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April is a newly qualified veterinary nurse, who works full time at a Goddard's branch in East London. She really enjoys her role and is continuing to learn every day! April is passionate about exotic nursing, feline nursing, and anaesthesia. She is also the Cat Advocate in her branch whereby she ensures cat friendly practices are carried out. If there is one piece of advice she could give to anyone wanting to be an RVN, it is that you can do this, believe in yourself! April never thought in a million years that she would be qualified and now that she is, it is a dream come true. April hopes to encourage veterinary nurses and students alike to have a voice, we can learn from each other and change practice for the better!
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Celia Hammond Animal Trust - a day in the life of

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ABSTRACT: There are a lot of rehoming centres doing essential work with matching new owners with potential pets. Ideally, veterinary practices should encourage people to rehome animals rather than buying a new kitten or puppy. One rehoming centre, the Celia Hammond Trust, was initially set up to provide low-cost neutering clinics to control the feral cat population and now runs several rehoming centres providing loving animals with new owners. This second article describes a typical day for the staff at the Canning Town centre and includes an interview with Celia Hammond herself, looking at her passion for animal welfare.

KEYWORDS: rehoming; Celia Hammond Trust; animal welfare; rescue centres

Welcome to part two of my article about advising clients on choosing a pet. In the first article, Marc Abraham answered questions on Lucy's Law and advice that practices can give to clients before they buy a pet. In this article, I talk to Celia Hammond about her work in rehoming animals.

Introduction

Celia Hammond was a model in the 1960s, and has since become known as a campaigner against the fur trade and for neutering of cats to control the feral population (Figure 1). Celia received an Award from the RSPCA in 1982 in recognition of her pioneer work on behalf of feral cats and her outstanding contribution to animal welfare.

Her work with animals became so all-consuming that in the early 70's she gave up her career to devote her life to animal welfare and spent the next fifteen years deeply involved in rescuing and rehoming many thousands of animals, mainly feral cats. She felt very strongly that the huge feral cat population derived largely from an uncontrolled domestic cat population, she passionately believed that the establishment of low-cost neuter clinics, such as those operating so effectively in Canada and the USA, would offer a humane solution to the ever-increasing unwanted animal population in the UK.

In 1986 she founded the Celia Hammond Animal Trust (CHAT) with the aim of opening a low-cost neutering clinic to control the

feral animal population. The first of these clinics opened in Lewisham in 1995, and a second opened in Canning Town in 1999. The Celia Hammond Animal Trust also runs a sanctuary in Brede (Nr Hastings) for animals who are not suitable to be homed for various reasons. In addition to neutering animals, the clinics (and sanctuary) also help to rescue and rehome animals - now homing thousands of cats each year.

Today, it is estimated that there are "2 million stray cats on UK streets and the true figure may be much higher", as stated on CHAT website (<https://www.celiahammond.org/>).

My Visit to Celia Hammond Animal Trust (CHAT) - Canning Town

I was fortunate enough to spend a few hours at Celia Hammond Animal Trust (Figure 2) in Canning Town on 11th November 2020.



Figure 1. Celia Hammond.



▲ Figure 2. Celia Hammond Trust, Canning Town.

I was shown around the building and was able to spend some time with various members of staff and talk about the work they do. Due to the current pandemic, I wore a facemask throughout and sanitised my hands regularly. I was only able to stroke the cats if I had gloves on and needed to change my gloves after stroking each cat.

Working at CHAT

My day begins with talking to Patsy, who was the Homing Officer at the time I visited. Her role is to try and find good homes for the cats. Patsy worked for the London Underground for 30 years and decided to have a change in career in 2019. Upon speaking to Patsy, I was made aware that CHAT is really struggling through COVID as the number of clients and pets they are seeing is on the increase. Many people may have lost their jobs during lockdown and are now depending on animal charities to seek treatment for their pets. Others may be acquiring 'lockdown cats and kittens' without properly thinking it through and in time, the cats are handed into CHAT for rehoming. Patsy even mentioned to me that even before COVID, staff members themselves were donating part of their wage per month to CHAT. This really touched me as just by this small, but kind gesture, it demonstrates that the staff are so devoted to their job role and passionate at providing the upmost care to their patients.

There are many ways to raise money for CHAT, one is by fundraising. On their website, CHAT have previously held a "Tea, Cakes and Cats" open day at their Greenacres sanctuary which raised over £6000 and homes were offered to 22 of their cats! Even taking part in an event such as climbing a mountain, or a running event, is a great way of raising money. You can even get your colleagues involved by organising a coffee morning or an animal themed quiz night via zoom!

When I spoke to Patsy, she was sharing her office with a cat called Wuji (Figure 3) who had been recently signed over to CHAT. Wuji is a 5-year-old cat who was originally bought in as a stray in May 2016. Wuji was neutered with CHAT and was looked after there until November 2016 when she was rehomed with a gentleman. The gentleman was sadly diagnosed with cancer a year ago and passed away recently. During the owner's diagnosis, Wuji was showing signs of illness including vomiting, defaecating outside the litter tray, and had a wound on her back which took some time to heal. Wuji is feeling much better now and has found her forever home.

