Interview with Kiera (pseudonym) animal rescue charity worker

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Researcher = [K]

**K:** To start could you tell me a bit about how the [rescue name] Rescue came about?

**P:** Yeah so, [rescue name]…... [radio bleeps] sorry my radio is going off I've got a loose goat, it doesn't sound like a panic loose goat, it sounds like they're in control of the loose goat, so sorry. Um yeah, [rescue name]'s sanctuary actually started as a dog rescue and that was the main focus and then [inaudible] ... [Founder] was really keep on helping other species as well as dogs and [Founder] had connections here, so um sort of long story short they ended up buying this centre here and [Founder] ran this, and the other rescues carried on up north and still carry on up north today. Erm, [Founder] was at a stage and the two charities kind of split and [rescue name] has become a charity in its own right and on this site we take in sheep, goats, pigs, chickens, ducks, geese, rabbits, guinea pigs, ferrets, horses, ponies, donkeys and cats. And then we've got another site that does dog rehoming and we've got a site in that does dogs and cats.

**K:** Oh, wow so you've been going for quite a long time. Loads of animals, lots to keep you busy. Could you tell me a bit about your role at the rescue?

**P:** Yeah so, I'm the centre manager here, so I oversee erm anything animal related really, obviously I also get involved in fundraising, estates, that kind of stuff. But main role is to oversee animals, ensure that everything comes into us gets the best possible care, ensure that all welfare standards and protocols are met and erm, our main aim is to help as many animals as possible but making sure every animal that comes in gets the same level of care. So yeah, we will close our doors at times erm, for short periods to get on top of what we've got and certainly we wouldn't take in animals that we didn't have the resource to care for at that time, which actually links quite strongly to pigs because we get asked to take a lot of pigs.

**K:** Oh really? Is it quite erm, would you say the kind of calls or enquires you get about pigs being kept as pets are quite steady over time?

**P:** Yeah, I mean you'll get pigs in troughs where you get a few together. So last week I was asked to take er, I had two calls about pigs last week, somebody with a single and somebody with a pair. Actually, while I'm here I might be able to get the emails up and tell you a bit more about those. Er, one of them it was a meat pig, a meat piglet that they didn't want to go for meat, so they took it home and erm, the other it was a pair of pet pigs. Erm, so yeah two pigs and one was a meat pig. And there is a big difference between pet pigs and meat pigs.

**K:** Yeah, could you tell me a bit more about what you perceive that difference to be?

**P:** Yeah, so absolutely, I mean I think with other species we're really used to looking at breeds, so for example I think a really easy comparison is looking at dogs, so if we looked... let me just turn off my radio, of course when I'm trying to talk it all goes off.

**K:** That’s ok, it happens.

**P:** So yeah, dogs for example, if we look at say spaniels. We look at a pet spaniel that is bred as a family dog, then compare that to a spaniel that's bred as a working spaniel, you're looking at two really different things, and as much as how we bring them up does have an impact on their behaviour, you know genetics and how they're bred has a massive impact on their behaviour. So, a meat pig is er, they're also bred to breed as well so a female meat pig, you know, if they're going to live long enough, they are going to want to breed and if you're not going to breed from them, you're going to potentially see some frustration issues. Whereas pet pigs are bred more for their personality, their temperament and their size, so people don't realise how big a pig is. I know that sounds really, really daft but meat pigs are massive and micro pigs are tiny compared to meat pig, but they're still big animals, you know, they're heavy, strong animals. So I think the lack of understanding of pigs in general and the differences between types of pigs, breeds of pigs, how they've been brought up, has a huge, huge impact, and actually what we're seeing a lot with micro pigs is they're quite often hand-reared, they're taken away from mum too young because people falsely believe that hand rear animals are going to love you forever and actually, hand rear animals in all species, you know you're seeing petting biting behaviour, you're seeing frustration behaviour, they're not learning bite inhibition, they're not learning how to socialise and with adult pet, er micro pigs that we're seeing, we're really struggling to socialise them with our pigs. So as much as for their quality of life, we want to socialise them, they don't know how to, they've never mixed with other pigs, their key socialisation period has been completely skewed by people, and erm, they just don't know how to mix with other pigs.

