

Supporting pets
and their people

OUR
IMPACT
IN 2023



Pets change lives
We change theirs

Who we are

We have been changing the lives of sick, injured, and homeless pets, and the people who love them, since 1897. Pets are at the heart of everything we do and every month we continue to help thousands more.

Pets and people enhance each others' lives in so many ways. So we offer lifelong support and advice to help that unique relationship thrive.

We change lives. For pets, for people, for life. We believe that pets and their people should be able to enjoy lifelong care and support, and we won't rest until that goal becomes reality.



Rehoming

Finding loving families for cats, dogs, horses and small pets across the UK.

Veterinary

Providing affordable care for sick and injured pets when their family can't afford private treatment.

Behaviour

Providing behavioural expertise so that pets, and their people, can live healthy, happy lives.

Education

Giving talks and providing advice to people who may need a little help now, or in the future.

Pet loss support

Supporting people who are struggling to cope with the sad loss of a pet through death, theft or having to give up a much-loved pet.

Cover image: Tiny Tim

This lovely kitten, now called Biffy, knew he could lean on us when he needed help. Read his story in our For Pets magazine, spring 2024 issue.

* Some figures have been adjusted from the original printed report following completion of the annual report.

Challenging times...

... for pets and their people

2023 was another hugely challenging year for pets and the people who love them. As the cost of living crisis continued, more people found it hard to feed their pets and pay for essential vet care.

Thanks to supporters like you, Blue Cross responded to the urgent needs of pets and people through the rapid expansion of our pet food bank network. By the end of 2023 we had fed over 2.2 million pets for a day.

The launch of our new look Veterinary Care Fund was another huge success. Within a few months of the launch, over 450 veterinary practices were working with us to offer accessible vet services to struggling pet owners nationwide.

On 15 September 2023, the government announced that the XL bully type was to be added to the list of banned dogs under the current law. As well as being distressing for thousands of dog owners, the decision has created a major crisis for the animal welfare sector. You can read more about our response on page 4.

We are determined to provide even more of the vital support, advice and specialist care that pets and the people who love them need and to actively campaign to improve pet welfare. But we can only do this with the support of people like you: our generous donors, volunteers, employees, legacy pledgers, corporate partners and supporters, including those of you on our Supporter Panel.

Thank you!



Chris Burghes Chief Executive MBE



On average
2,466*
volunteers
work with us
every month.
A huge thank
you to them all.



All figures quoted are 2023, unless stated otherwise.



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Key activities in 2023

Responding to the XL bully ban

On 15 September 2023, the government announced that the XL bully type was to be added to the list of banned dogs under the current law. Understandably, this decision has had a devastating impact on owners, and it's caused a significant crisis for the animal welfare sector.

The XL bully ban has caused immense distress and confusion for the owners of XL bully types around the UK, and we've been here to provide advice and support every step of the way. Our web page explaining the ban has received over 200,000 views. We also produced a regular newsletter offering advice and support, as well as videos on how to measure the height of your dog and how to muzzle train your dog.

The XL bully ban stated that dogs must be registered for exemption

by 1 February 2024, with strict conditions that they be neutered, insured, and muzzled and on a lead in public.

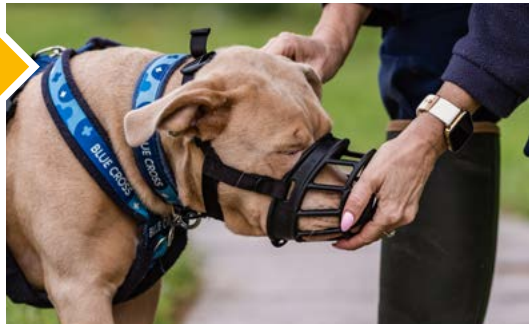
Working with other charities as part of the dog control coalition, we raised concerns with the government about the timeframe for neutering tens of thousands of dogs – highlighting the pressure this decision places on charities like ours and an already overstretched veterinary profession. We also encouraged supporters to write to their MPs to express their concerns, which thousands did.

Sadly, the new rules restricted charities from rehoming XL bully types beyond the end of December 2023, which put us and other rehoming centres in the unacceptable position of potentially having to euthanise healthy dogs based purely on the way they look.

Our 'How to muzzle train your dog' video has received

144,500

views on Facebook
plus 17,300 on Instagram



Cost of living crisis

With the help of our amazing supporters, we responded effectively to support people and pets impacted by the continuing cost of living crisis.

Household budgets around the UK continued to be squeezed in 2023, increasing the number of people struggling to feed their pets.

