Interview with Julie (pseudonym) animal rescue charity founder

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Researcher = [K]

**K:** It seems you have had quite a steady income of pet pigs over the last few years

**P:** Yes, yes, we have, yes. We have, obviously the pet pig craze. Started, oh it's over ten years ago now. Due to obviously, celebrities advertising online and on Facebook and things that they got a pet pig, and people jump on the band wagon and think it's something great to have. That's obviously why we ended up with the centre, there's obviously going to be a big rise in unwanted pigs. So, we decided to just to do a website, we put a website up, erm in 2011, early 2012 and erm we just started getting people ringing us up. Within the first month we had 25 phone calls, I'm going back years ago now. So, that's how we ended up getting involved in it. We've always been big animal lovers anyway, all our lives, so you know, and we just felt if there is a need to help unwanted pigs, we need to be there to help them.

**K:** So, did you start off as a website with no physical location?

**P:** Uh, no we had a location, we just put our website together and er, we had some acreage that we could put them on and with some housing, we had some old office blocks that we used to put them there at first. But then things progressed and got better over the years. Now they're based in Wales, on a lovely woodland site.

**K:** Oh lovely, so would you say the rescue started as a direct response to this pet pig craze?

**P:** Oh yes, yes. That's what it's about. We rescued our first two, they were two Kune Kune's and they were on some land where the people said they couldn't keep them there any more as horses were moving on to the land. Pigs and horses don't go well together. Which over the years of doing the rescues, we've actually realised they do get on well together, it's just how the owners deal with it at the end of the day.

**K:** Sure.

**P:** So, we've rehomed pigs to people with horses, so we know it works erm, you know sometimes it's just excuses. They got bored with a pig and don't want it anymore, you know, they give you excuses sometimes. Erm, but those two pigs never got rehomed, they stayed in our care and passed on about three years ago.

**K:** Oh, so you had them for quite a while.

**P:** Yeah, yeah. Well, they were getting on, they were about five-year-old when we took them on. So, they were obviously getting on in years and so they passed on, think they were about 12, 13 at the time.

**K:** Oh right, so they had a good run at the rescue. Could you tell me about the rescues' attitude towards pet pigs in general?

**P:** Erm, well personally, it's sad that you have to do it. Erm, because at the end of the day there shouldn't be any need of it, people shouldn't be breeding micro pigs which is the craze. Sorry, my partners in the background prompting me as well, what did you say love? Yeah, it's like my partner says, there's no such thing as micro pigs. Which there isn't, someone is yet to come to me and show me a mini pig, the only mini pigs I've ever seen are piglets and they grow. And they can grow anything up to 400 pounds, so erm, even bigger, sorry, excuse that, 300, our biggest one is 340 kilos. Sorry, I sometimes get my kilos and pounds mixed up. You know, some of them, these breeders are saying to people they will only grow to the size of a Labrador, but what they're also not telling them is they will grow longer, wider and heavier than a Labrador.

**K:** Yeah, so it really seems like an education gap there, there's more knowledge needed about how pigs can get.

**P:** Oh yeah. Yes, definitely. With mini pigs as well, obviously they tend to be bred with other smaller breeds of pig.

**K:** Do you see any common breeds that crop up a lot?

**P:** Common breeds that we find they cross breed with is Kune Kune’s, we've had a few like, proper Kune Kune’s in the sanctuary over the years, but what they try and do is cross breed with a Kune Kune and say, a potbelly pig. Potbellies, even though they're a chubby pig, they're not very tall in stature, they're only small in stature. We've known people to cross breed with a Kune Kune and a wild boar. A lot of the pigs we've took on are just Kune Kune’s and what I call a mixed bag, like a mongrel type pigs, like you have your mongrel type dogs. Where you don't know what they've been bred with at the end of the day.

**K:** Yeah, so a lot of owners would you say, they don't know what breed their pig is, they just describe it as a micro pig?

