



Building a kinder generation:

How the RSPCA will educate the adults of tomorrow to tackle the animal welfare crisis of today





Introduction

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has been promoting prevention for 194 years – it's in our name after all. We were set up by MPs and Lords in 1824 to enforce the first law on animal cruelty and we continue to carry out this important role today. Our broad range of work and long experience has given us a crucial and unique insight into animal offending behaviour, particularly among young people and what measures can be put in place to prevent this behaviour.

There have been many successes in the past two centuries particularly around advocating, supporting and implementing more than 50 laws which now underpin the way we treat animals. But we need to do more. Among children at an early age we need to generate a greater understanding of animals and their needs to improve the way animals are treated.

Much of the work we did in our early years was groundbreaking and instrumental in shaping attitudes and behaviours towards animals. At our first meeting on 8 June 1824, the trustees agreed that the Society would promote education through sermons, pamphlets and talks. By 1882 the RSPCA incorporated into its education programme a growing number of local youth organisations called Bands of Mercy that had been set up in 1875. Lessons on kindness towards all species were given at these meetings.

These programmes were effective and innovative at the time but we now face new challenges. The way young people obtain information and how they communicate with each other has changed rapidly in the past decade. The RSPCA needs to respond to this new challenge particularly as it impacts on how we work and how we prevent cruelty to animals. This report looks at these challenges, and launches our new programmes that are dedicated to meeting them head on.

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Preventing animal cruelty: How are we doing?

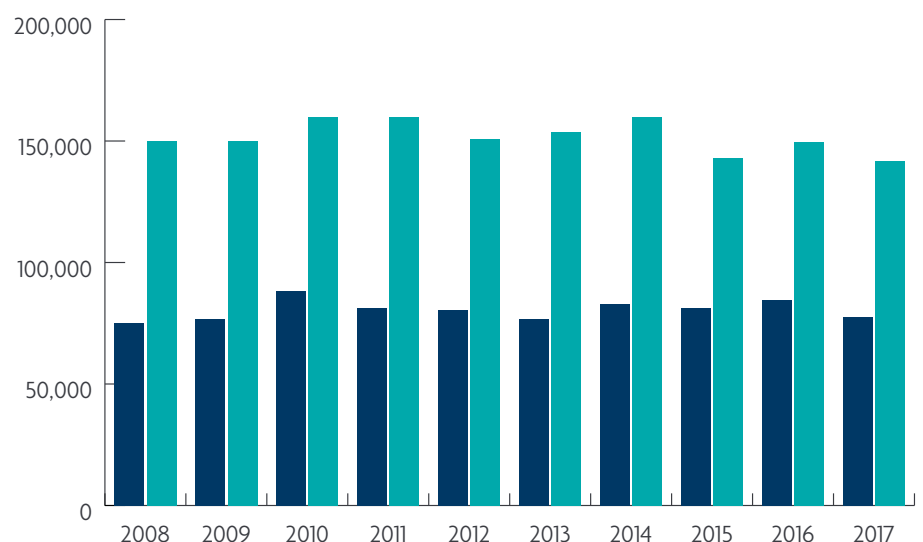
The RSPCA, due to its unique role in enforcing standards of animal welfare under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, has experience and information that no one else has. This helps provide some important insights into the prevalence and nature of animal cruelty and neglect in England and Wales, and the effect of welfare improvement notices which aim to prevent further cruelty and/or neglect through the provision of advice and information (Figures 1 and 2).

The RSPCA's Inspectorate has around 400 officers whose job is to investigate animal cruelty complaints and offer advice to change the behaviour of the person keeping the animal, so that the way in which the animal is cared for and kept improves. The number of complaints of animal cruelty investigated over the past 10 years, and the number of welfare improvement notices handed out, can be used as a way of assessing trends in cruelty and the impact of preventative measures. The figures suggest (Figure 1) that both complaints investigated and notices given have been broadly the same over the past 10 years with only a five percent drop in the number of cruelty complaints investigated over the past decade. Although the number of notices has remained fairly stable over the past decade, in 98 percent of cases no additional action is required to further improve the animal's welfare which suggests this preventative approach can be successful (Figure 1).

