on a lot of micro pigs, but as you know, they're all just crosses mainly of Kune Kune's, Pot Bellies, Vietnamese Pot Bellies, erm yeah, but sometimes they could just be Large Whites! [Laughs]. So, it's really just luck of the draw. And you know, saying that some of the imagery we have seen online, pigs can be really affectionate, they can be great pets, but it's just a case of doing it correctly and doing it with the pigs’ interests at heart and not doing it with your interests at the forefront.

**K:** Yeah, I would agree with that. Talking about breeders as well, do you think that many people do primarily go to breeders, or are people looking to maybe rescue pigs? That's something I'm not too sure about... where people get their pet pigs.

**P:** I think it's a real mixed bag and it depends whereabouts in the country you are. If you are located in an urban or a rural area. I think if you're located in a rural area, you're more likely to know erm, you know, if you could rescue or buy a pig from a local farm, rather than a breeder. Whereas, if you're in a more urban area, I think you're more likely to go to a "micro or teacup pig" [air quoted] breeder or search it online. Many of our urban pigs, they were kept in flats, or kept in houses, in inner city areas and that was obviously, totally inappropriate and they were then referred to us within about six months of being born. Erm, whereas some, who are located in a more rural area, they were actually able to have some outdoor space and they were able to look after the pig for slightly longer. In that case, it was other implications that made them want to give up their pig, such as you know perhaps having a health ailment, or something that they couldn't afford anymore. Quite often, medical bills that they didn't want to pay.

**K:** What kind of health issues do crop up often?

**P:** Joint issues are common. Erm, again it depends on where the pig is being kept, what environment. If it's kept you know, in mud, up to its knees all its life that can give it foot problems, that can give it really sore feet, they could have skin problems. There's something called Erysipelas, which is really common in pigs, erm, what have we seen a lot of... we see a lot of arthritis in our pigs, erm, yeah that's most of the health concerns.

**K:** Ok. Thinking about breeders again, what would you say a respectable breeder would look like?

**P:** [Laughs] I would argue… On a personal level, I don't think we should be breeding pigs for pets. I don't think they make appropriate... [sighs] it's a real tough one. We obviously look after our pigs, and I do see them as pets in a sense, but I would never agree with keeping a pet pig indoors. I think it is only appropriate if you've got significant outdoor space with secure fencing and sufficient enrichment and stimulation in the environment. I would say, with that caveat, if you have the correct facilities, then a correct breeder would be ensuring that you have those facilities in place. They would be ensuring that you have a farm vet, or you're aware of the differences between a farm vet and small animal vet, you're aware of the cost of keeping a pig, because they are very costly animals. Erm, also the social needs of the animal, like they're incredibly intelligent, you can't really keep them on their own. But also, you know the implications of keeping them in larger groups. They have a social hierarchy, so you need to be mindful of that, um you need to be aware of how they communicate. I don't know, there's so much to learn about keeping pigs and if you were to go into that blind, I would say it's not going to end well. So, if I were going to breed pigs, I would want to almost provide knowledge and training about how to do that.

**K:** Yeah, I guess it is very different to getting yourself a cat or a puppy perhaps, there's lots of different things to consider. But thinking about the pandemic as well, I remember in lockdown one, there was a lot of reports of about a puppy-boom and people buying themselves puppies to erm, kind of ease boredom I suppose. Have you seen that with any other animals? Particularly farmed animals, not necessarily pigs.

**P:** That's a really good question. Erm... tell you what, we do work with an organisation called the British Hen Welfare Trust and they are renowned for rescuing spent egg laying hens from industry and rehoming them as pets. We definitely had an increase demand for chickens as pets during lockdown, yeah. So, chickens are the only animals that we actually rehome, and that's because we think they can be kept quite easily as pets by anyone who's not particularly familiar with keeping farm animals. So, they would fall much more into the everyday pet bracket, as opposed to keeping livestock, which is a bit more specialist, I would think. So yeah, we did host a number of hen rehoming days and we rehomed all of the hens. That's about 200 hens each day, erm apart from two that were too poorly to go to a home, they needed a bit more TLC, so they stayed with us and recovered.

**K:** Yeah, that's interesting with chickens. Maybe people wanted their own eggs and things**.**

**P:** That could well be it actually, because obviously there was a food insecurity issue at the time, wasn't there? Everyone was going mad trying to buy everything, so maybe they just wanted a secure source of eggs!