**P:** Yeah, yeah, that's the thing, when they breed them, that's all they say. They'll say we've got pet micro pigs, they'll show the mum and the dad. We got the odd couple at the sanctuary have got grown very big, but they're still a hefty pig, you know what I mean? But majority of them are quite big pigs.

**K:** Yeah, that must be difficult to look after. Why do you think those kinds of pigs have become popular in recent years?

**P:** Through celebrities. That’s one of the things, celebrities have caused it. Unfortunately, people follow celebrities. Paris Hilton had one in her handbag, erm you know, George Clooney had one. They see celebrities having one and you know, it's a trend then. Oh, it's a trend to have a pig, let’s have a pet pig in our house, let it sit on the couch and you know, type of thing. And obviously, it's all on social media now so, and breeders do it, obviously they're looking at the pound signs. They're breeding and selling then. We've taken in pigs that have cost their owners anything from £100 to £1000.

**K:** Wow that's a lot of money!

**P:** Yeah, it's a lot of money. Er, so you know it is down to celebrities in the first instance, people do tend to follow. It's like footballers, you know if they've got a new hairstyle or new tattoo, somebody goes out and gets it, don't they? It's that type of thing.

**K:** Yeah, spending that much money on a pet pig is kind of like a status symbol I suppose.

**P:** This is it, and you get breeders, they're selling these pigs and giving out wrong information. I had a lady on the phone, only last week that she took in a pig off somebody, and she wasn't even given CPH, she wasn't even told she had to have a county parish holding number or even a herd mark. So, she had this pig at home without the proper paperwork, and DEFRA rules are you have to have a CPH and a herd mark in place before you take on these animals, and you also need to be registered with a farm vet. She wasn't even registered with a vet. She rang me up for advice about a pig because it was poorly [laughs]. So, there's a lot of people who have lack of knowledge out there and they go on google. Google doesn't tell you everything unfortunately, we found out a lot of things through rescuing pigs and rehoming them, by er, experience. You know, spending time with them, valuable time with them, learning about them and you know, working with your local vet and that type of thing and you get to know a lot more.

**K:** Yeah, definitely. Erm do you think that lack of knowledge among owners is widespread,

or is it just what you see as a rescue?

**P:** No, I think it's widespread, I think that there's a lot of lack of knowledge. Since we've had our website, we've put on there, you know, do your research. It's important to do research, it's even down to how much land do you need? We've taken pigs out of two up two down houses. Terraced houses with a backyard, one-bedroom flats, where they've not even got a way in or way out unless the owner comes home from work, type of thing. So, you know, pigs should be out in at least an acre of field, running around, foraging, doing what they should be doing in its natural environment. Unfortunately, people have them at home infant of warm fires, on the couch, maybe with a dog. Erm, but when a pig is bored the problem is that's when it starts to wreck your home, and it will. Their natural habit is to dig, and they will dig wherever they can. So, you get people ringing up "oh! This pig is wrecking my home what can I do?" And I say, "well, you should have done your research!".

**K:** What kind of implications would that have for health and welfare of the pig, keeping them in like, a two up to down house?

**P:** Erm, well to be honest with you the outcome isn't very good for a pig, because it's not being stimulated, erm it needs room to run around, it can't run around in a small environment. It needs to be able to go outside, run, because pigs do like to run. You know, they need to be in their - all it's going to do, is overtime, it will frustrate the pig mental. It will cause mental problems with the pig because it's going to be thinking "I need to do this, I can't do this" and that's what happens. Pigs do get frustrated when they can't do what they want to do, they're very intelligent animals. Fourth most intelligent animal on the earth, closest to us other than primates. They feel everything we feel, they even grieve the way we grieve. They get the same ailments as us, as well as their own. So erm, a lot of people don't understand, they know pigs are intelligent, but they don't understand the reasons why they're intelligent, and everything going on with COVID at the moment, people are stuck in their homes and it's causing mental issues with a lot of people. Well, in a small environment, the same happens with a pig. So yeah, they will get frustrated and the way they'll lash out is by destroying your home.