Measures, such as improvement and advice notices, have helped to ensure that less than two percent of cruelty investigations result in further action such as a prosecution. However, by definition, while they can help to prevent further welfare problems and/or improve future welfare, these 'notices' are issued in response to an incident or concern and do not prevent it happening in the first place. With regard to prosecutions, Figure 2 shows the trends in convictions obtained by the RSPCA in the past decade. There may be many factors affecting prosecution numbers and conviction rates but the overall message they convey is that prevention work is still much needed.

Figure 1: Number of complaints investigated and welfare improvement notices issued by RSPCA inspectors 2008–17.

■ Welfare improvement notices
■ Complaints investigated



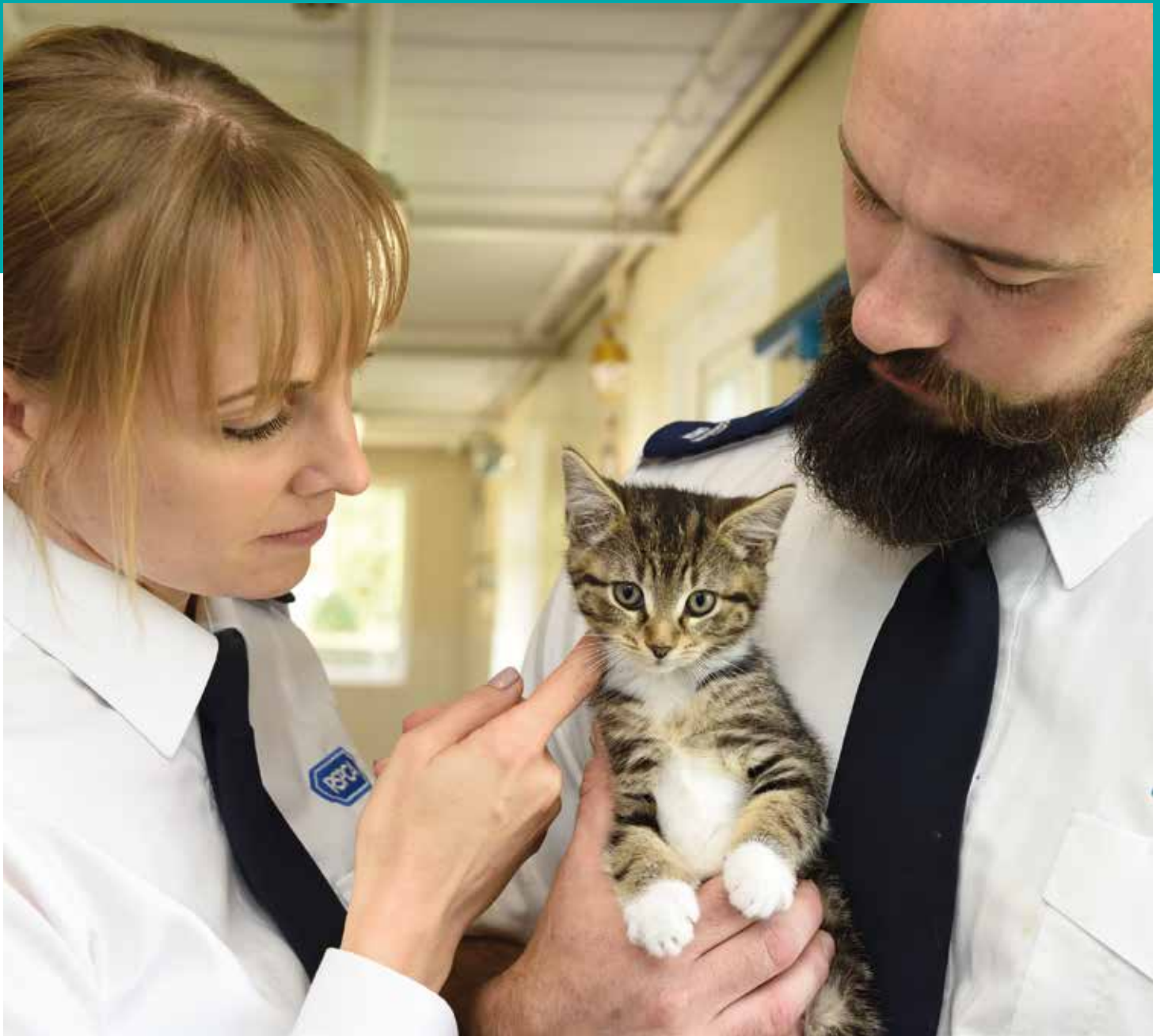
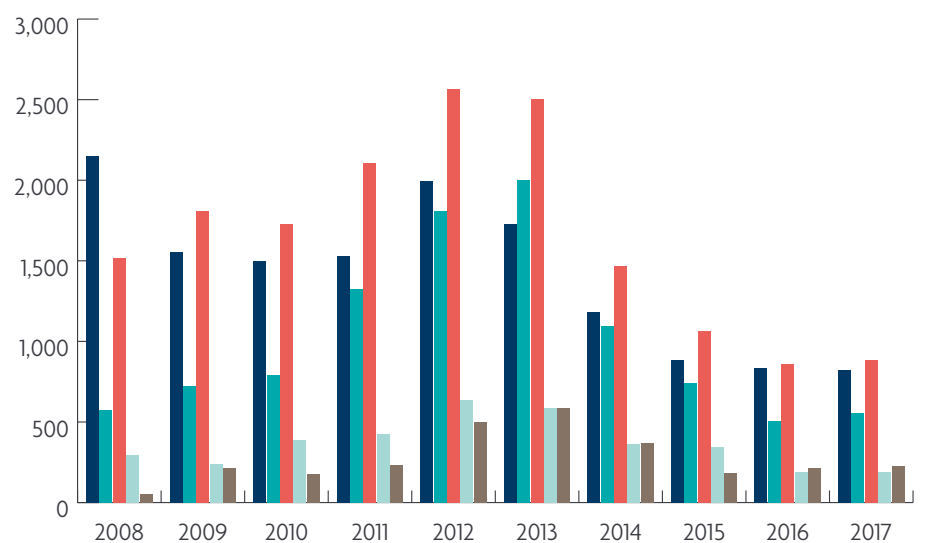


