Interview with Grace (pseudonym) animal rescue charity manager

23rd November 2021, online

Researcher – [K]

K: Can you tell me in your own words how the organisation became involved in taking pigs in?

P: Yeah, so I think it's like 35-40 years ago the rescue actually started, just from the founder and going into a vet for her dog and seeing a dog being put to sleep. When she asked why, it's just the owner didn't want it and so she kind of said “I've got land. Any animals like this ring me and I'll make space for them.” I wasn't there when it started, but it basically became a case of we've now got a kennels, cattery, small animal unit, wildlife, and farm unit. And so yeah. Pretty much just. An abandoned pig the vet’s found and gone, ‘here you go’ and we take it in, and from there it's grown to where we are now. We've got eight pigs on site currently and a small farm area.

K: And was that one pig a pet pig?

P: Yes, yeah. All of our pigs bar one where pet pigs yeah.

K: Do you think keeping pigs as pets has become kind of more or not so popular in recent years?

P:  I think definitely a few years ago there was the rise of obviously the micro pigs and that big trend of owning them. I'm not sure if now we're finding that it's still on that rise, as what we're seeing more of you, you've got a pig a few years ago and now there's definitely the rise of hundreds of pigs need in homes because people don’t want them. So, I don't think I could say whether there's a rise in people wanting pigs as pets, but there's definitely been a rise of people wanting to find them new homes as obviously they’ve got to full size now. And yeah, we struggle. We do rehome our pigs if possible, to the right home and we've never had a successful rehoming.

K: Why do you think that is?

P:  Well, I've only been there just under a year, but I think it's maybe in the past people haven't done their research and maybe haven't been told like how intelligent pigs are, first of all. I think is a big thing, I personally don't think you can just have your pigs in a pen and leave them. I also just think the destruction. People have probably got a nice field and within a few weeks it's not going to be very nice. And I think lack of research people don't actually know as much about pigs think they think they're going to be an easy, easy pet.

K: Yeah. Why do you think there is that kind of perception by a lot of people?

P: I think lack of research out there, maybe there isn't enough out there. I don't really know exactly. I would maybe say they, some people might just think “it's just a farm animal, they are just left in fields”. When they’re in a farm environment and they're just left, you know they're fine with basic care, whereas obviously dogs and cats there’s more things out there. Look at things like that. They need walks, they need this, they need that. And so, I think it's just a lack of knowledge and maybe like lack of publications or evidence of pigs needing this simulation.

K: Yeah, definitely. I think there’s a lot of other sanctuaries that feel the same. There's not much information out there. Moving on to the pigs at the sanctuary, can you tell me a kind of about the living spaces that they have at the sanctuary?

P: Yeah, and so they are kept in pig pens, which on average are probably around 20 to 40 meters in space, and so they're kept in those overnight and then a little bit in the day. But then in the center we have an acre field, and which they then take turns in coming out, and so there are there are in pairs, bar one that we struggled to socialize, and they get around two to three hours each out in the field and just to mix it up for them, get them out at the pens. Ideally, we would have them all in fields, but we don't have the space. In pig huts, they have at least two in there and then just loads of like branches, big logs, foraging sort of areas. But one thing we have a lot of is mud, which is what we struggle with the most. And yeah, I think their pens are quite basic so we do try and get them out as much as possible.

K: And can you talk more about how they are housed socially as well. You mentioned that one’s been difficult to socialize.

P: Yeah, so we've got two pairs, a group of three, and then [Johnny] on his own. So the two pairs, we've got two females and that were just mixed by accident. One of the females went in with her a few years ago and they were fine, so they were just left. We've got two piglets, and one we’ve recently got who we've mixed together. And [Johnny], who's on his own he was with another male who passed away. I believe that pigs do grieve and since his friend has passed away [Johnny’s] been an absolute terror, bless him. He hates people, hates other pigs. We've tried to mix him. We've had pigs with cheeks hanging off because he's just not happy. And so yeah, he's on his own. We'd hope that we could get him mixed, but we've tried with all our different groups and pairings and he's just socially awkward. These what we say, anyway.

