



# Cymdeithas Frenhinol er Atal Creulondeb i Anifeiliaid Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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5 February 2019

Dear Minister,

## **RSPCA Cymru Generation Kind: developing empathy and compassion through animal welfare**

As I am sure you would agree, our society is changing. In particular digital technology has transformed our relationships and the way in which we share information. Young people now obtain their information through different mediums from their parents and even their older siblings, and the influence of social media, both positive and negative, is hugely significant<sup>1</sup>. In an RSPCA survey of 10 to 15 year olds, 34 percent reported seeing animal cruelty on social media however, only three percent said that they had witnessed it themselves<sup>2</sup>.

In our report 'Delivering for a Decade', which reviewed the achievements of the Animal Welfare Act over the last ten years since it came into force in 2007, we highlighted our findings from a YouGov Poll that despite the Act, 32 percent of people in Wales think there is more animal cruelty taking place in Wales today, than there was 10 years ago<sup>3</sup>.

Following on from the RSPCA's survey of young people, we have launched a new education prevention scheme called 'Generation Kind', which contains a set of ambitious and innovative projects that aim to nurture and encourage the value of kindness, empathy and compassion towards all animals within children and young people. The RSPCA believes that empathy is an important aspect of a child's development and includes both their 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 the longer-term development of positive attitudes and behaviour towards animals in general. Empathy with animals is also a way of promoting the development of human-directed empathy too, teaching children

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<sup>1</sup> Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health: "Social media has become a space in which we form and build relationships, shape self-identity, express ourselves, and learn about the world around us; it is intrinsically linked to mental health."

<sup>2</sup> nfpSynergy Families Insight (January 2016), Executive Overview <https://nfpsynergy.net/tracking-research/families-insight-monitor> (accessed 05.06.18))

<sup>3</sup> These figures are from YouGov Ic. total sample size was 1,103 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 10-13 January 2017. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative (politically) of all Welsh adults (18+).



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about animal welfare helps them become kinder, more compassionate human beings in later life.

Generation Kind will focus on three key areas; young people in schools, disadvantage young people and young offenders.

## Young people in schools

**Compassionate class** is an innovative programme enabling children to develop compassion and empathy through the lens of animal welfare. Using an interactive, discussion-based approach, children will be led through a series of enquiry-led activities, children will consider what it means to be compassionate, understand the needs of different types of animals, and work collaboratively to develop empathy skills for their school lives and beyond. Teachers will be able to choose from sessions focussing on pets, wild animals or farm animals - culminating in an imaginative piece of work which can be entered into the RSPCA's competition across England and Wales.

This year our **Initial Teacher Training (ITT) project** has the potential to reach 42,000 children over the course of a teacher's career, based on the number of ITT teachers reached. By offering curriculum-linked interactive workshops for teachers, we can raise awareness of the five animal welfare needs from the Animal Welfare Act and develop further understanding around sentience and what it means for animals who suffer. The RSPCA's dedicated website for teachers<sup>4</sup> offers a plethora of English and Welsh language teaching resources linked to all areas of the National Curriculum, including Science, English, PSE and Citizenship, as well as lesson plans and activities. RSPCA Cymru's National Prevention and Education Advisor would be delighted if you would like to join them whilst they deliver an ITT session.

Starting in Wales in 2015<sup>5</sup>, **Animal Welfare: The Great Debate** enables students aged 11-14 to represent their school at six regional heats across Wales and debate some of the most important issues affecting animal welfare such as increased sentencing for animal offenders, an NHS for animals and pets in rented accommodation. Winners from the spring regional heats will then make their way to the final in Siambr Hywel in June to debate the question "*who is responsible for animal welfare?*" making arguments for and against the police, Welsh Government, local government, vets, the public or the RSPCA.

## Disadvantaged young people

Interaction with animals, especially pets, can represent a powerful opportunity to promote self-esteem, encourage the development of empathetic concerns and positive social interaction in people, especially children. The RSPCA's **Animal Action Days**, with funding from the Big Lottery Awards for All England and Wales, are one day sessions where children learn about the five animal welfare needs, discuss how animals have feelings and how to approach and have around unfamiliar dogs. The day continues with the children meeting an RSPCA Inspector, getting an insight into their job and how to rescue animals

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<sup>4</sup> <https://education.rspca.org.uk/education/teachers>

<sup>5</sup> Following the success of the scheme in Wales, RSPCA Cymru's external relations team launched an equivalent programme in England in 2018 with regional heats being developed for 2019



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using their specialist equipment. To be involved in an Animal Action Day, children are referred to the RSPCA by their social worker and following the initial action day, where between eight and 20 children attend, children who need extra support are identified by staff and work with the child and their family for an extra three sessions across several weeks. These can be more specialised, tailored sessions designed to address and curtail certain behaviours.

### Young offenders

Our education specialists having also been working with young people through Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) using our intervention programme **Breaking The Chain**, which was developed in conjunction with teachers and YOTs to tackle the issues surrounding young people and animal cruelty. The scheme aims to help young people to understand:

- the important role animals play in our lives
- that animals have feelings and needs
- that people have a responsibility towards animals
- what cruelty to animals is, what triggers animal cruelty and the consequences of cruelty.

A similar scheme to *Breaking the Chain* is also run for foster carers, who look after children at risk of harming animals or who have harmed animals in the past in order to reduce the chances of this escalating.

Overall, a 2017 YouGov Poll for RSPCA Cymru found that 75 percent of people in Wales agree that children should be taught about animal welfare from a young age and 54 percent believe that it should be taught within the national curriculum for Wales<sup>6</sup>.

The projects above are just some of the schemes that RSPCA Cymru is running or trialing in Wales and should you like to know more we'd be delighted to meet with you to go through them in detail as well as our hopes for animal welfare improvements through education. The RSPCA has long campaigned for animal welfare to be taught as mandatory in schools. We are aware of course that the implementation of the new curriculum in Wales is currently out to public consultation and we will be working to both engage with this process and ensure the RSPCA programmes complement the new guidelines going forward.

Yours sincerely,

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