Interview with Chloe (pseudonym) pig sanctuary volunteer

26th November 2021 – in person at sanctuary

Researcher: [K]

K: How did you feel about pigs before you started working here?

P: Well I've been vegan since January, and I started here in July, I did sort of have a connection with these animals already, but I'd never had much experience with them, I'd never really met a pig and I'd never been to a sanctuary before. Let alone one that is specifically for pigs. When I first got here, it did take me a while to learn everybody’s names and over the past few months I've really learned a lot about them and their personalities, what they do like, what they don’t like, and all the different emotions they show and what they mean. I’m still learning every day now and it’s really interesting.

K: Can you give an example of the different emotions you see?  
  
P: So occasionally a pig will get a tusk stuck in the pig wire, and they make a certain sound which means they’re distressed. So, instantly you go up to them and work out what’s wrong because it may not be that their tusk is stuck, they might be stuck in the mud or something along those lines. But they have a certain noise they make for different things like their tusk getting stuck or if they were having a disagreement with their partner.

K: How do you deal with the disagreements?

P: I think they sort it out amongst themselves, there’s always one that’s dominant and one that’s submissive who ususally gives up in the end. There’s never been a time when they’ve had to be seperated as far as I know.

K: Have you been here when a new pig has been introduced?

P: Not yet, no.

K: How do you talk about pigs to others who don’t have experience with them?

P: Well, they’ve all got their personalities so I would probably describe them all differently. Generally, they’re all just like dogs. That’s one way they’re usually described because they will come when they’re called, they wag their tails and [Harry] will even sit for food sometimes. They are so loving, and they can feel your emotions as well. So, if you’re upset they could tell.

K: Have you had a time where that’s happened?

P: Not yet

K: Who would you go to?

P: Probably [Tam], or [Harry].

K: Why them?

P: Well, [Harry] has a very big personality, like most of them do, but he is just so sweet, so loving and he’s always looking for attention and food.

K: is there any of the pigs here that you think don’t seek out humans as much?

P: We have lazier pigs, I think they don’t have much of a connection with us and vice versa, because they do just come out for food, go to the toilet, and go back to sleep. They don’t come out for affection and interaction with us, unless it’s for food.

K: and you did an animal care course at college?

P: yes

K: How do the things you learned there help you here?

P: at college we learned about health and disease, so that comes in handy. Hygeine, as well, so when we put sudocrem on the potbellies, we do it individually to stop any transmission. The sudocrem stops infection as well. We also did a lot on health and safety working with animals, so you have to be wary of animals biting you or something. You always have to have one eye on the pigs when you’re in a pen and do what you’ve got to do as well.

K: Have you ever been the one to notice something wrong with a pig?

P: Yeah, [Abe] a few weeks ago, he started to limp, and we weren’t too sure why. We put it down to the cold, because it did stop in the end. As soon as I saw that, me and another volunteer went and pointed it out to Jane.

K: And what happened?

P: Well, we monitored it for a few days, he was eating and moving about still and it did improve quite quickly. When it’s cold their joints sometimes get stiff so it was probably that.

K: Have you been here when a vet has come out?

P: yeah, because the pig was poorly it was quite sad, but it’s also interesting to see what they do when they’re here. That was a learning experience for me, because we never had vets come out at college.

K: Do you think the vets handle pigs in a different way?

P: Well, the pigs here are very used to us. But they don’t like the vet, or the smell of vet. They tend to dislike them. I don’t know how they feel about the vet coming out, they just know they’re hear and it’s not a good sign. Because, obviously they smell different to what we do and they wonder why they’re here and prodding me.

K: There was a pig recently that was poorly and had to be put to sleep, where you here for that?

P: Yes, you do get to know about all the animals and their personalities, you do build a connection with them, like you do with a pet. So, to see him go downhill very suddenly was quite a shock to all of us. We thought it was one issue, then he didn’t get any better and it was put down to being something else. But we still had that hope that he would pull through, but he didn’t. It was sad watching the whole process. It is part of sanctuary life though, and you will experience it, so I'm glad I did in a way.

K: is that the first pig you’ve seen go?  
  
P: Yeah

K: How do you cope with moving forward?

P: It is sad, but you have to carry on. You still have pigs to look after, other pigs and all the other animals we have.

K: Do you feel you have a similar bond with the pigs as your pets at home?

P: Definitely.

K: How do you feel about pet pigs?

P: as long as you can provide them with the life they need, then fine, but if not well.... as long as people do their research. I think pets are amazing though.

K: What could pigs offer as pets?

P: I guess, well, they’re so intelligent so you can really form a bond with them. They know who you are, they’ll always make you laugh as well.

K: And what do you think a pig benefits from being somebody’s pet?

P: More space, if they [the owner] has it.

K: What about in terms of their social lives?

P: That’s a good question, I think pigs do really like interacting with people and having a one to one bond with someone that they could build over time would probably be nice for them. Most of them here love everyone, but in summer and stuff there’s more people and they all get petted. Which they do like, because they get treats too, but I’m not sure, maybe a stronger one to one relationship with someone they’d like too.