K: So how do you approach caring for him as opposed to your other pigs who are perhaps better socialized?

P:  He definitely gets a bit more enrichment in the day. I think all pigs are intelligent, but I really do think with him, he's like really intelligent. He knows who's scared of him – he’ll bite! You can't have everyone going near him, so we just give him a lot of enrichment, just to keep his brain active. He loves food, so any solid food enrichments are great. And then we really try to mix his routine, some of the staff kind of put them all out at the same time each day, so they do start to pick up on a times and he, if for whatever reason he couldn't be like out in the evening when he normally is, he would go crazy, squealing and you couldn't even put your hand over the fence. So, trying to just mix his routine up and keep him thinking, more with him. The others are quite laid back like you let them out and they’re like “thank you”. But he always needs that interaction even with a person walks past, he's there and so it is quite a sad situation actually. Well, it's just trying to work out how we can get him to calm down a little bit.

K: Was he the same before his friend passed?

P: No, so I didn't meet him before then, so I've only ever known [Johnny]’s as he is now, but he was apparently really quiet and his friend was the dominant one. So [Johnny] was kind of put in his place and he was quite a happy go lucky little pig. We now kind of think he needs that hierarchy and he's just not got it. So, he kind of needs that pig that's dominant. It's difficult. Some. I know some sanctuaries mixing pigs, they kind of just like put them in, let them fight and they'll stop. Which I do agree with. But sometimes it's quite difficult when you're watching the pigs fight a lot, or I think we should kind of get in the middle of this. And so, I think he's just tries to be dominant over everyone now. And yeah, it is a real shame and definitely, he's the one that we're really trying to find a like an experienced home for. He'd be better in a place where he can have more of a one to one bond.

K: Does he have preferred people at the sanctuary?

P: Yes. He hates me! But I came in after the grieving, and I also put him on a diet. So, I feel like he just hates me. But there is one member of staff that he is still the same with, and that’s the member of staff that looked after him from when he was a piglet. And it's a completely different bond. Like if [Johnny]’s broken into something that he’s not supposed to be in, we can all be like pushing, like trying to get him away, he ignores us. As soon as this member of staff walks over is like, oh, OK. And he's so friendly with him. So yeah, definitely, but again, I think that might be the hierarchy a little bit. He sees this member of staff as may be a parent, in a way.

K: Yeah. So he’s been there since a piglet?

P: Yeah, so he was found dumped outside of football stadium. He came to us and he got rehomed when he was a piglet, but then they brought him back because he was too disruptive. So, he's been with us since and we kind of put a pause on pig rehoming just to assess what we actually want from homes to make sure they're successful. Because it's too much for the pigs they’re moving backwards and forwards, It's not fair.

K: Sure, yeah. I do want to talk more about rehoming at the end maybe so we will circle back to that. Could you just tell me of about the day-to-day care that the pigs receive, from morning to evening.

P: Yes. In the morning first thing they get their breakfast, which is just a pig nuts, some oats in winter and a little bit of bran. Some of them have medication or supplements, which is quite a few of them, they get all those in with their breakfast at around 9am. They then get a health check over and there are all friendly, apart from [Johnny]. But when he's got food you can check him over. After that they start the field rotation and then they'll do the cleaning, changing of waters and stuff.

I'm trying to implement more enrichment for all the pigs so when they're not on the field they've got something new to kind of foraging, explore. Just again to keep them active a little bit more.

Then after the field sort of around 2:00 o'clock, they get a little like lunch, afternoon feed it. It’s just a treat really. A mixture of fruits and veg, we get quite a lot of donations, so we'll give them that and that's pretty much it really. It is just two feeds and then rotating them out on the fields. And we do have the vet on site so there is a vet check once a week, but she doesn't really see the pigs unless they need it because, well, they know who she is! [laughs].

K: Right! And what does the daily health check over look like?