**K:** Yeah, I've heard a lot of similar stories from other rescues about similar things, rooting in the home, destroying furniture and so on. Talking about COVID as well, and the pandemic in general, how has that impacted the rescue?

**P:** Well to be honest, it's impacted that we can't take in any rescues, we won't take in rescues. We don't want anyone to visit the area, because we've been sticking to the rules and the guidelines. We have to feed the pigs, erm, the less people that are around them the better. We used to be based, well we have some pigs also based at another site in and that's where the main sanctuary is. We have two sites. We used to have visits, but because of COVID and all that, we had to stop all that so, that lack of funding. You're not getting the funding coming in. The pigs also are not, the pigs love it because they get stimulation from humans, they do like human contact and erm also it's, we haven't been able to take rescues in. We have been doing some rehoming, but we can do that in a safe distance way. But what we don't want is lots of people coming to our land, so everything was stopped. So, since COVID started we haven't taken any pigs in.

**K:** Yeah, it's important to be safe. Erm, I was reading a while ago in lockdown one, how lockdown impacted relationships with pets in lots of different ways. Like, there was a puppy boom, where people decided to get puppies for the first time to keep them entertained. Have you seen anything similar?

**P:** Yeah, we've found a lot of people re-evaluating what's important in their lives and we've had people who have changed their lives, where they've bought a smallholding. We will only rehome to smallholdings, where they've got the correct facilities. Yeah, it is something I have noticed more over the last 12 months. We're dealing at the moment with one lady who is purchasing some land with a property and they're going to be, well we've got a pig ready to go out next month for that reason. Erm, but they're also going to have the pig dealing with students, with secondary school students with mental health issues and anxiety. Because pigs are very, very good with people that have, well pets are known for, even dogs and cats, you know, you stroke an animal it's relaxing, it relieves anxiety, stress, so it is well known for that. But there is a lot more people now looking at getting smallholdings and putting animals on the land, and living a much nicer life, a much calmer life, let's say. Not that working with pigs is calming, it's also hard work! [laughs]

**K:** It seems calming at first, I suppose! Is this reflected in the number of enquiries you're getting about rehoming pigs or?

**P:** Yeah, yeah, we've had quite a few enquiries over the last 12 months from different people. We've just rehomed recently three pigs to a lady that had one pig, but she wanted some more pigs, and erm her and her husband wanted some more so we rehomed three. They said the children love it, it's therapeutic for the children, they get them outside in the fresh air, you know, it makes them feel better, they're at one with nature. Pigs do bring in nature, they bring in a lot more birds as well, so it's lovely to be around pigs and you see a lot more birds around.

**K:** That must be lovely, especially if you have the right environment for the pig so it can be as happy as possible. With kids as well, I'm sure that's lovely for both the pig and children. But erm, perhaps if a pig is indoors and develops behavioural problems due to stress, would that impact relationships with maybe young children or pets?

**P:** Oh yeah, it can do, because they can lash out. If they've not got the right stimulation or in a small environment, they can lash out on the human as well as on the home. But any animal can do that, a dog can do that, a cat can do that if they're not in the right environment and not getting the right attention they should be getting. It's how you bring that animal up and how you treat that animal, isn't it at the end of the day?

**K:** And with dogs and cats, I suppose some people learn to live with that behaviour because it's almost expected that behaviour. Do you think with pet pigs’ people would give them up easier?

**P:** Oh, very much so, I had an email off a lady not so long ago, she was, she said she doesn't have enough time for the pig, she doesn't want it anymore so can we take it. Now to me that's not a good reason to give up an animal, if you get an animal it should be for life. Erm, and we get where people have got ill health and obviously, you've got to really go into that because you've got to make sure it's genuine. So, you get people where they ring up and say, "I'm moving home, I can't take the pig with me". But you'll probably take your child or your husband or you wife with you, but not the animal. So, I don't agree with things like that, but you get lots of people ringing up for different reasons why they want us to take on the animal.