**K:** Yeah. Why do you think hand rearing is becoming common practice? Or is it even common practice?

**P:** Don't get me wrong, there are times when we have to hand rear. With the pigs, I think people just treat them differently, you know, with cats and dogs, people seem to understand that staying with the parent is the best thing to do most of the time. But erm, with pigs and farm animals, I think maybe because they live outside, people think that actually bringing them into their home, into the warm environment, you know, snuggling with them and giving them fluffy things is what the animal needs, because we just see it as a baby. Rather than, and when I say we, I mean people as a whole, they just look at it and see a baby animal and don't want it outside, and actually, for the animal to develop naturally and normally they need to be outside, and there is just a huge misconception about hand rear animals. We speak to people on a regular basis, they're always shocked that hand rear animals do not make the best pets, and then when you talk to them and explain, they get the concept, and they understand really, really quickly. Erm, but, I mean we had a cat in recently, that had really extreme behaviours, frustrated-led behaviours, erm and on speaking to the original owner in more detail, it actually turned out that they'd actually taken that kitten deliberately away from its mother early to hand rear for the last couple of week because they thought that it would really increase the bond between them and the cat, and then ended up rehoming the cat because they couldn't cope with the behaviours that they'd brought on, by what they did. And they did everything with the best of intention, but it was all about giving the cat what they thought was best and they ended up with a nightmare.

**K:** It's a real shame, with your pets you want to do the absolute best you can but when, I think it's probably best described as a lack of knowledge, when you can't meet their welfare needs and erm, I think that's what I've seen talking to others about pet pigs. Could you tell me a bit about the rescue's general attitude towards keeping pigs as pets?

**P:** It’s a really difficult one. I wouldn't advise people to keep pigs as pets, but we rehome pigs as pets. I suppose we are dealing with what we're left to deal with, so we wouldn't go out and say "oh pigs make amazing pets", because they don't, they're amazing animals but they're certainly not the easiest pets to keep and that doesn't mean we have, I mean we've got some great pet pig homes and we obviously rehome. But we don't rehome very often because trying to find the right people, it’s about trying to find the right people with the right expectations of what they're going to get from their pet pigs, and they vary so much in temperament and behaviour. You could get two pigs who look exactly the same, one pig could be absolutely lovely and friendly, but if a pig bites you, you know, and it only takes one bite for people to get scared, and they're so, so clever. Erm, you know I've been terrorised by a pig that's laughing at me [laughs], they're far too clever for their own good. So, yeah it is difficult. Excuse me if I'm waffling and going off topic, you might just have to guide me back to what you need me to.

**K:** No, this is what is important, it's clearly what you see so it's what I want to know about. How long have you been at the rescue?

**P:** Er, 6 years here. This is the first place I've worked with rescue pigs.

**K:** Ah okay, well over your time at the rescue would you say you've seen any changed in the number of pigs coming into your care, specifically from being a pet?

**P:** Actually, no, it's probably stayed steady, and as I've said, we get pigs in troughs where we get interest. I wouldn't say it's getting worse, thank god, but it doesn't seem... actually, we're probably getting less of people who bought them as micro... ooh I don't know, I was going to say we're possibly getting less people who bought them as micro pigs and slightly more who were bought from erm, meat farms as piglets and want to save from the meat industry. Which actually, is more difficult to deal with than the pet micro pigs.

**K:** Why is that?

**P:** Size has got a huge amount to do with it, and they're not bred for petting. You know, if you look at micro pigs, quite often it's been going on for long enough that actually you're looking at generations of micro pig, so actually their parents were handled and kept as pets and they're bred for their temperament. Whereas a meat pig isn't being bred for its temperament, it's being bred for the size of its body and how profitable it's going to be for a farmer. So, they're not used to handling, their parents weren't used to handling, it's not bred into them to be happy, or want handling, and quite often you find as these pigs grow, they just want to be independent. So, if you take on a boy and you don't get it castrated as a piglet, you know, you're going to be in serious trouble when you've got a big angry boy pig and they are just so, so strong and people just don't realise the strength of a pig.