Thanks to the generosity of supporters and pet food companies, we were able to respond to this urgent crisis with the rapid expansion of Blue Cross pet food banks. Since the start of the project we have successfully fed over 2.2 million pets for a day.

Our partnership with Pets at Home went from strength to strength during 2023. By June there were Blue Cross pet food donation points in all 450 Pets at Home stores around the UK.

The year also saw a huge increase in the number of local food banks being supplied with pet food. Thanks to Macfarlane Packaging, we've been able to distribute bulk donations from manufacturers free of charge. Some food banks couldn't accept food by the pallet so we piloted a project where a team of our volunteers divided the food into smaller, more manageable units.

By the end of 2023 we had:

29

Blue Cross sites where people could donate goods.



450

Pets at Home stores where people could donate pet food.



527

Local food banks receiving deliveries of pet food.



6 Blue Cross sites

where people could pick up pet food.



1,464,963

pets fed for a day in 2023.



Key activities in 2023

Campaigning for an end to greyhound racing

Every year, thousands of racing greyhounds face a life of uncertainty, injury and even death in the name of sport and profit. In 2023, as part of the Cut the Chase coalition, in partnership with Dogs Trust, the RSPCA, Hope Rescue and Greyhound Rescue Wales, we continued to call for a phased end to greyhound racing.

Our shared concerns about the inadequate welfare standards greyhounds experience were raised at political party conferences and through writing to MPs and Senedd members in England and Wales. With just one track remaining in Wales – and greyhound racing receiving significant political attention thanks to

the Cut the Chase coalition – there is real hope that Wales will lead the way in ending this cruel sport.

Don't race. Embrace.

We continued our own campaign against the greyhound racing industry – Don't race. Embrace.

For more information on how you can support the campaign across the UK please visit bluecross.org.uk/campaign/endgreyhoundracing

Over 52,000
people signed our petition
calling on the government to
phase out greyhound racing

Ukraine pet welfare

As the war continued in Ukraine throughout 2023, we supported the efforts of partner charities, such as Save the Dogs and TAC.social (Transylvania Animal Care) as they cared for stray dogs, treated pets and reunited pets and people who had been separated. We also continued to support the Ukraine Equine Federation, to help with the care of displaced horses.



Blue Cross donated over
£200,000
to charity partners in Ukraine

Taking a new look at veterinary care

Together with our supporters, we are committed to the welfare and wellbeing of pets around the UK. We want to do everything we can to support owners and to ensure pets receive the treatment they need.

In 2023 we launched our new look Veterinary Care Fund, with the aim of increasing access to essential veterinary services for struggling pet owners across the UK.

Within a few months of the launch, over 450 veterinary practices were participating nationwide. During the year, the fund helped over 1,300 pets, with an average award of £224.

With household budgets continuing to be stretched, our Veterinary Care Fund is there to provide essential support for people who are finding it hard to afford veterinary care.

“

Bell and I would like to say a heartfelt thank you for the generous donation towards Bell's veterinary cost. She is recovering well and getting back to her normal self since her treatment. Your help was much appreciated. Thank you.

Ruth and Bell

”



Comments from grateful owners...

“ I could not have afforded the treatment without the support and would have had to have given up the dog. ”

“ I am a single parent working part time and struggle financially, the fund helped me immensely. ”

and vets...

“ Thank you for your help with this one, Daisy has gone home wagging her tail. ”

Over 1,300
pets helped by our
Veterinary Care Fund

A year of changing lives

1,312
pets helped

by our Veterinary
Care Fund



3,410

behaviour
consultations



52,000

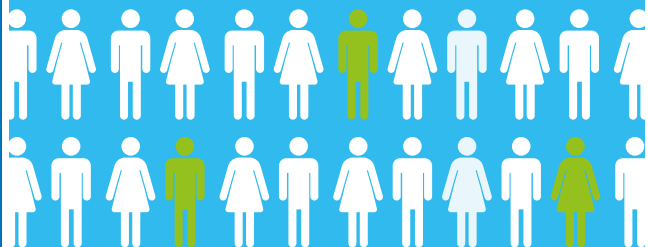
people signed
our petition

to call for a ban on
greyhound racing



234,833*

hours of volunteer time



53,410

people reached
through our
education services



3.3m*

visits to
our pet
advice
pages on
our website



For more information about our activities in 2023, you can read our Annual Report at bluecross.org.uk/publications

25,252[‡]

pets helped
by our veterinary services



1,004

horse welfare
consultations

5,966

pets helped
by our rehoming services



20,381

calls/emails answered
and Webchat conversations
had by our pet loss team



1,464,963
pets fed for a day
through our pet food
bank activity



31,218[‡]

pets helped by Blue Cross



[‡]Amended due to an administrative error identified in June 2024

Rehoming and fostering services

In 2023, the hard work of our rehoming team resulted in an increase of 27* per cent in the number of pets we helped.