**K:** Yeah, what would you say the top three common reasons are?

**P:** The top three reasons for giving up a pig are moving home, erm "I've got an ill relative", that's another one, or one of the main one is "the pig has grown too big for the house and we can't deal with it anymore".

**K:** They're all kind of things, especially the pig too big, that you should know about before. How would you suggest that lack of knowledge could be improved upon?

**P:** Well, it should come from people who are breeding them, making them understand that when they're taking these animals on, there's not enough information out there telling them about pigs. We don't just act as someone who rescues and rehomes pigs, we act as advice and guidance. We get people ringing us up before ringing the vets, because they know of the years of experience that we've had. Again, it's a lack of knowledge and a lack of understanding. People should be told when taking on these animals, if they really, really do want a pet pig and they've got the right facilities, they should be explained about the animal, and not a lot of that goes on. They're not given that awareness, that's why you see loads abandoned. We've had loads that have been abandoned, we had one abandoned in Accrington. Erm, in the middle of Accrington town centre. In the middle of Accrington somebody just dumped him, and he was running round the streets, scared. The RSPCA picked him and obviously we deal with the RSPCA, they contacted us and said could you take this pig. We've had two pigs, brother and sister, that was dumped in a field. Erm, they've been dumped at the gates of another sanctuary, but they've not been able to take them in because they don't have enough room, so they they'll contact us. We've taken pigs off of other sanctuaries because of that, a lot of places are overrun with them as well, it's like that with dogs and cats, there's so many unwanted ones now it's getting worse and worse. You think the trends levelling off at certain times of year, but then coming towards Christmas, and then just after Christmas, it begins to peak again.

**K:** Oh really? Why do you think that is?

**P:** I don't know why it is. People buying them for Christmas presents or not, I don't know. Erm, that is one of the peak areas that I've found in the trends in doing this over the nine years. You'll get it again over summertime, late spring to summer, it happens then as well.

**K:** That's strange, I hadn't been made aware of that before.

**P:** Well yeah, you also get pigs come from an environment where, like he had one particular pig, his human mother and father split up. He was left with the father, the father didn't want the pig. So rather than trying to find it a home, they didn't feed it water, they didn't give it any water or any food, any bedding. It had to sleep on a hard floor all the time. Erm, it was four-year-old when we took him on, and he was that thin that he couldn't even stand up properly. It was two months before we could actually, two months of care, in our care, and after the two months he could eventually stand up, he used to just fall over.

**K:** Oh, that's sad.

**P:** We had another pig, he was full of E Coli when he came to us and he had to be treated, the vet didn't think he was going to survive. Both of them pigs are still, one is seven and one is eight now, and they're still in our care. We had another pig, [Owen], we had a phone call from a lady who had been in a pub and he was being sold in the pub to be used as dog bait in a dog fight. She was mortified, she had thirty pound in her purse, and she gave them the thirty pound and said, "I'll take it". She took it on, didn't have a clue what to do with it, rang us and said can you help. We took, [Owen] is one of the success stories that's been rehomed recently with the other two, we had [Sal], [Owen] and [Benny]. They were our youngest.

**K:** And what kind of questions would you ask to prospective owners that come to you to rehome a pig?

**P:** If somebody wants to take one of our pigs on?

**K:** Yeah.

**P:** Yeah, we ask them how much land they've got, what type of housing they've got, what type of bedding they're going to use, what type of food they're going to have, are they registered with a vet, are they going to have regular worm and pest control, trotter trims, health, you know, regular health checks. Have they got the right stock fencing? To keep the pigs on the land so they're not going to get hurt anywhere by getting off the land. Have they got a herd mark, have they got the CPH? You know, there's endless questions you need to ask a person before. But if a person tells me they've only got a small back garden, it doesn't go. They've got to have at least an acre of land for us to rehome an animal. They've also got to make sure they're going to be, they're going to have human interaction on a daily basis. So, the people are there all the time, they're not just renting a piece of land, sticking the pigs on them and forgetting about them.