**K:** And people who do try and rescue meat pigs, are these members of the public who have a vested interest? Or ...

**P:** Yeah, they just buy them from a farmer's market and take them home, and then panic that they don't know what to do and phone us.

**K:** Is that quite a common thing that happens?

**P:** Yeah, not just for pigs. So, pigs, lambs, and you'll get it in spring, people will try and steal lambs out of fields and are horrified that we won't support them stealing lambs from fields. Erm, yeah, I had a call a couple of weeks ago about a lady that just bought erm, three beef calves from a market somewhere, or from a farmer somewhere, and had three beef calves, erm, had absolutely no way of keeping or caring for them, but just didn't want them to go to slaughter.

**K:** Yeah, that's definitely something you would have to plan beforehand!

**P:** It's so difficult, because obviously, you know, when you start rehoming farm animals, you're stuck in the middle. It's a really complex situation, and actually I was only talking about this this morning, horses have such a raw time in the U.K. because they have no meat value, and if they have no meat value, they don't have a value. Erm, so it is so, so difficult, people ask me a lot you know, meat eating and all this kind of thing, and if you're going to eat meat, look at how you can benefit welfare. So actually, at the moment, encouraging people, believe it or not, to eat British veal, is really, really helping to improve welfare because up until recently, everybody's version of, you know, imagination of veal, was what veal used to be, and obviously in other countries it still can be horrific, but if you shop responsibly. By buying British veal, you are helping to improve the welfare of young British calves, and so, we are in a difficult situation, with farm animals that actually aren't technically pets, we're trying to... we don't really keep them as pets, as much as it is a pet environment. So, you know, pigs come to us from being kept indoors, in houses, and the first thing we do is put them out and people get worried that they're not going to cope with that, but they absolutely love it, and as soon as they're given the opportunity to exhibit natural behaviour, they will exhibit natural behaviour and it's more that they haven't been given the opportunity to do that up until the time they come to us. Erm, yeah.

**K:** Yeah, have you seen or spoken to anyone whose perhaps not have much interaction with pigs before, gets a pet pig and then changes their mind on maybe the meat industry or whether they want to eat meat?

**P:** Er, yeah, so, I think, er I had a lady... I think once people have had a pig, they're less likely to eat pig. Erm and I think people will be quite specific about that, so there was a lady who lives locally to us who has had quite a few animals of us, including a pair of pigs and she absolutely no longer eats pork. Erm, she was never, she was never a huge meat eater, but she would eat pork but certainly since having the pigs, absolutely won't, and I really do understand that because of their level of emotional intelligence and if you spend time with pigs, you know the connection you can get with them is incredible and you know, they just, it-it's so difficult to explain, but they are intelligent in a different way. This sort of emotional intelligence and the way they communicate, the way they communicate with us is fascinating. Erm and they do, you know, they know how to get what they want and they know what they want and I know that sounds very much like I'm humanising them, but they are, you know they are really intelligent creatures and certainly from my point of view I think probably pigs suffer more than other animals in the meat chain because of their ability to understand and you know, understand what is happening to other pigs and their verbal communication and stuff, I think probably pigs get one of the worst deals in our meat industry.

**K:** Yeah, I suppose it's also learning how to interpret that behaviour and learning to know what the pig is asking you what it wants as well. What would you say, how would a pet pig and maybe your relationship with it compare to keeping a cat or a dog?