Figure 2: Number of convictions obtained by the RSPCA for cruelty and welfare offences and for cats, dogs and horses 2008–17.

- Convictions for animal cruelty
- Convictions for failing to ensure welfare
- Convictions relating to dogs
- Convictions relating to cats
- Convictions relating to horses



The role of young people in animal cruelty and neglect

Awareness of animal cruelty and a sense of what is wrong and right is very high among young people. More than nine out of 10 children aged 10–18 are aware of the RSPCA in one survey¹ and 73 percent feel it is a crime to not care for an animal. Three in four children are comfortable talking about animal cruelty with their parents²; this may be because seeing images of animal cruelty is surprisingly common. Just under half the 10–15 year olds interviewed in one survey for the RSPCA had seen some form of animal cruelty – although only three percent had actually witnessed it themselves, 34 percent had seen it on social media with the rest seeing it on television or in a film³. Clearly there are a lot of young people being exposed to animal cruelty.

While the number of juveniles harming animals may be low, some of the individual cases are extremely severe. Cases in 2008 included a hedgehog being set on fire and a cat being swung by its tail. In 2017 cases included setting a crow on fire and filming the incident, and Facebook images showing three youths causing animals to fight³.

The RSPCA has undertaken a number of studies looking at reasons why children start and continue to be cruel to animals, so that we have the best information to develop an intervention programme, assessing the best age and medium to tackle this behaviour.

A groundbreaking study for the RSPCA in 2007 revealed that a substantial minority of children between 13–17 years old had harmed animals on a frequent basis⁴. The greater the length of time over which a person offended, the more frequent their offending was, with the frequency of this behaviour peaking at 15 years old before declining to 17 years old. The research also found that animal abuse is less common than other types of violence and that there were many crossover characteristics between young people involved in animal abuse and those in other types of violence. This concurs with insights into offenders prosecuted by the RSPCA⁵.

The case studies mentioned from 2008 and 2017 show the changes in how images and information is shared among young people and the importance of phones and social media. In 2008, 15 percent of the cases involved the defendants recording the offences on their mobile phones, images that were then shared as trophies to their peer groups⁵. In 2008 Facebook was less than four years old and Snapchat launched three years later. But in the past decade the RSPCA has seen a large-scale shift towards sharing animal welfare cruelty on social media platforms such as Facebook and in the past three years Snapchat. In 2015 we investigated 27 cruelty complaints that were shared on Snapchat, a figure that more than doubled to 69 the following year and more than doubled again by 2017 when 167 investigations were initiated using material being shared on Snapchat. These included images of gratuitous violence such as: animals being hit against walls, animals deliberately run over, drugs being given to gerbils, alcohol being given to dogs, animals being put into washing machines and microwaves.

This quick and decisive change in communication methods among young people has prompted the RSPCA to prioritise understanding how young people communicate.

1 Beautiful Insights. 2018. Understanding and benchmarking knowledge of animal welfare and the RSPCA.

2 NfpSynergy. 2015. Families Insight Report.

3 RSPCA. 2018. *Prosecutions Annual Report 2017*.

4 McVie S. 2007. Animal abuse amongst young people aged 13–17: trends, trajectories and links with other offending. Report for the RSPCA.

5 Flindt D. 2011. Evaluation of 2008 data on juvenile offenders. RSPCA.

This will enable us to assess how to gather information on illegal activities and establish the best way of communicating educational messages back to young people.

The changing way in which young people communicate

Unsurprisingly the way in which children communicate has changed considerably in the past two decades.

Ofcom⁶ reveals that half (53 percent) of three to four year olds are now online, as are 79 percent of five to seven year olds and 94 percent of eight to 11 year olds. Ninety-nine percent of 12 to 15 year olds are also online. A quarter of eight to 11 year olds and three-quarters of 12 to 15 year olds have a profile on a social media or messaging site or app. The 12 to 15 year olds with a profile are less likely to say that Facebook is their main social media profile this year compared to last year (40 percent vs. 52 percent), while the proportion who say Snapchat is their main profile has doubled to 32 percent. Snapchat was the most widely-used social media platform among the children.

Twitter use has also declined among young people. It is still used by 32 percent of young people⁷, but the RSPCA's experience suggests that it is not a medium used to transfer or publicise images of animal cruelty, unlike Snapchat and Facebook.

Clearly the battle of ideas is taking place through online content and through social media apps. Young people are obtaining their information from different media to their parents or even their older siblings, and sharing content on different sites. Social media is important for the dissemination of animal cruelty imagery with one in every three 10 to 15 year olds reported as seeing animal cruelty on social media and the RSPCA seeing a fivefold increase in the use of Snapchat to share animal cruelty content in the past two years. Organisations such as the RSPCA that prevent cruelty by educating young people, also have to change the way they communicate with young people if they want their messages to be heard, accepted and taken on board. To this end, the RSPCA is considering its use of social media and how new platforms can be harnessed to reach a younger audience.

