

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



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# CHAIR'S STATEMENT

2023 was a challenging year for the ISPCA, its Board of Directors, the Chief Executive Officer, all management and our staff.

**National Crisis** – While many organisations were forced to close their doors or restrict operations, the ISPCA did not. The Board unanimously agreed that doing so would contradict our charitable purpose.

Consequently, we worked with the CEO, staff and affiliate network to address the immediate crisis as well as the long-term needs arising from the unprecedented influx of animals coming into our centres. The ISPCA remained steadfast in its commitment to leaving no animal behind.

**New Governance** – The ISPCA Board of Trustees worked tirelessly under the transformational leadership of former Chair Ms Kerry-Anne Pollock, especially over a difficult 2023, when Jillian Brennan, Nora Duggan and Pete Wedderburn joined as Trustees.

Kerry-Anne transformed the ISPCA into a modern, professional charity focused on delivering high-quality services and organisational efficiency. I am delighted that the Board members have placed their trust in me as its new Chair, and I look forward to working with the them and the CEO on advancing the ISPCA's mission.

Our Board members bring a broad range of skills and expertise essential for an organisation like the ISPCA, spanning veterinary science, animal welfare, strategy, operational excellence, governance and sales and marketing.

Upon her recent departure from the Board, I wish to express my gratitude to Emily Ennis for her hard work and her immense contribution over the years and in 2023 in particular.

**Affiliate Network** – We continue to prioritise building and nurturing vital relationships with our affiliated member organisations. These affiliates are made up of selfless volunteers who have dedicated much of their lives to protecting animals and preventing neglect and cruelty. Their wealth of expertise and knowledge, developed over many decades, is invaluable. On behalf of the Board, I extend my sincere thanks to each of them for their ongoing work, insight and contribution to our mission.

**Policy & Advocacy** – We believe there is an opportunity now for an urgent and much-needed reassessment of government policy and allocation of public funds to the greyhound and horse racing industries. In 2023, these industries received €95 million, while animal welfare organisations, including our own, collectively received €5.8 million. While we are grateful for the support provided to the animal welfare sector, we believe that a more balanced distribution of resources would better reflect the importance of animal welfare, particularly given the concerns regarding the treatment of greyhounds and horses in recent years.

**Operational Excellence** – The Board has worked closely with the ISPCA's CEO, Dr Cyril Sullivan, who has successfully delivered on a range of key initiatives and a strong 2023–2027 operational strategy. His passion and drive, supported by an exceptional senior management team and the wider organisation, reassure the Board that the ISPCA is in safe hands and well-positioned to address the challenges we face into 2024 and beyond.

**Joe Reynolds, Chair**



# CEO REPORT

I am pleased to report on 2023 as one of the most rewarding yet challenging years for the ISPCA. It brought unprecedented difficulties, particularly as the post-COVID puppy and dog adoption boom revealed an underlying animal welfare crisis of neglect and abandonment.

Over the last year and since then, the ISPCA faced one of the most challenging periods in its 75-year history. As the full impact of this crisis became clear, the ISPCA Board and I decided that no animal would be left behind. To illustrate the scale of the problem, we rescued and took in nearly 700 dogs in the first three months of the year alone – equivalent to what we would typically rescue in an entire year.

By the end of the first quarter, our four centres in Donegal, Longford, Mallow, and Wicklow were at full capacity. The ISPCA had to develop a phased plan to manage the surge, ensuring that we could care for all rescued dogs and more coming in. The first phase involved using private kennels to house surplus animals. The second phase saw the installation of extra internal temporary kennels, followed by the necessity to build permanent kennels in order to withstand the influx and provide sufficient capacity.

The decision to use private kennels entailed an immediate cost of over €500,000 – a significant sum that the ISPCA had not budgeted for and could not cover from its own resources. In response, we launched an Emergency Crisis Appeal in June 2023. Thanks to the generosity of the Irish public, the ISPCA was able to navigate this crisis. This prompt support from donors, corporate and private, from all over the country was invaluable in helping us through these challenges.

As detailed later in our report, with ISPCA Wicklow joining our operations, the Society rescued over 1,727 animals in 2023. We received over 10,000 calls to our national helpline, with 3,164 referred to our Inspectorate for investigation. These complaints led to 1,616 inspections, resulting in 1,474 animals being seized or surrendered. We also had a busy year in court, with 28 new cases brought forward within a total of 31 files prepared for prosecution of animal welfare offences.