**P:** For me, it just doesn’t, and I think it just depends what people are looking for in a relationship with their animal. So, with me, I love my animals being what they are, and I think that's probably something you see in welfare more than you see in general pet ownership. So, we speak to people who are happy for an animal to be whatever it is and display whatever behaviours it needs to display, rather than having a fixed view of you know, if I get a dog or a cat it's going to sit on my lap, and it's going to do this, and it's going to grow up with my kids, and I think, yeah. On a personal level, I just love seeing animals doing what they want to do and so, yeah, I mean I can't say, I couldn't say I'm more or less emotionally attached to my dogs at home or the pigs on site, I-I, they all mean the same to me and I think a lot of people you speak to in welfare will say we don't differentiate it doesn't matter if it's our animal, or somebody else's animal or an animal you've met for five minutes. Certainly we've all been in the case where we've been utterly heartbroken over something that you might not have known at all, and almost more so than your own animals, because with your own pets you know what they've been through, you know what sort of life they've had, what level of care they're getting, erm but with something that hasn't had that it can be more upsetting, but, no I think that erm, and I'm just thinking about my friend down the road who got these pigs of us because actually her bond with her pigs is absolutely incredible and she speaks a lot about how she never expected to have that bond with pigs and just didn't really know it was possible. I mean they are, they have an absolutely amazing life. You know, she'll go out with her dogs and call them, and they come running up from the bottom field and roll over for belly scratches. You know, they have a lot of freedom to go and do what they want, they have a wooded area, and they can go down there and display their natural behaviours but will still choose to come up for human interaction. I think that is they key really, and we're the same with all of our species, they're never forced to interact with people, they've always got the option to do their own thing but if they want to interact with us they can, and I think they're more likely to interact with you because they've got ways of expressing their natural behaviour and they can get that out of their system, erm and then they're happy to choose to come over and spend some time with us.

**K:** Yeah, and with more micro pigs do you think that perhaps the way they're bred has made them more likely to want human interaction or is that more something that we want from them?

**P:** Oh yeah definitely, I think, yes, it is what we want because we just want to touch everything! As people, what we see as giving care is touching and actually, from a lot of animal's point of view the last thing they want is people bloody touching them all the time! But yeah, certainly with breeding, breeders of micro pigs have done exactly the same as breeders of other species, they’re picking animals, breeding from animals who are friendly, who are enjoying human interaction and that really do want to spend time with you, and as I say some of that is nature and some of that is nurture, and you know, some pigs are naturally more friendly, yeah and some are more aloof, and some are more independent.

**K:** And what's your attitude towards micro pig breeders?

**P:** [Laughs] my attitude toward micro pig breeders is exactly the same as my attitude toward any breeder that breeds anything brachycephalic, anything with a flat face. The pigs, people don't talk about, is exact the same. Anybody who breeds anything with a flat face should be hung, drawn and quartered and I will not, there is absolutely no need and it is one of the worst things we do to animals in the U.K. And there are people out there who are campaigning so strongly, and they are not being heard because things with flat faces look cute and we will come around with them struggling to breathe, our pigs snore, all our pigs snore, and everyone goes "aww listen to the piggy snoring!" And I'm saying "Don't! It's not cute to listen to a pig snoring, the pig is snoring because of what we have done to them". You know, only need to look at their faces. Most of our pigs can't see very well, they've got teeth sticking out all over the place, their bodies are too big for their legs, they have mobility issues, they have skin issues, they get infections in their skin folds, they are so unhealthy, so unhealthy.

**K:** So would you say there are distinct health and welfare issues in those pigs bred to be smaller?

**P:** Oh god, there's absolutely no doubt at all. You only have to look at the shape of a, any small pig. That massive body on their tiny legs and the skin folds around the face, it's just awful. I'll just see actually if I can get you a picture, we've got one particularly badly bred pig, otherwise I'll send you some pictures afterwards. But yeah, you name it, she's got every kind of health trait associated with yeah, breeding animals like this, she's got it. You've got to feel for them, and as I said, most of our pigs actually can't see very well because they just don't have enough space on their face, they have their skin coming down over their eyes, where their eyes are, they just have tiny holes that they don't have a hope of seeing out of.

**K:** Mm, and do these health and welfare issues perhaps contribute to owners finding it hard to care for them?

**P:** No, owners don't care because they bought them because they look like that. I don't know if you can see this, I will send you a proper picture, let me just spin you round so you can see. [Shows picture of one resident pig with facial deformities].

