

Saving Saints Rescue UK
Annual General Meeting on 4 August 2024
Minutes

Present: Rachel Wesley (RW) – Chair/Secretary/Acting Treasurer
Amanda Rees (AR)
Tracey Turnbull (TT)
Helen McGuirl (HMcG)

1. Agenda

- Apologies
- Update on actions from AGM held on 11 August 2023
- Resignations and election of Trustees
- Financial update
- Summary of activities over the last 12 months
- Feedback from users of the service over the last 12 months
- Non-UK dog health and other foreign dog related issues
- St Bernard health liaison with Kennel Club
- Media platform feedback/website
- Income generation/fundraising ideas
- Feedback from users of the charity's services in the last 12 months
- Training needs of trustees
- Future strategy and priorities for the forthcoming year

RW welcomed everyone to the 9th formal AGM of the group.

2. Apologies

None.

3. Update on actions from AGM held on 11 August 2023

Actions from the previous AGM have been completed apart from merchandise/online shop development and the appointment of a President.

Additional ideas to approach a President were explored and will be taken forward at the next strategy meeting.

4. Changes to Trustees as per Constitution

Resignation of Simon Grundy (Treasurer) was accepted in October 2023.

Tracey Turnbull has given 12 months notice of her intention to retire as a Trustee at the next AGM in 2025 for personal reasons. TT was thanked by all Trustees for her unwavering support.

Trustees are now as follows for the next 12 months as per the Constitution:

Chair/Secretary/Acting Treasurer – Rachel Wesley

Rescue/Adoption/Fundraising Co-ordinators – Rachel Wesley, Tracey Turnbull

Merchandising/Online shop/Fundraising – Amanda Rees

General advisory/behavioural – Helen McGuirl

Media – Amanda Rees

Discussion centred around the need to recruit at least 2 additional trustees by summer 2025 and who could be approached. It was recognised that TT's health and foreign dog expertise would be a loss to the charity. RW agreed to develop a job description for circulation to interested parties.

5. Financial update

RW had provided each member with a copy of the Annual Statement of Accounts from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. This showed a significant decrease in reserves from £10,073 to £3,566 representing 65% less than the previous financial year. This is due to the reduction in adoptions and donations combined with an increase in operating costs. Most of the expenditure for 2023 to 2024 continues to be kennelling (partnership with Marsh Lea kennels), transport and vet costs. Direct adoptions have dropped significantly as part of our strategy to reduce our activity to a more sustainable level in view of the financial challenges from 63 in 2023 to 48 in 2024. Additional rescue back up and support has been given to 58 dogs to those directly adopted through the charity. Transport and vet costs have substantially risen once again in line with the state of the economy and rising costs of food products and fuel. The daily cost of kennels had remained static however the length of time that dogs were remaining in kennels before finding a suitable adoption has remained static at x3 times the level in 2022 increasing our monthly kennel costs substantially.

RW confirmed that she was satisfied with the level of financial controls in place and no breaches of policies had been identified. However it was agreed that

a bookkeeper with charity expertise would be recruited on a voluntary basis in the next 6 months.

6. Summary of activities over the last 12 months

RW provided data relating to the following measurable activities in the last 12 months:

Adoptions – 48 (plus 58 RBU for other charities)

Dogs in long term foster – 3 (Shadow, Sissi, Bobo)

Dogs in kennels – 7 (Lennox, Bear, Swan, Bella, Sophie, George, Amelia)

Euthanasia – 0.

Behavioural update – Continued theme of some working/guardian breed dogs struggling to adjust to urban home environments. It was agreed that genetic traits of certain dogs need to be carefully considered eg how to redirect/refocus guardian breeds instincts to a suitable 'job' and how to further educate people on their needs. Shadow (shepherd) has undergone residential rehab at Pupcakes funded by the charity.

Failed adoptions – 6. The number of adoption enquiries has fallen significantly and this is a trend being experienced across the sector. The impact of the current economic situation in the UK was a significant factor along with the XL bully crisis and the previous flooding of the pet sector during Covid-19. A continued theme with failed adoptions is some adopters having too high expectations of their rescue dog and not allowing a reasonable transition time to adapt. This will be taken forward in our education role. There remains a core group of adopters interested in adopting non-UK dogs and special needs dogs.

Fosters - The number of active fosters is currently 6 with no fosters available for emergencies. Recruitment of fosters and advertising remains ongoing and agreement for AR to do interviews with long term fosters to aid promotion of the role. The ongoing challenge is finding experienced fosters of large breed dogs who do not have children under 16 or who are able to safely separate existing pets for an integration period.

Home checks conducted (including for other rescuers) – over 72, 5 failed (for SS). The majority of homechecks have been conducted online over the last year and it was agreed that more time needed to be spent in drilling down on what adopters' expectations were of a new pet within the first 3-6 months. Consideration to be given to a stand-alone training module that would be mandatory. In the interim period, a video about rescue dog needs would be shared along with the general guidance which has been amended.