P: It really is quite a basic, hands off one, so we have a few pigs that have certain problems, so we check over them. But it’s checking how they walk to their feed, and because we’ve got quite muddy ground, we’ve had problems in the past. So, it’s just checking they’re not lame or sore. So we also check their eyes, ears, nose and make sure there’s no sort of discharge or cuts. We have two boars together and we say they’re like siblings, they couldn’t be without each other, but they argue a lot. So, we always check them over, every day they’ve got a new scratch or something. Certain ones do like a belly scratch, so they get more of a feel over, dependent on how they’re feeling!

K: And what does the vet tend to look for?

P: Well, she tends to come when we think we’ve spotted something that we've not seen before. So, on one of our girls and we found she's got a lump in her stomach. So, like there vet will come over then and have a feel and kind of discuss. But she's on site for the dogs and the cats, so she only really has an initial look and an initial assessment. And then we've got a farm vets and she will consult with them. So it's quite handy really having the vet there, but yeah, she kind of only comes and checks as and when we think we're going to need to contact the farm vet.

K: And what happens when a new pig arrives on the farm?

P: And so firstly, quarantine. And that wasn't always done. I know quarantine with farm pigs is so strict. My friend is a farmer, so I know it is so strict with biosecurity. I do think with pets and rescues it might not always be as strict, whether it needs to be, who knows, but we do have a quarantine pen. Just a basic pig pen. It's not a quarantine building, but they will go in there. They can't touch nose to nose to any pigs and they’ll be about 2 meters away. They'll go in there for a minimum of three to four weeks on arrival. The vet will also go over them, Have a check over them and we check the faeces, urine, if they’re drinking alright. Once they've done their quarantine period, it would be a case of mixing them. It's weird to talk about now because we don't have space for any more pigs, where would they go! We would really only accept pigs that we think would work if that makes sense. So now we can't, we've got no space, but we had one piglet and then we got another piglet that someone wanted to rehome, so we could mix those so easily so that we'll take him in. Whereas, if someone comes to us with an adult boar, I'd be like we probably can't risk it, because if he didn't mix with [Johnny], he would have nowhere. So, assessing beforehand if we actually have the space and if something goes wrong, do we have the space there to move them round? Then it would just be a case of slowly mixing them, let them get used to surroundings and that that would be it really yeah.

P:  I saw on your Facebook page the arrival of a new pig, could you tell me about how he settled in? I know you introduced him to the other pig.

K: Yeah, his story was really sad actually. We got a phone call that two piglets were found running around on the road about five minutes away from us. We managed to catch them and his brother, well, we call him his brother, but we don’t know. His brother was put to sleep because he had no eyes, they’d been eaten by maggots, he had maggots in his gums and it was just a horrible case. So, he got put to sleep and then we had [Obie] and we didn’t really have the space, but we couldn’t turn him away, so he came in, did his isolation and his checks. Once he was fully healthy, it was a discussion about well, we don’t want another piglet to end up like [Johnny], they shouldn’t be on their own. They should always be with other pigs, so we ended up getting contacted by a woman who decided to buy a pig from a farmer that was being sold for meat, it’s not a usual situation for us. She bought three piglets, but we couldn’t take all three. So we took [Mac], he quarantined and we mixed him with [Obie] and they’ve become inseparable. It was unusual though, we didn’t have space for any more pigs but we kind of made a pen for them. It was difficult, because you don’t want to bring in another pig for the sake of it, but [Obie] would have been on his own, it wouldn’t be fair. We did think about trying to mix in with our adult pigs. But it was, I think, for us the risk. Our adult pigs are so friendly, but they're also not always like that, and he was so small. We could have put him in and they could do something what they've done to others, it could be quite serious for him. Yeah, that's kind of how we ended up with [Obie] and [Mac]. They're peculiar match, but they get along.

K: Are they different breeds of pig then?

P: Yes, so [Mac] is a Duroc and [Obie] is a Kune Kune, so yeah, there's going to be a little bit of a size difference, but because they're so young and they get on so well it shouldn't be a problem. Well, it won't be a problem and so yeah, big breed! But at the moment I think [Mac] is already taller than [Obie] and we put him at about 2-3 months younger. So he’s gonna be quite big.

K: Yeah I bet! Do you have any other pigs that have friendships with different breeds?