**K:** Oh wow.

**P:** Well, you can see her, you can see the size of her feet compared to the size of her body. I will send you a better picture. The fact you can't see her eyes, her teeth are just sticking out all over the place. People don't care at all, because if people cared we wouldn't, in this day and age, have to be talking about the fact that we are breeding animals to suffer because that is still more important than, you know, we're still more bothered about what they look like more than their suffering. And I think, to a certain degree, sums up, a lot of pet owners. It's just, not about the animal, it's not. It's just about what they want. And if an animal has to suffer... if not, people wouldn't buy pet pigs... they wouldn't buy, you know most popular bloody dog breeds are franchise and pugs, if you cared about a dog, you wouldn't have one. I'm telling you now, even through rescue, I wouldn't get one because I'd cry every day listening to my dog not being able to breathe, not being able to exercise it in the summer, it's just awful. And from the pigs’ point of view, and her, this pig I've just shown you is quite a good example, doesn't like much handling because, and I think a lot of that is because her skin has been so sore in the past, you know she can't see very well, she's not that mobile. So why would you want people touching you? We put signs up saying "don't touch her, she's got sensitive skin" and people will stand and lean over those signs and tell me that the pig is enjoying it, actually she's not. She's bloody annoying in that her favourite spot is right by the fence, and it's not because people are there, it's because that's where she likes to lay and she's stubborn. But she'll get to the point where she'll ignore it until she gets really stressed. Erm, so actually when we're busy in the summer, we have to move her, because people won't stop touching her because that's what they want to do, and they just feel, because if a pig touched them, they'd be happy, so if they touch the pig, the pig will be happy, because it’s just about people, it's not about animals at all.

**K:** Yeah, and do you know much about her background?

**P:** She was a pet pig. Erm, they lost their long land. She's been with us a long time, she came to us in 2012, but she'd just been fed on donuts, sweets and bread. Yeah, just crap. So, they didn't have her very long before they realised it's not, she's not a dog, and if that's what you want your pig to behave like, then just get a bloody dog.

**K:** This kind of relates, talking about feeding her donuts and things, relates to some biosecurity and disease risks and the regulations pertaining specifically to livestock animals. Do you think prospective owners, or current pet pig owners have a good amount of knowledge about those kinds of things?

**P:** [laughs] No. Literally the first conversation I'll always have, "do you have a holding number? Is your pig ear tagged?". "Don't know what you're talking about. Don't know what you're talking about." So uh, literally, to be totally honest, with a lot of farm animals we are asked to help, people have no idea and that goes across to sheep and goats as well. I mean, certainly, I’m just trying to think of the last pig, actually no in fairness, the last pigs that came in had everything, which is unusual. But yeah, I've had a lady turn up with a pig in the boot of her car, I've had a lady turn up with a lamb wearing a baby’s nappy and a cat collar. And these people are driving these animals all over the place, because they think that ignorance is ok. And if they don't know, and when I say to them "well hang on a minute". You know, you're just thinking that this is just a bit of paper, and you think that this is just to make it difficult... yeah, because you didn't experience foot and mouth. If you'd experienced foot and mouth, and you'd seen the, you've only got to go back, you can see the mountains of dead animals, Jesus, you wouldn't do it! But people just think they can do whatever they want, and they do it on impulse and they don't bother to research first, and you know, even when they do find out. I know I've certainly spoken to people and said to them it's a really bad idea, but you just know they're going to go buy one, they're not going to get a holding number and they don't really care about foot and mouth and you know, speed of diseases, and if it results in people losing their livelihoods and thousands of animals dying, they won't accept responsibility. So, you know.

**K:** How serious do you think the risk of disease spread and transmission if you are for example only keeping one or two pigs in your house or back garden?

**P:** Oh, partly it depends where you live and where you go. So, it doesn't matter if you're not moving your pig, but if you walk through your garden and onto someone else's land, that's it. You know, if you've got a footpath nearby, if your garden is erm, you know if water, there's any runoff that's going into any sort of drainage, or stream which can then pass on and effect animals locally. You know, it's so, so easy to spread disease, and the result of that is just massive. So, I suppose with things like that, we spend a lot of time trying to prevent things that very, very rarely happen, but when they do happen, the impact is so, so massive. Yes, you do have to be uber, uber careful and actually, look at the effect of Covid. It just shows that disease transfer is exactly the same in animals, it just takes one person to do something stupid. If you think, say for example, you picked up a piglet from a pig farm, takes it round to see all of their friends, it only takes one of those people to go somewhere else where there are animals, even if they touched say, a cow, over a fence, infected that cow, that cow then goes into a barn with maybe four, five hundred other cows, they're all infected. It just can spread so, so quickly and people aren't aware, and they're not really interested.