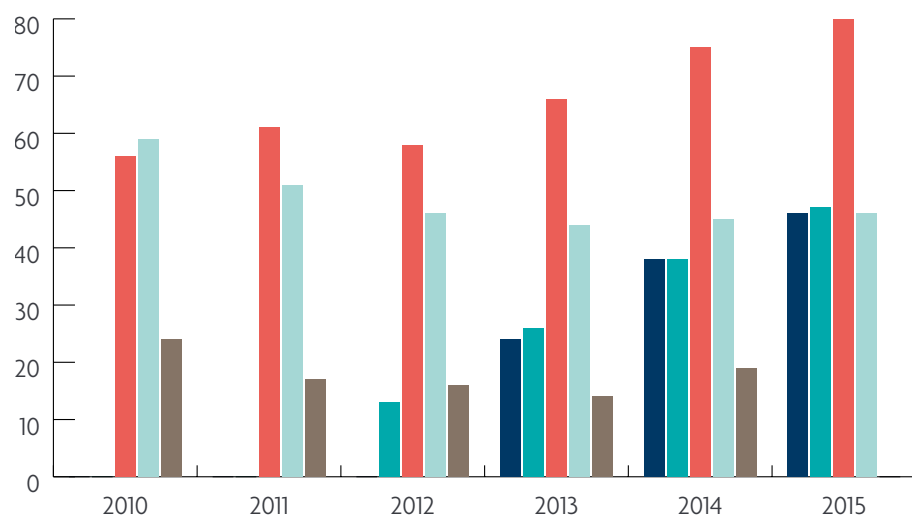
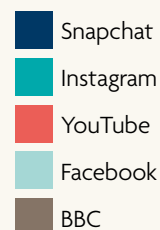


Figure 3: Social media and main media sites used in the previous week by five to 16 year olds.



Source: Childwise 2016.

6 www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens/children-parents-2017

7 www.pewinternet.org/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/

Cross reporting – the joined up world of child and animal abuse

As part of our groundbreaking work, the RSPCA helped found the NSPCC in 1884, so it is unsurprising that we have continued our close links ever since. Issues of deprivation, poverty, dysfunctional families and lack of empathy are common to both child abuse and animal issues⁸. The NSPCC and the RSPCA have a reciprocal arrangement of cross reporting any incidents that either organisations come across as part of their investigatory work. In the year April 2016 to March 2017, 51 referrals were made from the RSPCA to the NSPCC on child cruelty – a slight decrease on the previous year. The vast majority (86 percent) of referrals from the RSPCA to local authorities were not known to them. These children would not have received services or protective action had the RSPCA referral not been made.

The NSPCC shared 111 referral forms with the RSPCA in six months from October 2016, when a new email sharing protocol went live. This outlines the value of the partnership in the safeguarding of children and animals across England and Wales, and the key role that humane and non-human safeguarding agencies can play in identifying and reporting abuse and neglect.

Developing empathy through education

Empathy is important in child development as it influences children's prosocial development and altruistic behaviour. Empathy is a complex construct including cognitive and emotional responses to others.

Interventions that enhance a child's empathy towards animals will have an impact on children's ability to care for them and potentially on the longer-term development of positive attitudes and behaviour towards animals in general.

Contact with animals can be used as a way of promoting the development of empathy as animal-directed empathy may be generalised and fall into human-directed empathy. Studies showing the importance of pets on a child's empathy are mixed, due partly to the difficulty of measuring the influence of the animal against the influence of the family environment and the lack of longitudinal studies to establish causality⁹. However it is likely that there is a positive effect from promoting contact with animals to promote child development such as empathy and emotional skills¹⁰. Indeed some studies have shown bonding with companion animals can contribute to the psychological health of children⁸.

8 Wells D. 2009. The facilitation of social interaction by domestic dogs. *Anthrozoös* 17: 340–352.

9 Endenburg N and van Lith H. 2011. The influence of animals on the development of children. *The Veterinary Journal* 190: 208–14

10 Endenburg N and Baarda D. 1995. The role of pets in enhancing human well-being: effects on child development. Robinson I (ed). *The Waltham Book of Human-animal interaction: benefits and responsibilities of pet ownership*. Pergamon ps 1–17.