Patsy showed me a few forms which are completed whenever someone hands their cat to CHAT or whether they are rehomed. The first form is the Animal Acceptance Form. This form is what the owner signs when they hand their cat to CHAT. There is a table in the middle of the page where CHAT staff can write down vital information such as the breed, male/female, neutered status, coat colour and vaccination status of the patient as well as the reason as to why the owner is handing their cat to them.

The next form is the Animal Adoption form. Any client rehoming a cat from CHAT will read and sign this form. The form includes information of the cat being adopted, the client's details and a list of the conditions which the new owner needs to abide to. Conditions include feeding and housing the cat to CHAT's satisfaction, to report a change in address to CHAT. All kittens and adult cats are microchipped and neutered



▲ Figure 3. Wuji.

before rehoming as neutering is at the heart of CHAT's ethos.

Patsy then explained to me the rehoming process at CHAT. If a client is interested in a pet advertised on their website, then the Rehoming Team would have a chat with the client over the phone about where they live, lifestyle they lead etc. The client would then be offered a home visit by a member of CHAT. Due to COVID, the home visits are being carried out via video link. During the home visit, the client will show the rehoming staff the front, back and the inside of their house as well as a copy of their utility bill for proof of address. CHAT will Google their address and check for safety and road access.

If the home visit is successful and the client is a probable adopter, then CHAT will proceed with the application and will match the client with the most appropriate pet. Although the client may have the cat they want to rehome in mind, advice may be different after the home visit. For example, if a person is inexperienced at owning a cat, then a nervous or shy cat may be ruled out. Questions on lifestyle are asked again at the home visit such as if there are any children in the household or any other pets. Cat care is explained at the time of the house visit. Once the cat has been chosen, another video call is carried out so the client can 'meet' their new addition for the first time. The whole process takes approximately a few days.

Patsy proceeded to show me around CHAT, which included the veterinary clinic where there are several wards and theatres. Some patients that are being treated before rehoming are kept in a quieter ward. I met a few cats needing to be rehomed in the ward including a 7-month-old domestic short hair diagnosed with a heart murmur and a cat who has undergone a forelimb amputation. I noticed there were different coloured cards on each patient's kennel door. Patsy explained to me that these were 'traffic light cards' and that the colours corresponded to that below:-

- Green – Can be rehomed. No treatment needed. Veterinary examination within normal limits. "Bags packed and ready to go"
- Orange – For homing with awareness of conditions. Non urgent procedure needed that can be booked in after rehoming. Long term treatment and condition under control such as decreased vision, heart murmur, deafness, early kidney disease or FIV etc.

- Red – Not ready for rehoming. Currently on treatment for short term condition. On treatment for long term problem, not currently under control. Pending surgery soon i.e. – neutering or a condition affecting quality of life.

I feel the traffic light cards are such a great idea and anyone looking at the patient will immediately be able to see if they are ready for rehoming or not.

Afterwards, I was shown their new build Rehoming Ward and Maternity Ward. A client sadly passed away and left his possessions to CHAT. From his generosity, they were able to construct the Rehoming Ward.

As stated on the CHAT website, “the majority of our income is thanks to our supporters who have generously left a gift to the charity in their Will. These gifts allow us to continue our vital work, purchase essential equipment and undertake new projects which we may not have otherwise been able to do”. If anyone is interested in leaving a legacy to CHAT, definitely have a look on their website for more information under the sub heading GET INVOLVED.

I was introduced to the Maternity Ward where queens and kittens were kept – many which were strays. I could not believe how many cats were in this ward and some kittens were as young as 8 weeks old. Each pen was very spacious. I was shown the Rehoming Ward next. [Figure 4](#) is a photo of what each pen looked like in the Rehoming Ward.



Figure 4. Example of a pen in the rehoming ward.

Daily routine

There were a few cattery assistants present in this ward and so this was the perfect opportunity to have a chat with them and ask them about their role. The cattery assistants expressed to me the love of their role and watching cats grow and be rehomed is so rewarding for them. I asked about the day in the life of a cattery assistant at CHAT.

Their day starts at 10am where they clean each pen from the Rehoming Ward, Maternity Ward and the kennels in the veterinary section and then feed the cats.

At 12pm-4pm, they can let the cats out, one pen at a time and spend time with them, bond, play and socialise with them. This is such an important role because many cats arrive nervous and shy. The cattery assistants can spend quality time with each cat and bring them ‘out of their shell’ and give them the physical and mental stimulation that they need. Other types of enrichment the cats have in their pens are scratching posts/activity centres and toys including teaser toys and interactive toys.

Between 4 and 6pm, they feed the cats before the end of the day.

I was lucky enough to sit in the Rehoming Ward whilst a few cats were let out of their pen and it was so heart-warming seeing each cat walking around, playing and engaging with myself and the cattery assistants. [Figure 5](#) shows just a few of the adorable kittens at CHAT!