**K:** Yeah, have you had any experiences with infectious diseases amongst pigs, either that you've rescued or have been...

**P:** Not here. Luckily, not here. But certainly, any animal that comes here will immediately go into isolation and will remain isolated until we are absolutely sure it's got a couple bill of health. At the moment, avian flu is going round, so all our birds are in lockdown as well as people, and we're really, really strict with biosecurity.

**K:** Yeah, so talking about coronavirus and the pandemic as a whole, I mean I hope people kind of get a better understanding of the impact of zoonotic disease, but erm, thinking about the impact it's had on the rescue as well, could you tell me if you're still rescuing and rehoming animals at this time?

**P:** No. We're not rehoming, we're allowed to accept emergency intakes only. So, you know, animals, if there's a welfare issue, so erm, what we've had in during this lockdown is mainly owners passing away or becoming extremely poorly and not being able to care for their pets, so yeah. It's just been weird, it's weird for us to not be able to rehome. We usually rehome hundreds of animals every year. So erm, to not be doing that is really bizarre, and also this centre, we're a visitor and up until the start of this pandemic, we've been open seven days a week for fifty-four years, for people to just come round. So, it has been weird, on the plus side, we have seen, absolutely the seen the best in people, erm we've had people phoning us checking we're alright, certainly in the first lockdown I had half the village phone me and say, "if you need anything, we don't know what we're doing but we're happy to come shovel shit". Erm, you know people just offering us so much support, it really has been amazing. From a welfare point of view, it is a huge, huge concern because in welfare, we spend years campaigning against online pet sales and have done really, really well and now, well you might as well go back twenty years because we're not getting the animals through rescue, because they're being sold online. If you look at all species, prices are just through the roof it's absolutely insane, erm and actually, oh I had a meeting with our pet insurance company the other day, and they said that google searches, or general internet searches for pet adoptions have dropped massively and google searches for pet sales has risen considerably.

**K:** And does that worry you with pet pigs as well?

**P:** Oh yeah, all animals, because people get these bloody stupid ideas, and the thing with pigs, and more so with pigs than other species, nobody takes them in. There a so few centres that take pigs and when they need help, most of the time it's not there and that's what really, really worries me. So, we can take kind of sort of fifteen, twenty horses depending on what they are, fifty, sixty cats, we could have a hundred birds. Pigs, five, and that's it. So, it's really difficult, there is nowhere for them to go and I really, really worry about what happens to these pigs that I'm saying no to, because certainly we speak to other places that take pigs and they're few and far between, and we're all in the same boat, we're just scratching the surface, so what is happening to these pigs? I don't know.

**K:** Sure. I'm trying to get a good idea of where pet pigs are kept as well, obviously it's ideal to have a big outdoor space with secure fencing and stuff, but there are stories about pigs being kept in flats, in probably very inappropriate spaces. Do you think this is common?

**P:** Yeah, absolutely. Normally the ones that are kept indoors, erm start off, they get them as piglets, so when they're little it's easy to keep them indoors. Then as they reach maturity, it's at that point they will start looking for somewhere else for them. So yeah, it's just... who thinks they can keep a pig indoors!? People do think they can keep a pig indoors! Certainly, we had one come to us, he was six, seven months old at the time and he was bought as a house pet and the breeder told her he'd be absolutely fine, he was fully house trained, and he could live in the house, no problem at all. Three days that lasted. The last lot of pigs came to us from just a bog-standard back garden, been there five years. Erm, not the worst home in the world, but you know, it's better than being indoors. But when we rehome, everyone we rehome pigs to have smallholdings. Erm, so yeah, they're treated like part of the family, but they are outside pets rather than house pets.