P: So [Donna] and [Tulip] are different, [Tulip] is a potbelly and [Donna] is Kune Kune, but very similar size. [Luca] and [Furb] too, [Furb] had a home and they got him another pig, that was [Luca], and we have a policy of when someone no longer wants a pig they come back to us. So they contacted us, saying they no longer want [Furb] but they’ve also got this other pig now too, so that’s how we ended up with both!

K: do you notice any differences in kind of the way the smaller ones might act or behave compared to say, [Mac] who did come from a farm?

P: Yeah, and so definitely like Kune Kune’s. So, [Donna] and [Obie], I call them big dogs. They just love human attention. Just want a stroke on the head, very kind of placid, still a typical pig like, loves food! But, placid, and you would trust them with anyone. Our pot bellies, [Tulip], [Furb] and [Luca] all really friendly, but boisterous, so, if you've got food, or anything they want, they will be kind of a little bit more in your space. Then same with [Mac]. So he's quite small, so not really intimidating to anyone just yet, but he is very, very kind of food orientated and really boisterous. So even as you're going into the gate he's jumping up at you, running into you, blocking your path, quite erratic behaviour. Definitely compared to the others, he's a lot more erratic and in in your face. He is getting used to humans, he's quite happy with us and we know when we first got him and had him in the quarantine pen, he was petrified. So, even as you walked up to the gate he would be running in circles and trying to hide from you. He destroyed it, but as soon as we got him out and with [Obie] in the field, it was amazing actually because within 5 seconds he ran up to us and was like “OK!”. It was really, really nice. He’s like a completely different pig.

K: And are there any common health problems that your pigs might face at the sanctuary?

P:  our main one is feet problems, and they're all on like supplements like biotin just to kind of help with their feet. And then another one is kind of arthritis in the legs is a really big one. We had recently one of our pigs, Sassy, put to sleep and she struggled with arthritis for a few years. She was on Metacam and shows on loads of different meds to kind of see what works, and it and it did work, but then the last few weeks she started to collapse and her whole body was trembling at times. We had her put to sleep. When we were speaking to the farm vet, they just said the pigs are bred for meat so they shouldn't be living this long. They're not bred for it. The size, the size of their legs, so in the end their legs can't cope, which is what happened to her. And then [Donna], one of the girls we've got now, she has arthritis so we can kind of foresee the future. She is a kune kune so it is a bit different, but we have that in the past as well. So, I think definitely that arthritis in the legs and foot problems is the real big problem.

K: And does the arthritis come in at a similar age for most pigs if they’re living longer?

P: Yeah, I'd say you so. Sassy was probably late teenage years, but she had it for a few years so I'd say probably 8 plus years is when is when it's been noticed in the pigs that we have. I think a variety of reasons, obviously the breeding and how long this been bred to live for, and then ground conditions as well. Muddy ground isn't ideal for them at times, but that's difficult because they dig it all up.

K: Yeah, have you noticed any kind of problems to do with pigs actually being bred smaller than they perhaps should be?

P: we've not had any of that here, no, not that I can think of. Although I’m quite intrigued to see what [Obie] looks like when he grows up, just because his legs look tiny compared to his, his body size. But no, I'd say in terms of them being small, er not that we’ve had.

K: Ok that’s interesting. And, for you, has being involved in the sanctuary changed how you think about pigs at all?

P: Yeah, so I've always kind of loved pigs and but never worked with them closely. I think just being around them for longer periods of time, some people might go to the after petting farm and think I've seen a pig, but you really do see how intelligent they are and how that change of routine or that that added enrichment or, you know we've had it where we've had to separate [Furb] and [Luca], while one of them see in the vet. And you do see them kind of mourning when we had Sassy put to sleep. They were really stressed out and I think they are so intelligent and we really want to get that out there. Everyone kind of loves dogs, you know, dogs get the most impact with anything we share online, everyone’s like “we love the dogs!”, but if you came and spent a few hours with a pig, you actually see that they’re so similar in in those sort of ways. I think it's just really unfair and kind of the rules and laws, I mean you’re never going to stop farming, but with your pet pigs and things like that I think there could be more in in place to kind of help them. I mean I love pigs, I’d definitely have them if I had the space.