**K:** I heard of panic buying toilet paper, but not panic buying chickens, that's a new one. [Both laugh]. But you didn't see that kind of behaviour with pigs I suppose?

P: No, I can't say so, no.

**K:** I guess, it might be more problems for you if you got a pig, a big commitment isn't it?

**P:** Mmm [nods head]

**K:** Well, we talked about kind of keeping pigs in different kind of spaces, say an outdoor, big enclosure, tight security is probably best. But I imagine you see the pigs who are kept in perhaps worse conditions, inside flats and things, would you say that is more common in urban areas?

**P:** Yeah, definitely in urban areas, I mean if people don't have access to outdoor space, they obviously can't keep their pig that way, but if they are insistent that they want a pig, they will just get one and try and keep it indoors. So, one pig that we've got, that was on our stock list, or two actually, [Joe] and [Gabe], they were, I believe they were brothers, and they were both "micro pigs" [air quoted], erm and to be honest they are adults, and they are only, well reasonably small. But imagine that animal in a flat and they were incredibly destructive, you know. They were ripping up carpet, destroying furniture, and although they are like very affectionate pigs, they love fuss and they love attention, they are also pigs. They love to root around with their snouts and they love to scratch on things, erm, yeah, that's just an inappropriate environment for them. Whereas now, they're kept in our woodland, which is much more pig appropriate. We've tried to model it on what would be a wild boar environment. So, you know, there is plenty of woodland for them to root around in, there's natural foraging opportunities, erm, different trees for them to scratch up against and nest building opportunities as well which is really important. See like, all of this behaviour, I didn't even realise that pigs made nests until I started working with the charity and working with the pigs directly, erm but that's like a really important natural behaviour. And as soon as you remove the opportunity to carry out natural behaviours, the animal actually becomes quite stressed, which in turn can lead to destructive behaviours. So, it's just kind of a negative feedback cycle, where if you're not providing the right environment, they will make that environment worse out of stress and frustration and boredom.

**K:** And would that lead to potentially behavioural problems that are difficult for owners to cope with?

**P:** Yeah definitely, so like, if a pig is stressed, they will, they can become frustrated, they could be chewing or biting on objects. From the testimonies I receive of people giving up their pets, it's all about destroying the furniture, that's the common one, or trying to escape as well. So even if they're kept in outdoor environments, if it's not the right environment they won't be happy there.

**K:** So, it seems quite a few people do actually keep them primarily indoors and then have the consequences of destroyed furniture and things, but unfortunately you probably don't really see those who live probably quite happy lives in a nice environment such as your woodland sanctuary.

**P:** Yeah, like I'm sure there are many pet pig owners across the country who look after their pigs really, really well and that's amazing and we would like, advocate for that because we know they can be good companion animals. But we just have to be quite careful about, erm, we need to educate people about how to look after them properly and repair the damage that has been done by the misleading videos that you might see online. It’s reminiscent of like, someone who's not familiar with animal welfare might see a video of like a monkey dressed up in denim shorts or something [laughs], like eating a banana out of someone’s hand and you might think “oh that's really cute, I could do that”. But actually, you know, the back story of that image is rooted in mistreatment of animals and improper care. And it's the same thing with pigs, so you have to kind of, although they're farmed animals, you have to think of them like in the same sense you would a wild animal.

**K:** How much of a problem do you think that kind of those, that imagery, like Paris Hilton or David Beckham with their pet pigs, how much of a problem do you think that might have caused? How severe do you think it is?

**P:** It's difficult for me to say and know without asking people directly, but in my opinion, [sighs], I mean, I'm just thinking my friends will send me videos of you know, pigs doing funny things in people's houses on Instagram, and they think it's funny, you know, I don't. So that's just a personal, kind of, I can't really comment on it because I haven't spoken to enough people.

**K:** Yeah, it's a difficult thing to quantify, I guess you can't. One of the main things I'm trying to do at the moment is get an idea of how severe the issue is for pet pigs and also for sanctuaries who are kind of running out of space, running out of funds and kind of, how that could be changed really. It's difficult to know where to go. I don't know how many people in the U.K., for example, have pet pigs. It's a difficult thing to find out.

**P:** Yeah, I imagine that is difficult. Obviously, they have to have a holding number so I think you could probably look that up, how many like smallholdings and stock numbers there are, if you went through DEFRA. But it would be hard to quantify which ones are pets and which ones are for, you know, consumption.

