

# Supporting horse welfare

*Members of the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association recently visited the Irish Horse Welfare Trust. Georgina Self RVN DipAVN(surg) tells us about the visit*



**Claire Owens, Welfare Officer, Irish Horse Welfare Trust.**

Each year, the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association (IVNA) select a Charity of the Year in order to raise awareness and funds for the selected group. Previously, we have supported both The Dublin Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland by taking part in mini marathons and hosting coffee mornings. This year, the IVNA is pleased to support the work of the Irish Horse Welfare Trust (IHWT).

Ireland's largest equine welfare charity, the IHWT, is based in Arklow, Co. Wicklow. Co-founded by Sharon Newsome in 1999, the organisation gained status as a registered charity over a decade ago. Aims include the rescue, rehabilitation and re-homing of horses and ponies; the re-training for re-homing of retired racehorses; and, the promotion of welfare awareness and education. The group also campaigns on equine issues and legislation both at home in Ireland and on an international level.

## NATIONAL SUPPORT

The IVNA Committee was recently given a guided tour of the IHWT premises and an overview of the operation by Claire Owens. Claire is a passionate and inspiring advocate of the

work of the charity. As well as her duties as Administrator, Claire is Welfare Officer for the organisation. In this role, she is responsible for supporting counties mainly across the east of Ireland, but also provides support nationally.

"When horses in need are identified, there are a number of routes that can be taken to try and deal with the problem," explains Claire. "Where possible, the IHWT tries to educate and work with the owners to improve conditions – frequently providing hay and undertaking de-worming programmes at the charities own cost to illustrate the benefits of good husbandry.

"Our education programmes form an integral part of our work and we have seen long lasting improvements in areas of equine welfare black spots. In a case where no owners can be found, then the horses are taken into our equine centre. This will often involve the support of the local Gardai."

The IHWT is currently looking after approximately 80 horses and ponies. Some of the horses are in severe distress when they are rescued. As a result, they are in need of



veterinary care and behavioural rehabilitation before they can be put forward for re-homing. Sadly, others are in such a dire state that euthanasia is the kindest option. A number of horses are signed over to the trust's care on welfare grounds by owners unable to keep them. All new arrivals spend three weeks in quarantine. During this time, they are tested for strangles, de-wormed, micro chipped and issued with passports. Only then can the process of rehabilitation and schooling begin.

**RE-HOMING IN HARD TIMES**

The organisation works towards re-homing horses who



come to their stables. Some of the rescue cases, however, may never be able to work and are re-homed to act as companions for other horses. The charity is always looking for responsible homes. A selection of horses and ponies that are ready to start their new lives can be found on the IHWT website and Facebook page. The horse welfare charity receives some state funding and sponsorship from a number of equine industry bodies, as well as patronage from famous names such as renowned horse racing commentator, Sir Peter O' Sullivan; horse racing broadcaster, Tracey Piggott; and, Irish show jumper, Jessica Kürten. Despite this support, in the current climate, their finances are severely stretched. Not long ago, an urgent appeal for hay was raised on their Facebook page. Treatment is expensive for many of the neglected horses. A recent, high-profile case was that of a mare who was tethered next to a stream in Wicklow and fell in. She spent a couple of hours in the stream before she was seen and a subsequent rescue operation was undertaken by the IHWT, a local vet and the Gardai. After initial treatment for collapse and injury to one leg, the mare was transported to the IHWT for further care, which remains ongoing.

The IVNA would like to encourage our members and readers to assist the good work of the IHWT by supporting fundraising events or organising their own. The Committee is taking part in the upcoming Dublin and Cork mini marathons and will be looking for sponsors at work and conferences to support the work of the IHWT.

*If you would like to learn more about the work of the Irish Horse Welfare Trust, visit their stand at the IVNA conference taking place at Portlaoise Heritage Hotel on Saturday, May 24.*

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