K: What do you think could be put in place to make their lives better?

P: It's so difficult because there’s all the legislations with the farm pigs. So, the government would think, well, that's enough because they are probably in that mindset of “pigs are for meat” sort of thing … and I think in terms of like how you have like your rabbit welfare association which say that a hutch isn’t enough, this is the minimum requirement. I think if there could be that central base, where you could suggest to people that want pigs to go to. They could say like… this is what they need and this is like the basics. Because I think we have it with the small animals. If someone wants a rabbit and we say well actually we want this much space, there like… Oh no never mind. Which sometimes it's good because then you're not sending that rabbit off to a home where they're not meeting their needs. So, I think yeah, some sort of central base for pet pigs is definitely needed. I follow the pigs in the woods rehoming coordinator on Facebook and the amount of pigs needing homes… just a little bit more on information if you are keeping them as pets. They have specific needs and yeah, just a little bit a little bit more protection for them.

K: Do you have visitors come on to the sanctuary at all?

P: COVID stopped that, and I've only worked there from COVID. But we have people who sponsor the animals, and if someone raises a significant amount of money, they'll come and do a little tour. And when they do, they can meet some of the animals, but it's really dependent on the day, what's happening on farm. So [Johnny] isn't seen by the public because it stresses him out. But if something is happening with the pigs we make sure they're out of the way so that the people don’t stressed them out too much, and so yeah, we do have visitors, but it's not. It's not like a daily thing.

K: Do some of the pigs enjoy meeting visitors?

P:  So [Obie] and [Mac] love it and they love just any attention, and [Donna] too. So definitely the Kune Kune breeds, and [Donna] is one that you could have a child meet and she rolls over and she just loves human attention. But some of the boys are just not interested.

K: And what do the visitors say about meeting the pigs?

P: Aa lot of people are scared. I think as soon as they actually stand to next to them, you see a lot of people are a bit standoffish because they maybe don't realize how big they can be and to me I'm kind of like, oh she's a small pig! So a little bit standoffish at first, but then once they get to stroke [Donna] and she’s like lying down and grunting, their smiles are beaming, and they absolutely love it. You always get that thing of oh I didn't know they liked this! It's nice to see. How do you get that across without having to invite people down all the time? It’s like, how else can you get that across?

K: Yes. And can you tell me about some of your personal relationships with the pigs as well? Do you have like friendships with the pigs?

P: Yeah, I think there is definitely. I’m mainly office based, but I do cover the farm and I try to get out there every day anyway because how can you resist when you’re with the animals!? There's definitely a bond. So, Sassy who got put to sleep, she was just a firm favourite with me. She was huge, old spotted breed. It's one of those when you having a little bit of a down day you kind of go and seek out certain ones, so, [Tulip] and [Donna] I'll go to and just give them a little bit of attention because, selfishly, it makes you feel better as well. It is a strange one. We all kind of say they are all our pets too, but we want to find them homes and that is our main job. It's quite difficult. But then when they go to a new home, it really is a bittersweet sort of feeling.

K: Definitely yeah.

P: Even [Johnny], like I always call him evil and stuff, but I think that there is a bond there. He's so funny and like, yeah, you having a bad day, any charges like you, it’s like, “oh here we go!”

K: How do you think he perceived that bond?

P: Maybe for him there isn’t one! I think some of the pigs do have bonds with the staff. I mean some of the boys, [Furb] and [Luca] are so friendly, but when you're letting [Tulip] and [Donna] out they'll stop and kind of look at you and you don't have food, but they'll stop, you can give them a little stroke and then they'll lean into you. But the boys, they just walk past you, they’re like “cool, Food! I'm going to eat now". I think they do just see us as the people who feed them sometimes! But Jeurgen, he doesn’t see a bond between me and him at all!

K: do any of them seek out play with the staff?