**K:** Yeah, I guess there's also an overlap with them as well. I think some people might keep pets and decide they do want to get them slaughtered, is that something you've come across with any owners?

**P:** Erm... [pause], I'm trying to think if any came from industry. One of our pigs, [Petey], came from a petting zoo in Scotland and he was destined to be eaten, and then I think the story was, a member of the public connected with him and decided to buy him from the petting zoo. Then sent him to us, because she couldn't look after, she recognised she couldn't look after him herself, but she didn't want him to be killed, so he came to us. Erm, what else? We've had a couple of breeding sows, Tamworth sows, they were used to breed pigs for consumption, but they actually weren't destined to be eaten themselves. Erm, but many of ours are Kune Kune's and I don't think they're for eating anyway, they're more of a companion pig I believe.

**K:** Interesting how the different breeds... I suppose they're bred that way to be more companion animals than for consumption.

**P:** Yeah.

**K:** Erm, do you think there's any other challenges that owners may face that we perhaps haven't touched on yet?

**P:** [Long pause]. I think probably the cost of keeping the animal is quite important. One issue that we had with one of our very first pigs, was erm, he actually escaped his enclosure. So, he was kept in quite insecure fencing in their back garden and he you know, it started out as a beautiful lawn and he quickly turned it into a quagmire of mud just through rooting and he, his name was [Westy]. So, he was one that was bought as a ‘micro pig’ [air quoted] and he started in the house but grew so large that he had to live outside eventually. Erm and one day he escaped, and he actually ‘attacked' [air quoted] a next-door neighbour. So, if you google it, you can actually find the news report because she reported it to The Sun, I could send you a link to it if you like.

**K:** That would be really good actually yeah.

**P:** So, she went to the papers and said “Nightmare pig attacked me” and there was this horrible photo of this elderly woman with like, bruises on her leg but you know, I don't think, I don't know if he did ‘attack’ [air quoted] her, but it was probably like not understanding pig behaviour and she was elderly, she probably couldn't get out of the way, but he's just a big pig and he probably tried to get by her and anyway, she ended up pressing charges and the owners of the pig were absolutely devastated because it would mean the pig would be put to sleep, and they actually managed to persuade her to allow them to give the pig up and come to us rather than be put to sleep, so that's what happened. Do you want me to try and find the link? I'll send it to you after.

**K:** That would be really good thanks. Well, that's a happy ending for [Westy] I suppose. But I wonder if that's kind of more common than we think, perhaps people don't report these things or maybe not to the same extent as like "pet pig attacked elderly woman" [air quoted] erm, I don't want to say aggressive, but these behaviours that may appear aggressive.

**P:** Yeah, yeah, well that is another issue actually, that is a good point, because they are obviously, they can be quite large, unwieldy animals. For example, if you want to administer some medication to them, that can be really difficult if you're on your own, you don't have the correct handling facilities, so it's like common practice to restrain a pig with like a halter when you're trimming their feet, or perhaps giving them an injection. And that's for their safety, as well as for your safety as well, because many of the pigs will have sharp tusks and you know, if they do catch you, they can cause quite a severe injury, so and especially if you introduce a new pig to an established group, they will fight, they will spar in order to establish their social hierarchy. If you don't understand what's going on that can look quite shocking to you and you might want to try and separate them or if you're worried one pig might get severely hurt, you might separate them and that might result in you getting injured. In those scenarios, you have to be able to gauge whether or not they are right to mix. So, we find that if you mix pigs that are of the same kind of build and height, they will fight for a lot longer than say a large pig and a small pig, because it's quite quickly established who is the dominant and who is submissive. So, it's knowing stuff like that in order to reduce aggression and potential risk of injury, that is important knowledge to have.

**K**: Yeah, it must be quite a sharp learning curve for someone who has never been around pigs to know how to understand it. Could you tell me maybe about how people, or what kind of resources, prospective owners might lean on to learn these things?

**P:** Do you mean like written learning resources or like physical equipment or?

**K:** Both, I suppose, wherever you would learn those skills.

**P:** That is a good question. I'm sure there are like books, published books on how to keep pigs as livestock animals but they certainly won't touch on the subtleties of keeping them as pets, I don't think. Much of the research that I've looked into has been about pigs in industry and that's commonly cited, but what I struggle with is you know, how to look after your pig properly at home, there are informal stuff like forums online, but you know, you can't really trust them because they're not peer-reviewed, that could be any type on information. Although you can collect quite informal recommendations elsewhere, to get a trusted source of advice is quite tricky I'd say.