**K:** And how common is it for them to be kept indoors before they come to a rescue like yours?

**P:** It's difficult to say, just because, I suppose when they're little... most of the calls I get from people who've got them indoors are people who've bought meat pigs as piglets and they're tiny at the time, with the really, really babies. Adult pigs not so much. Have you heard of a comedian called Dom Joly?

**K:** No, I haven't

**P:** Ah, google it. He's written a great article, he was quite a well-known comedian a while back and he got himself pigs a while back as house pets and it really went wrong. But actually, what he's done, is he's really promoted pig welfare. Erm, and he's done some great stuff because he just put his hand up and went "I've been really stupid." I remember seeing him interviewed, and while he was being interviewed one of the bloody pigs attacked him and I'm sure one of them nearly bit the top of his thumb clean off. So, he's certainly got [inaudible] by this pig. Erm, but he's in touch with, er another sanctuary and they help him, they took his aggressive pig and they managed to home him another pig who was much more chilled out, erm that lives outside rather than inside. But, you know, he still loves the pigs, erm but yeah, he really did make a mistake. I think he was told that they were micro pigs, and they were crossed with wild boars or something.

**K:** Oh god, yeah. Well hopefully those kinds of people who do own up to their mistakes and hold their hands up might educate people, but on social media and things there's a big craze about teacup and micro pigs. What's your perspective on those, that kind of viral imagery and celebrities promoting their pigs?

**P:** [Laughs]. The thing is, if you speak to anyone here, I will not look at anything, I won't buy anything, I will not look at anything. So, for example if I followed someone on Facebook and they showed a picture of a teacup anything, anything brachiocephalic, I won't use it. It will stop me using companies and organisations and I just wish other people would do the same. Actually, I have contacted so many people, I have a standard letter which is about brachiocephalic dogs and cats mainly, but if I see a company using a teacup anything, I will write to them and say please don't do this, and this is why. Nobody cares. Er, it is a real, real shame. I think because everybody is too scared to put out the hard-hitting stuff because we're worried about upsetting people and upsetting children. But actually, it's okay for us to torture animals for fashion, but it's not okay for us to, [sighs] I don't know, I cannot believe that we still, in this day and age are putting so much suffering into animals because of the way we breed them. You know, pigs are not meant to be that small, they're just not. If common sense doesn't tell people that you're breeding in serious health issues when you're disforming an animal to that level, for what? There's not even any purpose behind it other than we think it looks cute. All of this suffering comes back to that because, we think it looks cute. That is, it, there is no other reason for it, and these animals suffer beyond belief, but yeah, people just choose to ignore it.

**K:** Yeah, and how do you think we could go about changing people's perceptions towards that?

**P:** Just constantly giving out the same message over and over again. It's difficult to measure the result of that, but it is the only way you can do it really. Because otherwise if people don't keep screaming and shouting about it, people do keep turning a blind eye and by turning a blind eye, I mean anyone who likes a Facebook post that's got a cute picture of something that shouldn't look like that. So, a brachiocephalic dog, a cat, a rabbit, a teacup pig. Anybody who seems something like that should be boycotting it and informing other people. So, if my friends, and I do drive them mad, I do have some slightly non-animally friends, who might send something like that, I'll explain to them why and say please don't do it, please don't do it, and this is why we don't want to you do it. People are horrified, you know, nice people are then mortified, but then they're the people who will go spread the word. It is fine for us to know about its animal welfare, but it is the non-animally people that we need to get the message out to and get them to care somehow. I, that is very difficult, I suppose you do kind of. Have to keep the faith, have some hope that it will get better, and I suppose twenty years ago, we felt this way about neutering. We were seeing lots of stray puppies and stray kittens, and I remember twenty years ago banging on at everybody about neutering and saying to people, we all used to talk and say it's not going to change in our lifetime, but actually, it has changed in the last twenty years. The improvement in animal welfare through neutering has been huge, so it absolutely can happen. But again, it's like everything else, people want gratification. So, they want to be able to say, oh well if I do this, I'm going to save this number of animals. But even from a charity's point of view, you have to, if you're going to spend money advertising and doing something, what are you getting back from that? Erm, so it's one of these things where... and I think people are scared to piss off a whole kind of range of people, by saying "well if you like this, you're cruel". But I genuinely think that is the message we need to get out there, by liking anything like that you are liking cruelty. It's exactly the same, like, if you saw a deformed baby, you wouldn't use that for advertising, but a baby teacup pig... it's a deformed baby. I think we should really start getting people to realise they are looking at deformed babies and maybe they'd have a different opinion of it.