Soon after, I was given the opportunity to have a Q and A session with Celia Hammond herself. Celia is such an amazing lady who has devoted her life to animal care and rescue. Hearing her story and the changes she has made to animal welfare really has inspired me. CHAT is in dire need of volunteers - if anyone would like to volunteer for them, please call or send them an email.

Interview with Celia Hammond

Q/Hi Celia. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to chat to me today. For those who are not yet aware of your story, could you let us know a little about yourself and how the Celia Hammond Animal Trust came about?

A/I have been rescuing animals since I was 25 years old. In the 60s, I was a model and having witnessed the appalling cruelty of the seal hunt, I vowed to never model

fur again and persuaded top models of the day to give up wearing fur. In the mid-60s, I started to be involved in rescuing, neutering and rehoming stray and unwanted animals. I was rescuing animal colonies in derelict areas in London. Once I rescued them, I drove to my local vets for them to be neutered, sometimes I would rescue 10-15 animals a day! Neutering in the 60s was £3 a cat!

I soon realised there was an ongoing need for a low-cost neuter and vaccination clinic and began to search London for a clinic which would be the first in the country. With the aid of fundraising, I opened the Lewisham clinic in 1995 and 4 years later, I opened another clinic in Canning Town. From day one we were fully booked up and have continued to be in high demand ever since.

Q/Which major changes have you seen since founding the Animal Trust to the present day?

A/For the first 10 years since Lewisham clinic opened, I noticed that money was the main issue for clients and because of this, we offered discounted rates on vaccinations and offered neutering vouchers. However, in the last 10–15 years, money is still an issue but there are other factors as well with regards to neutering such as religious reasons, lifestyle and beliefs.

Q/How have you managed to deal with the increased reliance on CHAT services since COVID?

A/It has been a real struggle to try and keep everything afloat during COVID. We have abided by the regulations throughout. There have been some issues with not being able to carry out rescues at people’s houses and have found ways to negotiate. For example, rather than us going to the client’s house and rescuing their cat due to welfare reasons, we loan out one of our carriers for the owner to bring their cat to the door of their home to be collected by one of the CHAT team or the owner can bring them to the clinic themselves which at times, has not been easy! However, rescue work outside has still been fine to carry out. During COVID, it is all about being flexible and creative.

Q/For anyone wanting to learn more about rescue and rehoming, what advice would you give to them and why?

A/The main piece of advice that I would give is to gain lots of experience. At Celia



▲ Figure 5. Kittens waiting to be rehomed.

Hammond Animal Trust, we have specific protocols which we abide to and therefore, if anyone was looking to work with us, we are carrying out interviews via video link. Applying to be a volunteer is a good start or applying to a vacancy for home checker, rescue work or animal care is a great way to get your foot in the door. Training is provided on the job and there are many areas in which you can progress.

Q/If you could give veterinary practices any advice on advising clients about choosing a pet, what would it be and why?

A/Thousands of beautiful animals are in rehoming centres. I would recommend for clients to rehome and do NOT go to

breeders. Of course, those wanting pedigree pets have the option of going to breeders however, there are many pedigree cats in rescue centres already wanting their forever home. Clients going to breeders are encouraging this way of buying a pet to continue. Rehoming centres are a must.

We need to be educating clients about this and about the temperament and nature of pedigrees. For example, Orientals like Bengals, can often be demanding and difficult cats to own, especially for a first-time cat owner.

Q/If you could give clients one piece of advice when looking for a pet, what would it be and why?

A/Research beforehand! We receive endless phone calls from clients who start the conversation with “I want a cat” without realising the time and cost of upkeep. I remember a phone call from a lady who had a 10-week-old kitten which she was only feeding him chocolate biscuits and milk. She called because he was not eating the chocolate chips from the biscuits! This was due to a lack of knowledge and understanding. She ended up handing her kitten into us for rehoming as she could not look after him anymore.

Here at Celia Hammond, our rehoming process is in depth to match the client with the correct cat for them. We get details of the owner over the phone. A member of the rehoming team calls the client, and we ensure that the client is aware of the cost of upkeep, and that they have gained the landlords permission (if applicable) to have a cat in their household etc. We ask them various other questions including whether they live in a house or flat, details about their lifestyle, before moving on to the next stage of our rehoming process. We want to make sure that every cat in our care is going to their forever home.

It has been a very memorable day and has been a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak with you, Celia. Thank you for your time and answering my questions.

Conclusion

Visiting the CHAT was a humbling, amazing experience. They do such valuable work but it is a shame that they are so busy. Without shelters such as these, so many more animals would be suffering on the streets.

I have decided to donate the money I make from this article to CHAT.

I am hoping you will also feel inspired by Marc Abraham and Celia Hammond and I am grateful for the time they gave to me.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Celia Hammond for taking part in the Q and A and giving us an insight about the incredible work she has done and continues to do. I would like to thank Patsy for taking the time to show me around CHAT. Also, I would like to acknowledge every member of staff who works at CHAT, they work fantastically well as a team and should be recognised for all the hard work they do, despite working through a pandemic which has meant a dire need for their service.