Compassionate Class

Schools are still an excellent way to teach children to develop this empathy. A focus on empathy and compassion with the five to 16 years age group builds on their natural inquisitiveness and discovery learning, which is the basis of the RSPCA's Compassionate Class project. Compassionate Class is a programme of work for Key Stage 2 primary school pupils which develops positive attitudes and teaches about responsible behaviour towards animals. There is still a project-based approach to learning in primary schools which means teachers are open to the resources we produce and more likely to integrate the ideas into their classroom practice. Secondary schools now focus on the exam syllabus so our interventions for this age group are targeted to specific needs and remedial studies.

How is the RSPCA responding to this changing world?

In 2018 the RSPCA is launching a three-stage programme of prevention through education to children and teenagers. As part of our current five-year strategy we are prioritising resources to programmes under these three stages. This will ensure that educational messages are given to all young children and specific educational messages tailored to those that are at risk of youth offending.

Generation Kind, our ambitious prevention strategy, will build and develop programmes of work for a generation of young people who have a compassion for, and understanding of, the needs of animals.



Children in school

Primary and secondary education.
Ages seven to 14 years old.



Children who are disadvantaged

Children in care or from deprived backgrounds. From toddler age to 25 years old.



Children who have offended or are at risk of offending

Ages 14 to 18 years old.

Stage 1

Focus on young people

The RSPCA's founding fathers agreed in 1824 that education was to be one of the three planks for the Society¹¹ and our educational work has been continuing ever since.

Today the Society's educational work concentrates on working with trainee teachers, providing teachers with resources and lesson plans, and going into schools to give talks.

Although our education team is small when compared to some other charities, by concentrating at two levels of teacher training and school children we can maximise our impact. In 2017 we trained 968 new teachers at 12 universities and colleges in England and Wales with a reach of nearly 90,000 pupils.

We also delivered assemblies through our volunteer speakers to more than 12,000 primary school pupils. Some of these are targeted and focus around situations where children are particularly at risk – e.g. from dog bites – or are in response to specific incidents involving dogs and children. Going forward we are going to optimise the unique resource of our 400 Inspectorate officers and it will become part of their role to undertake educational work.

Our new Compassionate Class programme is an ambitious and innovative solution to encourage a more empathetic understanding of animals and what they need to experience good welfare, helping to prevent neglect and cruelty from happening in the future. This education project for children aged seven to 11 is designed to meet curriculum requirements and aims to engage and inspire pupils so that they develop compassion for animals through learning about their welfare needs. Since its pilot in Manchester early in 2018 nearly 2,000 schools have signed up for the resources, which is double the year's target, showing the demand for animal welfare to be taught in schools. *Animal action*, our magazine for six to 12 year olds, will be sent to all participating schools.

We have also started to involve schools in discussing animal welfare through our Great Debate programme which started in Wales in 2015 and was then launched in England in 2018. This enables schools to compete against each other and debate issues of animal welfare in prestigious venues such as the Welsh Parliament. The opportunity for young people who are in the early phase of their secondary education to get to grips with the key issues that impact on animals is well received by schools. The Great Debate finals, held in Cardiff and Westminster, challenge students to think through who is responsible for animal welfare.

Stage 2

Focus on young people at risk

Working with children at risk and disadvantaged young people

Hastings Wild Things is a project run at RSPCA Mallydams Wood Wildlife and Education Centre, which supports disadvantaged young people. Wild Things reaches four key groups: primary school children from deprived areas, young people aged 11 to 25 who've been excluded from school (or are at risk of exclusion) or aren't in employment or training, and children who come from troubled families.