Fundraising and raising awareness days – 6 local fundraisers; Derwentwater sponsored walk; attendance at Kennel Club Breed Rescue conference, Peterborough Cathedral event for mental health day in May; West End Woofs at Covent Garden; 4 car boots and fairs; monthly dog walks in Lancashire; sale of Christmas dog gifts; 100 Club; sale of Big Paws Welfare and Saving Saints calendars

Media presence –BBC Cambridge, S4C, West End Woofs

Pat/companion dog sessions (in last 12 months) – 10 sessions conducted – RW and Dotty attended Bolton Hospice and Isla in Yorkshire has attended a local care home

Ebay activity – remained low with a profit of £54. This will remain open until our website shop becomes fully operational. Most popular items continued to be dog bibs and personalised cards.

Website shop – remains closed

7. Media strategy

Media activity – an increased presence and use of Twitter and Instagram was now in place and analytics showed our following on Facebook had grown to over 20,000 members along with Instagram.

Website – The new website has been successfully launched on 14 February 2024 with significant work from AR and Bruce Williams has developed with Rhys Welsh. This continues to be updated and developed each month and further work is ongoing. The new menu is far clearer with the focus on dogs in need, education and maximising success stories.

A new YouTube channel has now been developed by AS and all were asked to consider suitable content.

8. Merchandising

Old stock continues to be sold including gym bags, t-shirts, bibs, slobber cloths, dog toys and other donated items online and at events. AR is continuing to source eco/ethical items for an online dog product shop. This online shop development will be linked to the new website.

9. Feedback from users of the service in the last 12 months

Positive feedback has been received from people surrendering dogs, adopters and fosters in the last year and also from our rescue partners in our responsiveness to surrenders, provision of timely advice and guidance. A number of positive comments have been received about our back up support and 7 adopters have chosen to adopt another dog with us.

We have received one formal complaint in the year and this has been satisfactorily resolved.

10. Non-UK dog health issues

TT has spoken on a podcast for the veterinary profession on the very low risk of Brucellosis to the human population. This has been shared on our website and TT has continued to liaise with other charities on zoonotic diseases and testing. The Brucellosis issue has now become less problematic however there remains variance across UK vet practices whether they request second blood tests before treating non-UK dogs.

11. Liaison with Kennel Club re: St Bernard health concerns

RW and TT had spoken to the Kennel Club re: health concerns related to the St Bernard breed and the lack of health testing, clear health strategy for the breed. A decrease in life expectancy in the breed was noted along with concerns about an increase in early deaths due to cardio-myopathy, bone cancer and aggression. Concern was also expressed at how many UK breeders were failing to honour their return to breeder contracts and how rescue was having to step in more frequently. The trends were being looked at by the Kennel Club as part of the breed health watch survey.

12. Training needs 2024

RW had passed Trustees information about free resources and training available with the Charity Commission on responsibilities and ADCH. AR has now completed the online dog behaviour programme with Battersea.

AR has successfully completed her Canine Diploma level 4.

13. Future strategy, income generation ideas and priorities for the forthcoming year

The strategy weekend was held on 2-3 September 2023 and all trustees attended. The meeting reviewed current resources (people, financial, physical); review of media strategy – use of website/social media platforms; how the charity can streamline operations further; focus and priorities for the coming year, income generation and fundraising ideas.

Due to the high increase in surrender activity within the UK within the St Bernard breed particularly, it was agreed that this would remain our focus of activity for the next 6 months. All trustees also expressed their commitment to support other large, working guardian breeds and RW confirmed this was in line with our constitution. It was agreed that non-UK rescue work would be highly restricted to dogs who we had previously committed to unless adopters wished to privately sponsor a foreign dog in which case we would provide our advice

and guidance. It was agreed that separate fundraisers would be launched for specific non-UK dogs with donators being asked to specify where they wish their donations to be used.

The review of trading names on Facebook resulted in the successful launch of a new Big Paws Welfare Facebook page, with the Saving Saints Rescue UK Facebook page continuing to be focused purely on St Bernards/crosses. This has received positive feedback from users.

Further work is due to be undertaken in 2024/25 on our foster and adoption guidance and training package. Further work has been undertaken by Peta Brandwood who was thanked by the Trustees for supporting adopters and supporters in HMcG's absence and an ongoing review of all advice and documentation given to adopters will result in further website updates.

RW is currently working with Bruce Williamson on sourcing a CRM/shelter database to contain 'live' dog data and link to donators which will be accessible to all Trustees. Further work will be undertaken to increase the charity's role as an educator to improve the responsible ownership of giant breeds.

It was agreed that an annual report would be developed and shared publicly to maximise the good news stories within the charity to generate further media content and link to fundraising campaigns which would enable us to link up with large dog merchandisers to generate income.

Due to the crisis in the Raduati shelter in Romania it was agreed that a short term campaign to support 5 St Bernards and 22 other dogs held by this shelter (who we have worked with for many years) would be undertaken with the support of subsidised kennels at Marsh Lea.

14. Date of next AGM

Agreed for August 2025 – date TBC.

Saving Saints Rescue UK
Charity Register no 1171050

Accounts for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

Profit and loss account

Receipts and donations	23943
Less expenses	30450
Add balance from previous yr	10073
Total	3566

Balance sheet

Co-op bank balance	1737
PayPal balance	1779
Stock in hand	50
Total	3566