**K:** Yeah. It must be hard to enforce these kinds of things, which is I guess where the problems start.

**P:** Yes.

**K:** Would you say there's an important difference between, I'm talking about having a vet now, is there an important difference between having a pet vet and a farm animal vet?

**P:** Farm animal, for pet pigs you do have to have a farm animal vet.

**K:** Do many of the people who come to you with their own pet pigs, are they aware of this difference?

**P:** Well, if they're not aware I make them aware! Some think they can just go to their local vet that deal with dogs and cats, and then they'll be able to deal with the pig. Well, no, when you do your veterinary training, once your veterinary training is finished, you either look at going to small animals or you go to livestock animals, farm animals. You know, they end up diverting in two different areas, whatever they want to go into. Erm, but yeah, it's, there are some farm vets that deal with all, like our farm vet also deals with dogs and cats, but it's a different side of the practice. You know, do you know what I mean? You get certain vets that deal with one side and other vets that deal with the other side, but it's all under one practice.

**K:** Mm yeah, I read recently that there was a sort of memo that went out by, I think the British Veterinary Association, specifically for pet vets and it was a note on kind of, common pet pig problems and perhaps owners don't know the difference and take them to their general pet vet, which perhaps isn't the best course of action.

**P:** Yeah, well it's like my partner, and he's always said it, until we came along, our, the vet we used, didn't know anything about pet pigs. Because the one thing that veterinary students don't get to do a lot of training with when they're studying is with pigs because a lot of them go to slaughter for meat, so they don't get to do that training. But since we've come along, they've been able to operate on them, we've sent them to the veterinary college, the university in Liverpool and they've had tumours removed, entropion, which is ingrown eyelashes, eye operations. One pig had a face lift because it was big at one point, lost its weight then it couldn't see. So, they've been able to do things on our pigs, just like you would be able to do if it were a dog or a cat if it had a problem, you'd take it to the vet. But even there they have a side for the small animals and one area for, they call it farm livestock. Because pigs are classed as livestock, it doesn't matter if they're a pet or not, they are livestock.

**K:** And do you think owners are aware of the specific regulations, for example, for biosecurity, that do pertain to livestock animals and therefore would pertain to their pet pigs?

**P:** When they have them in their own home, no, definitely not. [Laughs]. Because the biosecurity is quite important with pigs, or any livestock. You know, daily washing down, using the correct disinfectant, you know we use FAM 30, which is what DEFRA recommends. Erm, you know, but, no, they don't in their own homes. We've been to people's homes and we've seen the biosecurity in some of the homes, and there isn't any in some of the homes, so no they don't understand the biosecurity sometimes. They do if they're on a land and they've got, you know, they do their research and look on the DEFRA website, there's a lot of information now about pet pigs on the DEFRA website, there never used to be but there is now.

**K:** It's about people finding that information though.

**P:** Well, this is it, and if, you see, when they come to us, we say "right, do your research". We have a rehoming pack that I give out, and it's all our experience of dealing with pigs and their ailments over the years, and I say "right, you want a pet pig? Read this first. Read it, and then tell me you want a pet pig", because we don't sugar coat it. We don't sugar coat, we actually say it how it is, and this is what you're dealing with on a day-to-day basis. Yes, they're beautiful, wonderful and intelligent animals but have you got X, Y and Z in place? Can you do this, this and this? You know, this is what to expect. You know, these are the ailments that pigs get.

**K:** And are you aware of any instances of perhaps zoonotic or transmissible diseases that you've seen in pet pigs?

**P:** We've never had anything, obviously, erm, when our pig had E Coli, obviously we all have E Coli in our body systems, and it takes something for it to erupt, but no. We haven't had anything that's transferred from another pig.