**K:** Yeah, it does seem like an education issue and this imagery leads people to want a pet pig as it might be a bit different to your standard pet puppy, but what do you say to those prospective owners before they commit?

**P:** Well, it's all about doing your research. It really, really is. I mean here, if someone phones up wanting to find out about pet pigs... first thing, we'd invite them out, spend some time with us, see what's involved, make sure you've got the facilities and just go through everything. But really, it's about spending time with them and making sure that what they think they want, is actually what they want. So, managing their expectations, understanding what it's like to have a pig, what kind of relationship you can expect. You know, the face they're not piglets, they're pigs. So really doing their research and really getting out there and looking after pigs and seeing what's involved in that before taking them on. Because once you've taken them on, it is so, so difficult to get out.

**K:** Yeah, yeah. And before we wrap up, are there any challenges that pet pig owners face that we haven't talked about yet?

**P:** Um... no I don't think so. I mean, I suppose not everyone can keep a pet pig. If you can't, some places they will not issue a holding number to keep pigs and I think people are unaware of that. But no, I think we've covered it really.

**K:** In what cases would a holding number not be issued?

**P:** It's a DEFRA thing, so it does depend. Erm but certainly, if you were planning on keeping pigs by a river, where they had access to the river or if you had sheep right next door, potentially that might not work. Pigs pass copper in their urine so you have to be really careful about where that's going to soak away to.

**K:** Oh ok, so the holding numbers are kind of issued based on biosecurity risk rather than anything else.

**P:** Yeah, it's a DEFRA thing, what their stipulations are I don't know but I would imagine it is mainly biosecurity, I can't see any other reason why they wouldn't issue a license.

**K:** I suppose, well I've spoken to others who suggest that perhaps implicating some kind of minimum welfare standards in the issuing of holding numbers might be beneficial as well, particularly with livestock being kept as pets. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**P:** It's a difficult one, because with any animal welfare, it's about enforcement. If you can't enforce it, you put it in place and it's not enforced, it almost [inaudible] to a certain degree. I just don't know how to, you know, it's just such a drop in the ocean and I suppose, maybe it's not a big enough problem. I know that sounds bad, because actually for the pigs, yes, it is. But people just look at the numbers and when you look at the numbers of pigs compared to other animals, and also, suffering pigs, you know people get very upset if you see a suffering cat or dog and not as upset if it's a suffering farm animal. Erm, I don't know, people are weird. But having some minimum standards would be great, if they could be enforced. Erm, but yeah anything is an absolute nightmare.

**K:** Yeah, and what kind of changes would you like to see in, I'll call it the 'pet pig industry', what changes would you like to see happen?

**P:** I suppose, somebody has got to be accountable, really. It's difficult because, being realistic about it, it would be great to say that actually, you know, nobody should [inaudible] not have adequate amount of land, adequate shelter and all the rest of it. But we don't do that for other species, so to single out pigs I don't think is the right way. Erm, I don't really know, that's a really difficult one. Maybe having tighter restrictions on licenses and holding numbers too. If that was a residential, maybe there should be extra checks, you know, if it's not a kind of farm or smallholding and it is a residential, maybe there should be some additional measures you should have to go to if you're planning on keeping a pig in a residential area. That might single out the pet pig people who haven't thought about it a little bit more than the kind of smallholders, small breeders that actually are doing alright with their pigs and wouldn't necessarily keep them as pet pigs.

**K:** Yeah, that's a good point actually. Might make it easier to enforce if you said, pigs in more urban areas maybe need more checks. But thanks for your time, I think we will wrap up there. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**P:** No, I think that's it.