**K:** I suppose you can read a lot about how to keep livestock animals, but there are subtleties in keeping them as pets, it would be slightly different. Do you think that maybe having more credible, written resources would help prospective owners or do you think maybe it could be a bit of a double-edged sword and actually encourage people to take up pets that they might not be able to take care of properly?

**P:** That's a good question as well. I think there is a need, again, it's just finding that reputable source. I think the RSPCA are perhaps the most familiar to a layman, in terms of animal welfare, but erm, I would also argue that the RSPCA aren't the best and I don't think they do things entirely, absolute best practice. I do think there is a niche and there is a need for more resources on how to keep pigs as pets, so I think that would be great, but I couldn't tell you where to find them.

**K:** Yeah, I don't know whether they exist or not. But it's interesting because I think if these things aren't available, people will go to the internet and find maybe less credible sources and that's what they will take as their gospel, so maybe it would be useful to have more credible information. But that is perhaps a whole different conversation to have. But erm, talking about kind of maybe stigma people have with keeping pigs as pets, I know we spoke about the elderly woman who went to the papers about her interaction, but do you think maybe they may face other issues in their neighbourhood with neighbours and so on?

**P**: Yeah, quite possibly. If you're in a built-up area and keep your pig outdoors, I can imagine there would be complaints about smell, number one. Or the presence of flies, but I think that's probably a misconception because erm, we know that from keeping our pigs, we don't really have a fly problem. Erm, they are relatively clean animals and they do have designated latrine spots. It's just whether or not you give them the opportunity to have that. So if they don't have enough space to have a designated toileting spot obviously that's going to affect their cleanliness, erm, if you're not cleaning them out as often as you should then that's going to effect the likelihood of a smell complaint. I don't think they're too noisy, well, when it's feeding time they do, like, squeal out of excitement, but I don't know if that would be enough to warrant complaint or stigma. Erm, yeah, I mean, I'm biased though because I like pigs [laughs]. You know, I would struggle to understand why people wouldn't.

**K:** I guess it's like a dog barking next door, might get some complaints.

**P:** Yeah, like when I speak to some of my city friends about what I do and stuff, I know they are a bit fearful of animals like pigs. You know, that's fair enough, if you're not familiar with them, erm because you know it's good to have respect for them animals. Sometimes I think it's unwarranted fear.

**K:** I think it's something you get from interacting with a species or individual animal over time, you kind of learn the ins and outs of them, and they're perhaps not as scary.

**P:** Can I ask erm, you know what kind of interaction you've had with pigs?

**K:** Me personally, I haven't had a lot. I mean I love animals, always have and I've volunteered at various places, various farm sanctuaries and things, but I don't have a lot of experience with pigs. So, it's a learning curve for me, I'm trying to learn all about welfare and behaviour, and I don't come from a welfare science background either, so it's very interesting to learn all these things and hopefully, after all these lockdowns I can actually go out and hang out with some pigs!

**P:** Yeah definitely, well you'd be more than welcome to come up and visit our sanctuary and if you did want to do any behavioural studies, you'd be more than welcome, because that's something we'd be interested in doing as well. So I think it's quite interesting to look at their social interactions as well, erm and at the moment, speaking from an organisational point of view, we as I said before, are very opposed to factory farming, and I'm sure you're aware of the conditions in factory farming settings are barren and unstimulating and very cramped and we want to demonstrate the necessity to absolutely get rid of that system, because, when you see the correct environment and you see how they interact with that environment, and others in it, there is such a strong case to make factory farming illegal.

**K:** Yeah

**P**: So, if you'd want to do some data collection on that kind of aspect, that would be amazing.

**K:** Yeah, that would be really interesting, so outside of pet pigs as well I am kind of interested in all aspects of livestock welfare and behaviour and perhaps that's another project for another day.

**P:** Yeah, you're right at the start, I don't want to overwhelm you!

**K:** Ha-ha, yes, I've got a lot of topics that I want to eventually look at, but perhaps coming to visit would be good.

**P:** Well do keep us on record because we would love to have you.

**K:** Thank you very much. Erm, yeah, what else would we want to talk about? I suppose the last theme I'd like to talk about is biosecurity and disease risk. Could you tell me anything about kind of the attitude of pet pig owners that you might encounter towards perhaps disease risk and biosecurity regulations?