We also completed a huge restructure to our small pets services (dog, cat and small pet services†), with the aim of significantly increasing the number of pets we help in the next three years.

1,525 pets spent time in foster care
(1,399 in 2022)

830 pets helped by Home Direct
(764 in 2022)

5,966 pets helped by rehoming services
(4,692 in 2022)

To provide a more streamlined service for pets and people, we looked at how we could make better use of our centres.

We introduced new rehoming roles, which came into effect in January 2024, some of which focus specifically on providing compassionate support for people giving up pets. We also prepared for a significant expansion of our fostering service and Home Direct rehoming service.

The changes to our dog, cat and small pet services will give us the capability to help increasing numbers of pets, in a more cost-effective way.

Horse services

A focus on increasing efficiency in our three areas, Burford, Rolleston, and the horse welfare team, enabled us to take in and help more horses, with the number of horses helped in 2023 growing by 14* per cent.

Dandelion and Burdock

Brothers Dandelion and Burdock had been well loved, but when their owner was sadly unable to keep them, they found themselves at our Sheffield rehoming unit and then our centre in Hertfordshire. At the age of three and with a few health issues, it took longer than we hoped to rehome the adorable siblings. But, after more than 130 days at the centre, the inseparable pair found a loving new home.



† Small pets is a generic term for pets other than dogs, cats and horses – such as rabbits, guinea pigs and hamsters.

Behaviour services

In 2023, our behaviour team continued to see a high number of pets with complex behavioural issues due to poor socialisation during Covid lockdowns and inappropriate breeding.

Additionally, the cost of living crisis has resulted in an increasing number of people delaying seeking help for minor issues, which have subsequently become more challenging.

XL bully types

Later in the year, our behaviour team was called on to offer support to anyone impacted by the XL bully ban. During this time, the team took 160 calls and helped 226 individual XL bully type dogs.

3,410

behaviour consultations
(1,733 in 2022)

In 2023, your support also helped us...

- Appoint our very first horse rehabilitation and behaviour advisor
- Complete a pilot of a paid for, but affordable, service to support owners struggling with their pets' behaviour

While we have seen a lot of complex cases, sometimes pets just need a little extra training to channel their energy.

Bolan

Lovely 10-month-old Bolan came into our Suffolk centre when a change in his owner's job meant she could no longer care for him. While extremely friendly, this bouncy and energetic fellow was a little 'full on', so our team worked with him to calm his behaviour. He was rehomed just a few weeks later and is now part of a new family.



Veterinary services

2023 was another very challenging year for the veterinary industry, with national workforce shortages, stock and supply issues and rising costs. At the same time, demand for veterinary services has increased due to the growth in the pet population, which boomed during the pandemic.

Thanks to animal lovers around the UK, our veterinary teams responded to these challenges, providing essential care for many thousands of pets – and finding new ways to deliver veterinary services.

Greater collaboration

One of our key priorities is for Blue Cross teams to work collaboratively and efficiently together wherever possible. This was put into action in 2023 with a veterinary services pilot at our Hertfordshire rehoming centre. Vets from our London hospitals made weekly visits to the centre to provide non urgent treatment, which reduced costs and took some of the pressure off local veterinary practices.

25,252[‡]

pets helped
(24,204 in 2022)

Harley

Harley was found collapsed, unable to walk, in a neighbour's garden after having been involved in a road traffic accident. Her distraught owners took her into our Victoria hospital where she underwent treatment for injuries to her spine, pelvis and hip. Thankfully, after significant surgery and much intensive care, she is now back on her feet.



5,659

operations
(5,997* in 2022)

Knowledge and understanding

Throughout 2023 we continued to ensure that more children, young people and adults had access to learning about animal welfare, care and empathy. Partnerships with animal welfare charities and other organisations increased our reach, helping to improve knowledge and understanding.

Online live super sessions

Our online super sessions continued to be a highly effective way to get our animal welfare message across to children and adults alike. In total we reached 16,466 people through our sessions in 2023.

Pet Education Partnership

Blue Cross is part of the Pet Education Partnership, an exciting collaboration of eight UK animal welfare charities, working together on ways to reach school children aged 7 to 11. In 2023 we launched a new website, peteducationpartnership.org to help teachers and youth group leaders access resources and talks.