P: Our adult pigs are not that playfull really, but the piglets really do. [Mac] is probably the one who seeks it out and so, you could be walking through to go somewhere, and [Mac] runs straight over to you and then if you like, walk or run, he's chasing you and so he definitely is like, as soon as he sees the person, he’s like “Oh my God, I'm gonna go over!”. And he has a little football like he loves to play with that so more the piglets, definitely [Mac]. I think our adult ones. And I don't know sometimes I wonder if because they've not had a playful interaction from a young age, they don't kind of seek it out.

K: Do you try and encourage it?

P: I'd probably say not really with play behaviours, maybe a little bit with [Johnny]. Again, just to try and keep him busy, but it tends to be he is not interested if there's not food involved. I suppose, yeah, we did kind carry on with it more, and the other guys probably not. I think it's probably a downfall really, because they we do perceive them as being quite chilled and quite happy go lucky pigs sometimes, maybe it is where we just leave them to it. And so yeah, I think play could probably definitely be encouraged more with us.

K: Yeah, OK. I appreciate this might be a more difficult subject, but I'd like to ask about what happens when a pig dies at the sanctuary. How do you kind of deal with that loss?

P: t's just horrible. So sassy was obviously quite recent, about four weeks ago maybe. And and yeah, it's horrible. You think you're there to kind of save these animals. She had a bad past, came to us and we've been all she's known. What you always want is for them to find a home and she didn't get that chance.

So, it was really sad, she got a feast. We had all the people who worked on the farms, volunteers came in. She had loads of treats and then I think it's one of those. It's really sad. As the deputy manager, I kind of put the farm staff first, because they're out there every day and say you know if you need to kind of go, or take a break, do it. I'll cover. I find that with the farm staff as well, they're upset and then they see the other animals. It's like, well, I need to be here to continue help them and look after them. But it is difficult I think because Sassy was with us for 6+ years and so, it's a long time. I know one thing that the staff struggle with is, obviously when she was put to sleep then we can't bury her, we can't cremate her on site. We don't have a big enough facility for her and so then she does have to go to the knackerman, which is something a lot of this stuff struggle because they kind of just come in, pick her up with a crane and it's not the nicest thing to see, but there isn't any other option. But yeah, I think in any animal job I've had it’s horrible, but you kind of all get together and then focus on the other animals.

K: So, it’s about moving forward as a sanctuary?

P: Yeah, and they're always remembered, so we've always got like photos in the staff room. And things like that, so yeah.

K: And personally how do you cope with the loss of a pig you might have had a particularly close bond with?

P: I think I'm really strange because I kind of have to think in practical terms in my head as well, and I put on the brave face at work always, and then I get home and yeah, it hits. I think anyone who says it doesn't hit them is lying in an animal job. Yeah, it's difficult to say how you cope. It’s a case of carrying on with your work, but having that time to have a cry too. I don't think there's any harm in getting upset, but yeah having photos too. It is difficult but like say then you just go to another animal, get a cuddle or stroke. I think the team, as well, if everyone kind of leans on each other.

K: Yeah, and you said that pigs feel the loss as well as specially with [Johnny].

P: Yeah. I spoke to a few people at different pig rescues about [Johnny]’s behaviour and what they recommend. And they were saying he's just probably grieving and then Sassy was in with [Furb] and [Luca]. And when she was being sedated, they were both there. We did it out on the field and they were both on the field and it was quite sad actually, because all the staff were kind of stood around her and [Furb] and [Luca] were stood in between us. And then when she like had died and they did keep going over to her and grunting. They might just be curious because she was the dominant. They're probably a bit like “why is she letting me come near?”. But yeah, I think they were more in intrigued and saying well, “what's happened?”. But they're definitely not grieving like [Johnny], and they're quite happy to go on with their routine.

K: Did they have a close bond with her like [Johnny] did with his mate?

P: Oh, no, no. She was the boss who lived in their pen, and we actually had to feed her completely away from them because they were both... she's never done anything to them, but they wouldn't even walk past her. I think because of his size they were quite... well we call them drama queens and if she came near them they would like throw themselves on the side to be like “Oh my God, she's here!”. So no, they definitely didn’t have a close bond, they were never in the same pig hut or anything.

