



Katie Knight

Katie Knight qualified as a registered veterinary nurse in December 2014. Since qualifying she has worked in a small animal independent practice in Cambridgeshire. At home she has a small-breed schnauzer cross who she regularly trains and enters agility with. Currently Katie is volunteering in Sri Lanka for 6 months and is thoroughly enjoying it.
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Working with WECare

Katie Knight

Registered Veterinary Nurse at Amical Veterinary Centre, Cambridgeshire, UK

As a registered veterinary nurse based in a small-town independent practice, I always felt there was more I could be doing, whether it was here in the UK or somewhere else in the world. That is when I came across an advert seeking a Registered Veterinary Nurse to volunteer for 6 months in Sri Lanka. It sounded absolutely perfect being able to do the job I love in one of the most beautiful countries in the world and, on top of this, being able to make a real difference. So I set about making this dream a reality and, before I knew it, I was chasing stray dogs around on the streets of south Sri Lanka!

WECare Worldwide is a UK-registered charity that was founded in October 2014 by Veterinary Surgeon (and newly crowned Vet of the Year 2016) Janey Lowes. WECare's team is made up of voluntary vets and nurses, not only from the UK, but also from the rest of Europe and Australia, and all give up their time and expertise free of charge. We aim to provide a high level of care to the street dogs of Sri Lanka and not to let our standards slip just because we are working in challenging conditions. This comes with its difficulties, but we feel strongly that if we aren't doing the job properly then we shouldn't be doing it at all.

Sri Lanka is an incredibly beautiful country the size of Ireland, but the overpopulation of street dogs is a big issue for both the dogs and the humans. With an estimated 3 million street dogs, equating to one dog for every six people, resources are limited, and extremely advanced disease is commonplace. WECare aims to provide high-standard veterinary care for all animals in need, as well as neutering and vaccinating 70% of the population. By reaching this target, we will both eradicate rabies and provide a sustainable future for the dogs by reducing the population numbers and, therefore, the level of disease and injuries encountered.

As well as our work with reducing the population and treating sick and injured dogs, we also focus heavily on education. The people of Sri Lanka do not currently see dogs the same way that we do; they are not seen as pets, but more of a nuisance



▲ Figure 1. Dr Janey giving an educational talk with the local children



▲ Figure 2. The WECare Team



▲ Figure 3. Street dog Fred severely affected by mange



▲ Figure 4. Belle recovering post wild boar attack



▲ Figure 6. WECare volunteers

or vermin. More often than not you will see the locals throwing sticks and stones at the dogs if they dare to venture too close. Many of the children here are also scared of dogs and will run away. Sri Lankan street dogs are extremely affectionate, despite their reputation (the Sri Lankan government do a lot of scaremongering!) and are nothing to be feared. Part of WECare's work is to go into schools to educate the children on topics such as responsible animal ownership and community dog care, as well as focusing on the older generations and their approach to animals too. We hold talks in community centres and we spend a great

deal of time training local vets, as basic knowledge is lacking.

The street dogs suffer from many ailments, but the most common ones include mange, TVTs (transmissible venereal tumours), maggot wounds and injuries resulting from road traffic accidents (RTAs). As part of the education programme, it is vital that owners or members of the community are provided with the information required to be able to contact WECare in the event of an issue, as our biggest problem is stumbling on these cases 2 weeks too late. Locals turn a blind eye, and a problem that could have been solved easily 2 weeks prior

becomes a life-threatening, and often fatal, condition. It is about raising awareness that help is available and all it takes is one phone call.

As previously mentioned, overpopulation is a huge problem in Sri Lanka and WECare addresses this by holding CNVR (Catch, Neuter, Vaccinate, Release) programmes once every one to two months. We work for 5–8 days in a designated area under tents, neutering around 60 dogs per day and strategically targeting each area so that we ensure we hit our 70% target. The team of WECare volunteers work alongside a local Veterinary Surgeon and his team of dog catchers and assistants. Working on the CNVR programme was a totally new experience for me and I was very apprehensive thinking, first, how am I going to manage more than one veterinary surgeon at a time? But also, how am I going to manage without gas anaesthesia? However, I picked it up very quickly and now it all seems like second nature to me. The days are long, starting with the first catch around 6:30 am and ending with the last dog going back on to the streets around 7 pm. A full clinical exam is carried out on each of the dogs when they arrive at the clinic. Some dogs are slightly anxious so are not amenable to full exam, but we ensure that every dog receives a bare minimum of cardiac auscultation and mucous membrane check. This is of utmost importance due to the high level of Babesiosis encountered in Sri Lanka (around 70% of street dogs have it in the subclinical form) – if there is any doubt that the patient is not fit enough for surgery it will not go ahead. Those that are fit for surgery are weighed, pre-medicated



▲ Figure 5. Katie and Dr Abbie hard at work at CNVR Clinic



Figure 7. Katie and one of the many puppies waiting to be neutered

and prepped for surgery to the same high standards of that in the UK. Each patient has an IV catheter placed and is on IVFT intraoperatively and during recovery. Only when the patient is fully recovered do the dog catchers return them to the exact spot they were picked up from. Each dog leaves with a red reflective collar to indicate they have been vaccinated against rabies and also a “V”-shaped ear tip to show that they have been neutered. The collars also make

it a lot easier for the dog count that takes place at the end of clinic. Everyone within the team works extremely well together to ensure that everything runs smoothly and that the dogs are well cared for up to their release.

Dr Janey Lowes, the founder of WECare, certainly appreciates the value of nurses here at WECare.

WECare would absolutely not be able to function without RVNs on board. The level of expertise and commitment to patient care is second to none and I am in awe of our nurses every day. Sri Lanka is not an easy place to work and, with all the challenges involved, it not only takes a strain on you physically but also emotionally. Some of the cases witnessed are horrendously shocking but our nurses deal with them professionally and compassionately, which is everything I could ask for. We are one of only a handful of charities in the world set up by vets and vet nurses and I am so very proud of our team.

WECare can only keep moving forward in its mission with the support of everyone

back home. If you would like to help with our quest to have the first fully equipped veterinary hospital in Sri Lanka then please do get in touch. It is estimated that there are 20,000 RTAs per year and there is only one X-ray machine on the whole island. This means that thousands of dogs are suffering, and often dying slow and painful deaths, due to a lack of the equipment that we take for granted in the UK. We must do better. Even the smallest of donations will be a huge help and will allow us to realise our dream of ensuring that no animal is suffering on the streets with no one to help them. Equally, if you too would like the opportunity to work in paradise, then please get in touch. It is truly a life-changing experience and a decision I assure you will not regret. I have to say, honestly, it is the best decision I have ever made and I haven't looked back once.

WECare is a UK-registered charity (reg no: 1162386). If you would like to support our work then please contact us on info@wecareworldwide.org.uk or check our website at www.wecareworldwide.org.uk

Membership Fees for 2017

BVNA would like to advise members that there will be a slight increase in membership fees which will take effect from 1st April 2016;

Category	New Application	Renewal
Full Member	54.00	48.00
Student Member	34.00	29.00
Associate Member	43.00	39.00



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