Responsible Dog Ownership Course

Our Responsible Dog Ownership Course gives information and advice to those who have been referred to us by police forces as a result of committing, or at risk of committing, a dog-related offence.

As a result of increased media attention on dog attacks in 2023, police forces around the country were even more focused on tackling the issue. We responded by giving more forces access to the course, and the number of referrals we received grew massively from 53 in 2022, to 331 in 2023.

In addition, we also trained teams of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in Wiltshire and Staffordshire to deliver education sessions in primary schools, to teach more children how to behave around dogs.

22,062**
virtual interactions
(16,752 in 2022)

31,348
people reached in
person (27,511 in 2022)

6,996
people reached
through partnerships
(5,070 in 2022)

**Includes live super sessions

Pet Loss Support

Our unique Pet Loss Support service celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2024. Over the years the service has provided support for thousands of people suffering the devastating loss of a pet.

In 2023, we took the decision to change the name of this important and valued service from the Pet Bereavement Support service to Pet Loss Support. This better reflects the support we offer to people experiencing all types of pet loss – not just bereavement. During the year our Pet Loss Support service responded to more than 20,000 requests for support from people who are coping with the sad loss of a pet, whether due to death, theft or having to give them up.

5,051

webchat conversations
(2,890 in 2022)

2,148

people reached by our online training, enabling them to provide support to bereaved owners
(1,318 in 2022)



Rosie

Left heartbroken after the loss of her beloved rescue dog Barney, Karen had been determined not to fall in love with another pet. However, after being shown Rosie's photo by a family member, Karen couldn't resist coming to our Burford rehoming centre to meet her.

A few weeks later, Rosie was settling into her new life with Karen in Gloucestershire.

"I wasn't looking for another dog because it's like losing a member of your family when they die," says Karen. "I think it had to be the right dog though, and I truly think Rosie found me."

10,226

telephone calls answered (9,187 in 2022)

Our plans for the future

During 2023, we refreshed and updated our strategy, launching our new three-year plan in early 2024. You can see our full strategy document on our website from the beginning of May. This lays out what we intend to achieve by the end of 2026, but we can't achieve any of our goals without your support.

Rehoming and fostering

We'll continue our work to develop our rehoming services. This will see us aim to significantly increase the number of pets that we help through these services in the next three years, as well as making our services among the most efficient and modern in the animal welfare sector.

Veterinary

By continuing to focus on productivity, efficiency, improved accessibility and innovations like our Veterinary Care Fund, we intend to increase the numbers of pets we can help across the UK by the end of 2026.

Pet Loss Support service

Our Pet Loss Support service helps thousands of people through the sad loss of a pet every year and we are committed to making the service more inclusive. Over the next three years we intend to develop the service to help even more people.

Responsible dog ownership

We will continue to work with other charities, the government and police forces around the UK to educate people and promote responsible dog ownership. And we'll continue to campaign on the subject of breed specific legislation.



Your support is vital

With household budgets increasingly stretched and more owners struggling to afford veterinary care and food for their pets, it's essential we manage our finances carefully and sustainably. Our life-changing work for pets and people has never been so crucial – and your support means more than ever.

Barley

14-year-old Barley (pictured far right) came into the care of our Burford horse rehoming centre after being left abandoned in a farmer's field following the death of his owner.

Barley was a highly-strung stallion and clearly nervous of people. "Initially we thought Barley may be too tricky to rehome, being a stallion for much of his life," explains Horse Rehoming Coordinator Lauren. However, once he was gelded to bring down his testosterone levels, our team could begin the gentle training work needed to help Barley find a loving new home.

Fast forward to today and Barley has made the journey from stressed stallion to faithful friend for 28-year-old Buzz – who recently lost his lifelong companion. You can read more at bluecross.org.uk/our-stories



For every £1 invested in fundraising we received

£6.50*

(£6.66 in 2022)

Thank you



**BLUE
CROSS**

Pets change lives
We change theirs

As a charity that receives no government funding we're very grateful for your vital support.

Whether you donate, volunteer, raise money in the workplace or have pledged a gift in your Will – you make an incredible difference.

Together we change the lives of thousands of pets and the people who love them. **Thank you!**

If you would like further information about our work, please call our supporter care team on:

0300 790 9903
info@bluecross.org.uk
bluecross.org.uk

Registered charity number: 224392 (England and Wales), SC040154 (Scotland)

* Please see our annual report for our full financial statements.