**K:** Yes, and if you're only keeping one or two pet pigs it's not such a great risk as say in factory farming settings.

**P:** Yes, but they still should stick to DEFRA rules when keeping livestock. Erm, you know, it's even down to the feed. When we feed our pigs, I have, when we get a new batch of feed in, I have to record where that feed has come from. They won't be doing that. And probably when they're living in houses, we know people do, feed them scraps. You know, we actually took in a couple of pigs and, a few years ago, and the lady was actually feeding them ham.

**K:** Oh no, that's not good.

**P:** Well, that's why pig swill stopped. That's why the rules are so tight, and what you feed pigs, you know, it was causing all sorts of problems in pigs, that's why pig swill stopped. I was mortified what I saw what this woman was feeding her two pigs.

**K:** I would be too!

**P:** The best thing that happened to them was coming to us. [Laughs]

**K:** Yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure that's the case for a lot of your pigs.

**P:** You know, people just think they can feed them anything and they've got very sensitive stomachs.

**K:** Right, yeah. I've heard of a lot of people as well taking their pigs for walks and there's certain regulations about where you can walk your pet pig as well?

**P:** Yeah, you have to speak to animal health and your local council and what they do is set up a walk route for your pig. We dealt with a chap in Manchester City Centre, he's got [Perry] pig, he loves [Perry] to bits, him and his partner, and erm, well him and his husband actually. They've been looking for a house er, with you know, a fairly sized good garden but couldn't get one. Luckily, they have moved now, but they had a walk and [Perry] was famous where they lived because the walk route was around a certain area and that pig was living in a flat in the city centre. It was very loved, it was well looked after and everything. We used to look after him when they used to go on holiday, and erm he does have a lot of garden to mill around in now. But you do have to get a walkway and it does have to be through your local animal health and local council. That's mainly through your local animal health and council, you always get someone at the council who works with animal health and they come out and look at the walkway. I even know a lady that even makes pig harnesses for pigs, but personally, I think they should be in their natural environment, running around. There shouldn't be any reason to put a pig on a harness really.

**K:** Sure yeah, I wonder as well how many people are aware of those regulations. It would be hard to enforce as well, how do you know if people are taking their pigs for walks?

**P:** Well yeah, that's the thing. That's it, it's like when people ring us up and say "oh can you take me pig because oh the neighbours keep reporting us to the council because of the noise"

**K:** Oh really?

**P:** Or you know, because they're squealing a lot and this, that and the other. I thought, well if they're in a very small garden and they don't have enough to keep them occupied, they will squeal. But normally, when they're in the right environment, you only ever hear a pig make noise when it's dinner time.

[laughs] yeah, I've heard that.

**P:** When they're coming to feed, they all make the noise then. "Ooh food's here, yum yum!"

**K:** Do you think owners face a lot of judgement within their community maybe with neighbours about their pigs?

**P:** Oh yeah, definitely.

**K:** And what would those judgements be about, other than noise?

**P:** Well, you know, a lot, we get, when they ring up, they talk about the noise, but they also talk about the smell. You know, from the pig faeces. But to be quite honest, pig faeces doesn't smell that much, and the good thing is, like horse manure, you can use it on your land. Erm, erm, so you know, some have been reported because of the size of the area they're keeping them in. But the main one is also due to neighbours, again lack of knowledge, not knowing anything about the animal and because they don't want the animal in the neighbours’ garden, they'll report them anyway.

**K:** Hm, I wonder if that's quite a common thing, I'll have to look into that

**P:** Well, we've had quite a lot of people where we've had to go to houses to take them, when they've been reported. We had one particular case, I mean she loved the pig too much because the pig was obese, Truffles. She was living in rented accommodation, housing association, and erm, they didn't even know she had a pig and they told her she had to get rid of it because they'd had complaints from the neighbours. This pig was, I mean, obese. It could hardly walk. Love and feeding, but all the wrong foods, biscuits, all sorts.