K: And how are those hard decisions made about when to maybe let pig go?

P: Well firstly, the staff will always report back to me about what's happening, and we knew she had problems. I was covering the farm and noticed her collapsing down. Got videos. Wasn't happy with seeing her like that and so then we consult each other. We discuss whether to monitor it for a few days - was it a one off, then consult our vet. Once we spoke to our vet, then we call the farm vets just to say look “we've seen this”. Then I spoke to a woman at another sanctuary as well, because they're really experienced with pigs. Sent other videos. Asking is there anything else we can try, even though in my head I knew this wasn't fair anymore, but yeah, it's just a case of everyone kind of talking and discussing. Then it's my decision at the end of the day. I knew what that decision would be, but it's just having that day or two just to kind of say to staff that we’ve asked others. Staff don't have to agree, but I think it's much better when they do because I think if someone is not agreeing then it's like well, why? Have you seen her being more active than I have? It is that group decision and just checking with the vets because it's again there's not loads of research out there in terms of treatment. Because they don't live for that long, and I know the farm vet said, you know, a lot of farmers are just like “i'm not paying for that”. But, it's worth asking because there might be something else.

K: Does that come through in kind of how the farm vet approaches their care as well that they are perceived as meat pigs?

P: Erm, no. I've found that our farm vet is great and very respectful of how we see our pigs. When our farm vet came out to put Sassy to sleep, she said to everyone that it's so nice to see how much you all care about this one pig. So, I know they're great and sometimes, I'm kind of fine with it, but sometimes the handling. They might be a little bit rougher than what our staff would be, but sometimes I'm not as bothered by that because I think, well they know what they're doing. If it's quicker, it's less stressful for pig, and it's nothing that we disagree with then fine. But they’re actually respectful of us.

K: And you said that they’re really respectful of how you see your pigs. Could you tell me about how you do see the pigs?

P: We see our pigs exactly the same as the kennel staff would see a dog, the cattery staff would see a cat. The animals in our care, they should be respected. They are animals at the end of the day. They're not something we can just pick and move about and hoist stop. And we always kind of think about the stress inflicted on them. And so yeah, I think some the vets I would imagine would go to some farms and it's like a quick the farm wants them in and out. You know get it, get the job done off you go, but they will come in and chat through it more us about everything. So, if we need to catch a pig or anything they will ask how do you want to do it? And yeah, just communication really. They don't rush, they probably stay a bit longer actually because we have friendly pigs.

K: That must be nice for them too!

P: Yes, they always say that it’s different here!

K: And just before we round up. I'd like to come back to the rehoming aspect of it. How are potential owners' selected?

P: Initially it's a case of they'd get in touch with us and then I have a phone call with them and see what they're thinking. Yeah, I think you can gauge quite well if they know about pigs. They don't have to have experience with pigs. I would kind of discuss it through with them and but the first stage really is: What space have you got? And so, it is like a home check like they would do with a dog. We go down to where the animal would potentially be rehomed. Secure fencing, is it enough space? The ground, pig huts. Check they know all that stuff. They would have to have everything in place before the animal was even reserved, and once they have got the correct home. I then put in place a kind of consultation sort of period, where if they wanted [Tulip] and [Donna], I say well [Donna]’s got this issue. So, this all needs to be dealt with and you need to do this this and that. It’s not a care plan, but saying this is what we would expect. You know they can just be left to their own devices but, I think talking through a little bit more. I'm hoping to put a document together sort of like an advice sheet. When I adopted a dog from work, I'm pulling a face because I said I wouldn’t but...

And they give you a pack, a full pack of like you know, there's everything. We've never done that on farm and I think, well, actually we could put that together.

I mean, it's just a case of speaking to people and building up that relationship. Any of our farm animals that are rehomed, we stay in touch with all of the owners now and I just think it's really important because if they're struggling, I know some struggles for say like a sheerer for their sheep, or a vet for the pigs. It's not really a setup process, but the home check is the main thing and then just kind of building that relationship.