**P:** Erm I'll start by saying it's not something that we commonly discuss with people that give up their pets, and I don't know if that's because they're oblivious to the issue or it just hasn't naturally come up in population. Erm, all I can really comment on is how we perceive disease risk in our sanctuary, and we take it incredibly seriously and we always have a mandatory quarantine period when we accept a new animal and we also give them like an MOT, we worm them, make sure there is nothing they can pass on to our existing stock. Erm, we have had problems, as I mentioned earlier, with something called Erysipelas and that apparently is very common in pet pigs, according to our vet. Erm, and it's treatable with antibiotics but it can cause quite a nasty skin disease. Erm, there was another issue, it's very common as well. There's just a lot of joint issues erm, we find it's quite tricky getting the substrate right for pigs. They don't like it too soft and they struggle on harder surfaces as well, so at the moment we've had to bring all our pigs in from the paddocks because they're too muddy. They don't like to be covered in mud in the winter, that's more of a summer behavioural thing to protect their skin and cool them down. So, in order to look after them more in the winter and keep a close eye on them, we bring them inside to sheltered accommodation in the barn and some of them have really struggled being on concrete floors. You know, they are, some of them are limping. Particularly the older pigs, we've got some like 12, 13-year-old pigs, so we have to make sure we rotate them, put them out on the soft mud for a bit and it's all, it's one of our main health concerns really.

**K:** I suppose that would also be an issue for pet pigs inside of homes and not having the variation of surfaces to walk on and things.

**P:** Yeah, yeah. I think that must stem from like, their ancestral beginnings really, because they were constantly on the move and following food opportunities, so that would take them over a variety of different substrates. Whereas, if you're keeping them in a contained position, they just don't get on well with it.

**K:** So, you say that's the main health problem?

**P:** Erm particularly for us, yeah. But we do have particularly muddy ground and very thick clay soil with poor drainage, so it's a very thick mud, if you were in like a drier, sandier soil it might be better for them. Yeah, I would say that's the ideal substrate actually.

**K:** Ok, yeah. I guess that's very hard to mimic if you're at home, in your garden.

Yeah, you're severely restricted by whatever your ground type is wherever you are.

Yes, that's something I hadn't thought about that much, ground type and things. You said that you don't really have much experience with owners and their attitudes towards er, disease risk, but do you know about, or could you tell me about any instances of zoonotic disease risk that you might have come across?

**P:** Yep, erm. So obviously since the coronavirus outbreak, there has been much more awareness around zoonotic diseases, but this is something that has been existence since the beginning of factory farming. I'm sure you're familiar with the Swine Flu epidemic, I think that was 2009 in the U.K. I would say those in agriculture and those in industry are aware of the risk of zoonotic disease transmission and they do take it incredibly seriously. I would say if you're keeping one or two pet pigs, it's probably not top of your priority list, erm because it's a much lower likelihood of being a severe risk to you. It's only in those overstocked, cramped, barren conditions that the risk of gene mutation from say, a pig strain of flu, varying to a human transmissible strain of flu is much more increased. For us, that's a major selling point to get rid of these factory farmed systems, because they are such a risk. But I would argue that keeping pet pigs doesn't pose much of a risk as long as you're doing things correctly and keeping them at safe stocking levels.

**K:** Yeah, I wonder to what extent people do kind of follow the DEFRA regulations on like, feeding household waste, walking routes things like that.

**P:** Yeah, I'm not too sure actually. I wish I could help you more with that, but that's just something we haven't done a lot of outreach into. Because I know, as you say, some people who keep pigs as pets do take them on walks and stuff don’t they? Like I personally don't know the rules around that. Is there anything specific?

**K:** I know you have to have a licence and I think you have to inform your local APHA office of the route you want to take, and they will approve it, if it's close to like a takeaway place or something they may not allow it. But I'm not sure how strictly it's enforced, I don't know if everyone who does take their pig on a walk does have that licence and has their route checked.

**P:** No, I don't know. Speaking from our experience, we are, have we ever been inspected by DEFRA? I think we have been inspected. Erm we've been there for three years and I think we've had one inspection, it could be more, maybe don't quote me on that one if that's ok. I'd need to check that, if you want me to I can.

**K:** Yeah, that would be good actually if you can.

**P:** But you're right yeah, they definitely need to have a holding number... [writes down reminder] ... cool yeah I'll speak to the manager about that and let you know.

**K:** Thanks. Yeah, it's hard to know, I mean the next phase of my research after I've spoken to a few sanctuaries like yours, I'm going to try and find some pet pig owners to talk to, but it's difficult to know without talking to people.