**K:** Is obesity quite a common thing with pigs that come to you?

**P:** Yes, yes. We had it also with a pig. Yeah, she was used for breeding and just fed biscuits all the time. She was enormous. I mean she was, we had her quite a few years now and she's still going strong. She's a Kune Kune, erm but, now unfortunately she has a liver complaint, so her weight is the other way, because with liver complaints you lose weight.

**K:** Yeah of course.

**P:** Yeah, but she was terrible when she come here, she could hardly stand up properly, she was that big, and walk. Obviously, it puts strain on the heart, on the limbs, causes joint disfunction.

**K:** Yeah, that must be hard to see.

**P:** Well people think pigs are meant to be fat, and they're not. So, they should have the correct weight, they shouldn't be overweight and obese.

**K:** Yeah, do you have any testimonies from people who've maybe got themselves a pet pig and changed their perceptions towards livestock animals in general?

**P:** In what way?

**K:** In terms of how we farm animals, how we slaughter them, how we keep them. Things like that.

**P:** Oh yes, there's a lot more, I found over the nine years, there's more and more people are going either vegetarian or vegan because of the way pigs are farmed now. Especially for meat, and you do actually get people, we have had people that have took on some of our pigs, due to the reason they're vegetarian and just want a pet pig. They don't believe in the way pigs are farmed, but to be honest with you, we've never got involved in the farming industry. We're a rescue centres, farmers do what they do, we've never really... it gets too political, so you have to be careful. We're in it because we knew there would be a trend of unwanted, abandoned pigs and pigs that have probably been abused, due to lack of understanding, knowledge, erm you know, not knowing how to keep the animal in the right environment and that was the reason we did it. But I have seen it more over the last few years, definitely.

**K:** Do you have any people who maybe buy piglets off a farmer and want to rescue them and give them to you?

**P:** Yeah, all the time. You get people call up and say, " I just rescued this pig from going to slaughter, can you take it?". Well, don't rescue a pig from slaughter if you can't take care of it yourself, and then just, all they're doing is they're giving that responsibility to someone else. So, they're rescuing it, but not following it through. I don't agree with that. If they want to rescue an animal, they should follow it through and keep that animal, and follow it through. This is why rescue centres are like they are, that's why they're overrun with all these animals. Whether it's dogs, cats, whatever. "Oh, I'm rescuing this, I'm rescuing that". Well, if you're going to rescue it, take it on. It still happens.

**K:** And would you say there are different needs for a pig bred for meat compared to a pig bred for being a pet would have?

**P:** Sorry, say that again.

**K:** Erm, do you observe there to be difference in needs for pigs bred for meat and pigs bred for pets?

**P:** Well, the pigs that are used for pets, a lot of the pigs we deal with, are not pigs that would go for meat anyway. Ours are mixed breeds, mongrel pigs, what they call micro pigs. So, we don't really deal with that side of it anyway.

**K:** Yeah, well it seems like the behaviours that are bred into them are quite different.

**P:** The behaviours, what into the pigs?

**K:** Yeah so, they're probably bred to be more sociable?

**P:** What the pet pigs?

**K:** Yeah, than a meat pig would be.

**P:** No, no I mean don't get me wrong, I've been near meat pigs. Meat pigs and pet pigs have got similar intelligence because meat pigs, even though they're going for meat are still around humans. Still the same animal, there's no difference between a pet pig and a meat pig.