K: And how are the pigs kind of prepared for being re homed as well?

P: I suppose they’re not really in a way. We try and get them used to the trailer a little bit. It’s not happened when I've been there with the pigs, but yeah, it's just a case of getting them there and and letting them out. I know, with the sheep we did it, and I'll probably say the same with the pigs is if they've got quite a large space, keep them in a pen initially just so they can have kind of build a relationship with the people. And it’s not just off you go. They would also get their last vet check when they get a full health check over. The vet has to sign them off to say this the health of your pig.

K: Do they meet their potential owner or every time?

P: Yeah yeah, so with the pigs we would do that. So, there is a man who's looking to rehome two of our pigs and he just doesn't really know who. So he is coming down to meet them all. Which I think is important but yeah, we do tend to ask people to meet the pigs because of their temperaments. We don't want it where it [Furb] and [Luca] find a home, but they come back because they're very boisterous, so I think it's good for people to kind of have that meet and go in and give them some food, have that interaction because they're definitely quite overpowering at times!

K: And it's where they go. Is it like smallholdings? Is it people who just really want pigs and have some space?

P: so I know in the past, which is probably why they've all failed, they have gone to people who've got what we deem as enough space. I have just put in place new rehoming requirements for space is probably a bit bigger than what they looked for in the past. For me I would really mainly go for smallholdings someone who's got an acre plus. I think if you've got enough space, you've got a big space you can work with that pig to make sure they're happy. If you start off with a a large garden, that's all you've got, and if that pigs destructive or it's not happy, or it's got behavioral problems, well, it's stuck there, and so yeah, I mean, it's definitely more of smallholding type of places which is, uh, that's why you struggle because not everyone has money to buy the land.

K: Yes, of course yeah. And and what opportunities do you think rehoming provides for pigs?

P: Dependent really on the owners. I would hope that it provides them with more space. So our pigs are confined to their pens unless they're out in the field. I would hope that they would have more space and more interaction. Although they do probably get quite a lot on our farm, but a little bit more interaction with the same people. I do question sometimes whether the change in people, maybe it affects the pigs. Maybe it's in our head a little bit of “oh we have to find them a home”. but I know a big driver as well for me is if we can find them a suitable home with enough space, so we can then help another pig that might be put to sleep if you can't find a place for them and we want to help. I think you know what it selfish a bit. It's just us being like, oh, we found them a home and they're happy there forever. But yeah, I think I think space, space and more space is definitely a big thing. 'cause I don't think many rescues have like massive amounts of space for the pigs.

K: Yeah, it seems most are kind of our capacity. Do you think that when a pig can't be rehomed and they do have who put sleep, is that quite a common occurrence?

P: Generally, when we get calls about pigs, we tend to get them from the police where they found one like abandoned and some are in urgent need of help. I'm not sure if it's common that they do get put to sleep. Sometimes, I don't know if it's because of the job I'm in, but sometimes I question whether the owner is saying that so they get them rehomed quicker, they’re not actually going to put them to sleep. You don't know but, don't want to risk it either and but yeah, definitely think that's a big a big problem. There's just not enough. Not enough homes for the amount of pigs that are pet pigs.

K: and are you quite well connected with other sanctuaries?

P: I’m trying to build on it more, definitely. I think sanctuaries helping each other out is a key thing. If say, another sanctuary didn’t have space, but they knew we did, there’s less stress and if they have a pig it could come here. I’m trying to build it up, just to see husbandry, what they do daily, their setups, because I think you can all learn from each other. There’s probably things others do that we wouldn’t, but then others might do things which is a great idea we didn’t think of. Again, if you can have all your pig sanctuaries on the same thoughts and opinions, then that builds your foundation, a base of what pigs need in a home.

K: Sometimes sanctuaries are hard to come by! Just on a lighter note as we wrap up, what’s your favourite part about working with pigs?

P: Their personalities. I just think they have the biggest personalities ever. I love all animals, but just seeing them when you walk in, they’re like “person!” and come marching over. They’re just cheeky. They know what they’re doing, they’re cheeky. They will always put a smile on your place”