These children and young people are given the opportunity to engage with animals in ways that might not otherwise have been possible. They can take part in a wealth of activities designed to help them develop compassion and understanding for animals – such as learning about how to handle pets, making hedgehog homes for gardens, responsibly throwing away or recycling plastics and other potentially dangerous items, and picking up litter on beaches to protect the habitats of seals and sea birds. Giving young people access to nature and animals helps them grow in self-confidence and learn practical new skills. It also helps them develop the empathy and understanding that is vital if we are to create a generation that is kinder to animals.

The programme has already produced evidenced outcomes, including teachers reporting an improved attitude to learning, almost 900 young people have increased in confidence and learnt new skills (300 of these have also achieved between one and six AQA certificates in a learnt skill) and 220 parents have reported improved communication and confidence interacting with their young children.

Indeed the project has exceeded its outcome targets to date, showing that it can be expanded to other sites. It has had some very interesting unexpected outcomes such as decreasing social isolation and improving access to services for young people with mental health problems. All of these outcomes have been achieved through animal welfare education which involve activities learning about and understanding animals.

Children in foster care

Research has shown that children who have witnessed or experienced abuse at a young age sometimes don't know that cruelty is wrong and will copy this behaviour. In some cases, children take out their feelings of powerlessness on innocent animals and this can cause their foster placement to break down. Our Looked After Children Animal Action Days project

¹¹ RSPCA. 1824 Annual Report.

aims to reduce the risk of these children harming animals. When children in foster care demonstrate a lack of empathy for animals, social workers can refer them to our Animal Action Days – one-day events designed to help them develop compassion for animals. During these days children are taught about animals' welfare needs and shown that animals need empathy and kindness too. This helps to ensure the children begin to have more positive interactions with the animals around them. Not only does this keep animals safe from harm, it also helps to keep the children in secure and loving foster homes and out of the youth justice system.

This project involves joint working with Barnardos and private foster agencies, who refer young people and their carers on to the programme. We have also held 15 fostering carer training sessions reaching 173 carers and social workers.

Paws 4 Change

Paws 4 Change is an innovative project that seeks to help both vulnerable young people and animals to overcome their disadvantage – by bringing the two together. The scheme carefully matches disadvantaged young people with dogs who have suffered cruelty and neglect. The young people, many of whom suffer from low self-esteem or problems with impulse control, are tasked with training and looking after rescue dogs.

Over four days, and under the careful guidance of our behaviour and welfare specialists, they begin to bond with each other. The young people learn about responsibility and what dogs need to experience good welfare. In return, the dogs benefit from their care and loving attention. Over the last 10 years, the project has expanded to six RSPCA animal centres. In that time, we've helped around 200 young people and dogs. The results have been consistently positive. For many of the participants it is the first time they have ever completed and succeeded in a programme of learning and their confidence soars. Meanwhile,



the dogs become more confident with people again, and benefit from the training and behavioural support, giving them the best chance of finding a loving new home.

Stage 3

Focus on young people who have offended

We believe it is important to work with younger people who have offended and are still school age 13–16, as they are more responsive to interventions and less likely to reoffend. So in 2010 we set up a new programme to work with Youth Offending Teams (YOT) in England and Wales. We developed a toolkit called Breaking the Chain which we offered to YOTs to help them in their work with young offenders. In 2017 we trained 43 YOT members and social workers.

In 2017 we worked with 250 different young people who are at risk of disengaging with education, face social isolation or are entering the youth justice system. We continue our work with Sussex Police and Rye Primary Youth Intervention Project to build positive early relationships between children and the police. The Neighbourhood Policing Team Officer from Sussex Police spends time at RSPCA Mallydams Wood Wildlife and Education Centre

Our Compassionate Class programme aims to engage and inspire pupils so they develop compassion for animals through learning about their needs.





with children who are very young and identified as at risk of antisocial behaviour or social exclusion. This strong relationship with Sussex Police has enabled initiatives to reduce the risk of young people reoffending by providing diversionary activities and increasing positive peer group support for young people.