**K:** Yeah definitely. I just wonder how being treated like a pet may shape the animals behaviour over time, I suppose.

**P:** Well, any animal that is treated like a pet is obviously going to be, respond completely differently. It's going to come to you more, to respond to your voice, respond to whatever demands you give to that animal, erm you know, like you do with a dog or cat. The difference is with meat pigs, I would imagine they're not given that opportunity some of them, but they still have the same intelligence, they're still the same animal. If you give it a name, you know farmers, you see it on the television. farmers give the pigs names. Countryfile with Adam's Farm, you know, he does it. He knows all the pigs, they all come to him, and some of them are rare breed pigs but some that go to slaughter for meat, it's a working farm you know.

**K:** Yeah, it's interesting to see the relationships that come between farmers and their animals as well.

**P:** Yeah, this is it. Well, farmers, they say that they love their animals and their close to their animals, but they are there to do a job for society, to make a living.

**K:** Yes, it seems like a way of life. Anyway, is there anything we haven't touched on, maybe key issues for pet pig owners?

**P:** Erm, let me just have a look on my notes. We've already covered the total lack of knowledge and understanding when buying them, doing the right research. Erm, er, we've covered quite a lot actually. Let me just have a look on here, no I think we've covered everything.

**K:** Excellent, it was really interesting to hear about the stories of all your pigs as well, been nice to hear about some happy endings for them.

**P:** Well as long as you know, where's your research going to go to now?

**K:** Well, this is it, I'm doing a few interviews with rescues and at this point in time I'm trying to get a good idea of kind of what the 'pet pig industry', I'm going to call bit that at the moment for lack of a better term, like what it looks like and what the key issues are. Then hopefully go on to talk to some owners over time and get some more insight out of them.

**P:** Right okay, so you're going to deal with people who actually, not sanctuaries and stuff, people who actually have pet pigs in their lives, in their own homes?

**K:** Yeah, I hope so. Finding those people is the difficult bit, especially finding people who perhaps have a pig in a flat, that's quite a difficult thing to come by, especially if they don't have a holding number, they're kind of under the radar. So that's the next challenge I've got to figure out.

**P:** Well, you could always put some information on social media, and see if anyone will come forward.

**K:** Yeah, I've seen a few people on Instagram with accounts specifically for their pigs, I wonder if I can get some of those involved.

**P:** If you look at one called pet pigs in back garden, that's one area you could look at.

**K:** Oh okay, I’ll jot that down. Well thank you very much for your time today, it's been really insightful. Hopefully we can make a real difference over time.

**P:** Well, the difference we would like to make, the main difference, is that you know, people stop buying them. unscrupulous breeders giving out wrong information, that the numbers go down rather than the numbers keep rising. Then there wouldn't be any need for rescue centres to take in these animals that people just get bored of, or they get too big for their homes.

**K:** Would that be your ideal end goal in this?

**P:** Yeah, the end goal, is that we don't get any more phone calls that ask us to take in the pigs. That there isn't any more pigs to rescue, because it's the breeders that need to stop, that's where some of your research needs to go, getting the breeders to stop breeding them. Erm, you know, charging X amount of money for these animals and that's what, our outcome is that there isn't any more pigs to be rescued for whatever reason.

**K:** Yeah, I hope that over time, increased education with the public will hopefully reduce the demand for pet pigs and hopefully it could be wiped out, but it's a hard one.

**P:** There definitely needs to be more tighter rules for taking, for people having these animals. For them to even put pet pigs on the website is encouraging, it's alright it's guiding them to do it the right way, but also, it's encouraging people to have pet pigs as well. They need to be out in their natural environment, running free, getting on with their lives. Pet pigs should never, they should have never happened.

**K:** And perhaps with holding numbers, there could be tighter regulations attached to them

**P:** Well tighter regulations in what kind of land they're going to, they should never be allowed to have a pig in a flat or a two up, two down, or a three-bed semi, because they haven't got the land for them. It's the wrong environment.

**K:** If people aren't getting the CPH numbers to begin with, it's difficult to enforce which is a big challenge.

**P:** It will be an interesting one for Countryfile if you come along and say, "right that's it, all breeders have stopped breeding pet pigs." [Laughs]