**P:** Erm, we do have a couple of our supporters. So er, [Westy] the pig, erm their previous owners are still very much supporters of us. He's passed away now, he was an old pig. But I could reach out to them if you like to see if they would be interested in participating in your research, because they, I'm sure they'd be very helpful and they're lovely people. Yep, I will ask them.

**K:** Yeah, that would be great, it probably won't be for a couple of months but to have their interest would be useful, a good starting point.

**P:** Yeah definitely, and they could probably put you in contact with other pet pig owners. They're probably friends with other people who do it.

**K:** Yeah, that would be great.

**P:** Are you speaking to erm, [another sanctuary]?

**K:** Erm, I think I have emailed them but I'm not sure if we've arranged an interview yet.

**P:** They'd be really good to chat to. They actually rehome their pigs.

**K:** Yeah, yeah. A lot of places don't rehome their pigs which is interesting to see the differences with those who do and those who don't, there's different insights.

**P:** Yeah, I personally don't have a problem with rehoming pigs to someone who has the right knowledge and facilities, but it's just the view of the charity that we can't ensure the level of care elsewhere, so for us, it's about providing the best care for a lucky few, rather than rehoming.

**K:** Yeah, hopefully by increased outreach and education maybe that won't...

**P:** Yeah, that's definitely a possibility, yeah.

**K:** Well, is there anything you'd like to add, maybe what would you say to prospective pig owners that are perhaps looking at a micro pig breeder?

**P:** I'd probably say definitely do your research and speak to people who have kept pigs, even if it's a farmer, like they will have much more knowledge about how to keep a pig than you probably do. You could also ring up a farm vet and talk through common ailments with pigs, common health problems and they would be able to recommend exactly what you should have in place. Also, speaking to people like us, speak to sanctuaries. Like, I think the best approach to take is gaining as much information as possible before committing, rather than learning along the way because that is when difficulties arise.

**K:** Yes, probably good advice. You mentioned at the beginning as well, when the sanctuary opened you had an influx of calls in the first few weeks. Do you think that's because there is a genuine need for more sanctuaries in the U.K.?

**P:** Erm the need is definitely there, It's difficult, you could either argue there's a need for more sanctuaries, or there's a need to reduce the amount of pig breeding or keeping pigs as pets. So, it's kind of like a double-edged sword, either educate people to not keep them inappropriately, or to accept that people will always do that and find specialist homes for when they inevitably give them up.

**K:** Yeah, that's the issue. But how do you think going forward the main issues surrounding pet pig keeping, how could they be changed? I know that's a very big question, but briefly would you like to kind of say a few things about that.

**P:** Sorry, what was the question again?

**K:** So how would you change the main issues that are present in pet pig lives? Maybe, it's regulating breeders more, perhaps that's not the best option if we do want to reduce the number of pet pigs, but as an example.

**P:** Perhaps making it illegal to keep pigs as house pets. That might help, erm ... I'd say that's probably it. And I think we should have minimum guidelines and minimum facility requirements in place, associated with your licence number. So, if you don't meet those requirements, you don't get the license.

**K:** Yeah, would it be useful to differentiate requirements for pet pigs as opposed to those who are kept as livestock?

**P:** No, I think those that are kept as livestock should be kept to the same standard as pets. Erm, yeah, I think there's improvements to be made in the way that pigs are currently kept, definitely. Erm, if in an ideal world, I think there should be a minimum space requirement of erm, so many meters per pig, I'm not sure how many meters that would be, but you know there has to be minimum stimulation requirements and minimum shelter and feeding requirements as well. You know, having fresh straw at all times, you know, not being left with no straw at all, in barren environments, that's the worst condition. Sorry, it's a tricky one.

**K:** No that's alright, it's a difficult question and a big question to answer. I'm not sure whether I will be able to answer it wholly by the end of the project, but hopefully we can make steps towards making it a safer activity. Like it's not very feasible to say no pet pigs at this point in time and..

**P:** Yes, and I don't think it's fair to say no pet pigs either, as I said before, there are some who really care about the pigs and look after them really, really well. So, it's just about doing it properly, that's the important thing.

**K:** Yeah. Well thank you for your time today, it's been really interesting to hear about pigs you have at [sanctuary name], I hope I get to meet them one day maybe. Maybe this year, who knows.

**P:** Hopefully, that would be great yeah.