Caring communities and a kinder world: Where we go in the future

Encouraging children to embrace the animal world in a positive way builds stronger communities and a kinder world. Preventing animal cruelty, understanding what animals need to enjoy life and teaching animal empathy forms an integral part of the RSPCA's five-year strategy. We are coalescing all the different educational strands into one project, prioritising resources and expanding the programme. We aim to build on the foundation we have created and achieve the following in the next few years.

Focus on young people

All our educational work is based on need so we will continue our annual research into how children communicate and what they need, and we will be reviewing all our resources to ensure that they are what teachers require for lessons and assemblies.

- We will compile an annual index on young people's attitudes to animals.
- We will grow our assemblies programme by expanding our volunteer base from 35 to 150 to undertake assemblies, and start our programme of RSPCA inspectors regularly going into schools.
- We will develop the RSPCA Compassionate Class initiative (page 9) for Key Stage 2 students after its pilot in Manchester, with the intention of reaching more than 3,000 schools annually by 2020.
- We will expand our circulation of *Animal action*, our magazine for six to 12 year olds, to all schools participating in the Compassionate Class initiative.
- We will expand our schools debate programme, for the first time running it in England and using regional heats in Wales, to maximise the number of schools that can compete.
- We will be working with the governments in England and Wales to put animal welfare into the national curriculum and have a more structured approach to teaching animal welfare.
- We will identify areas where children appear most at risk from dog bites and deliver targeted educational assemblies to primary school children with advice on keeping safe around dogs and understanding dog behaviour.
- We will continue to develop the RSPCA Young Photographer Awards, our long-established competition open to children and young people under 19, in order to engage more young people in the animal world around them.
- We will develop activities for Key Stage 1 students where we currently have a gap.
- We will continue to target student teachers, reaching 20 teacher training courses at universities and therefore influencing up to 2,000 new teachers. By multiplying this with school children taught, we aim to reach tens of thousands of pupils and local communities where teachers are seen as influential opinion formers.

Focus on young people and families at risk

- Using Reaching Communities National Lottery funding we will expand the Hastings Wild Things project to at least two new educational facilities at our wildlife centres. This would deliver programmes annually in each centre to: 1,500 school children; 70 excluded children; 200 people not in education, training or employment; and 50 troubled families.
- We will work with psychologists and other professionals who provide therapeutic services to vulnerable children and families, using attachment and trauma-focused approaches to facilitate the development of healthy relationships with both humans and animals, as we believe that early therapeutic intervention is the best way of preventing harmful and harming behaviours.
- We will develop bespoke mental health training for RSPCA inspectors to recognise when they come across vulnerable families and children, and the best ways of assisting them.
- We will ensure that our cross-reporting work with the NSPCC is delivered across England and Wales ensuring that our data and reporting are robust and use any learnings from the year to be delivered through our respective organisations.

Focus on young people as offenders

- We will be expanding our Paws 4 Change programme to 10 additional RSPCA centres to double the number of people on the programme.
- We will be re-designing our youth offending programme by developing a toolkit of resources and standardising our approach following a review of the programme in its first two years.
- We will be offering up to 30 apprenticeships in our centres over three years for disadvantaged young people. We will undertake new research into youth animal offending patterns.
- We will be working with social media providers, particularly Snapchat, to develop new ways of ensuring that animal cruelty content is not shared on their platforms, and put in place educational content.
- We will review our projects, such as Breaking the Chain, to ensure they are delivered at the right places to the right people. Breaking the Chain provides professionals working with young people with a series of case studies that look at how cruelty to animals can occur. It looks at triggers and then the consequences before suggesting responsible actions and behaviours. It was developed with YOTs and psychologists.

Animal mistreatment is preventable.
Our aim continues to be a world in which
animal abuse is prevented – and kindness
to animals promoted – through prioritising
prevention programmes for young people.



Our Paws 4 Change project matches disadvantaged young people with dogs who have suffered cruelty and neglect.





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