I am also pleased to report many positive developments in 2023. The ISPCA merged with Wicklow SPCA and Waterford SPCA, expanding our operations. Wicklow SPCA, with its large kennel facility, provides additional capacity, while the Waterford SPCA was strategically important in maintaining our inspectorate service in the South East. I extend my sincere thanks to the Committees and Boards of both SPCAs for their trust in me and my team.

I would like to thank the Board for its continued support, guidance and counsel throughout 2023, and into 2024. I also extend my personal thanks to former Chair Kerry-Anne Pollock for her outstanding leadership. During her tenure the ISPCA became the formidable and resilient charity we are today. Emily Ennis also made a significant contribution, bringing her legal expertise to the fore during her time with us. I warmly welcome our new Chair, Joe Reynolds, and new Board member, Colman Burke. Joe is an exemplary consultancy professional, and Colman brings in years of veterinary practice, management and public sector experience. I look forward to working closely with both of them.

With the continued support of the Board, and the dedication and commitment of the ISPCA Senior Management Team and staff, I am confident that we will continue to strengthen the organisation's resilience and uphold the highest standards of animal welfare in Ireland for many years to come.

**Dr Cyril Sullivan, CEO**

# STRUCTURE & GOVERNANCE

Since 1949, the ISPCA is the leading animal welfare organisation dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and responsible rehoming of neglected and abused animals.

In 2023, the organisation employed 61 staff (40 full-time and 21 part-time) across our the inspectorate team, animal centres, dog warden service, administration and management. The frontline inspectorate service operates all over Ireland and we provide the Dog Warden Service in Donegal, Kildare, Laois and Wicklow counties.

Our main operations include our include three, long-standing animal welfare centres in Longford, Cork and Donegal, to which Waterford and Wicklow were added in 2023.

## DIRECTORS

**Kerry-Ann Pollock (Chair)**

**Nora Duggan**

**Carmel Rooney**

**Jillian Brennan**

**Emily Ennis**

**Pete Wedderburn (appointed)**

## SECRETARY

**Martin Jacob (resigned)**

**Rosalyn Quinn (appointed)**

The ISPCA Board and Senior Management Team are committed to the principles of good governance and believe in openness, transparency and accountability. Our Society aims to fully comply with the Charity Regulatory Authority's Fundraising Guidelines and adheres to Ireland's Charities Institute Codes of Practice on Fundraising.



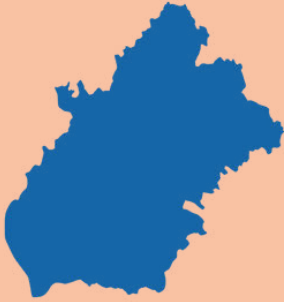
### AUDITORS

Crowleys DFK Unlimited  
16/17 College Green, Dublin

### SOLICITORS

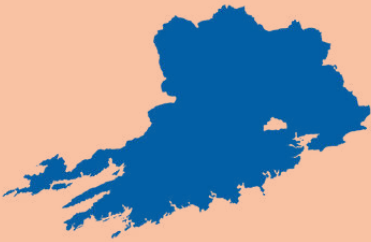
Patrick F. O'Reilly & Co  
9/10 Sth Great George's St, Dublin

# ANIMAL CENTRES



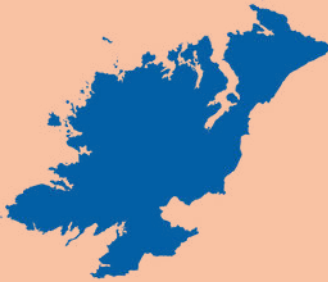
Our main ISPCA National Animal Centre in Keenagh, Co Longford provides veterinary care and rehabilitation to seized and abandoned animals until they can be responsibly rehomed.

**Admitted: 1,033 | Rehomed: 971**



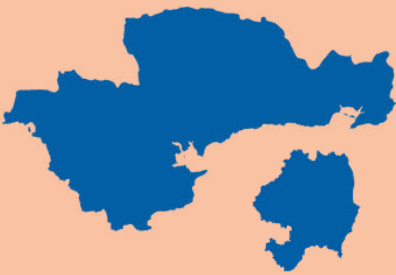
The Equine Rescue Centre in Mallow, Co Cork cares for many equines from the South of the country and collaborates closely with the equine unit in Longford.

**Admitted: 360 | Rehomed: 373**



The Animal Rehabilitation Centre in Ramelton, Co Donegal provides accommodation for small animals as well as large animals, and houses aquatic wildlife such as seals, alongside many animals in its stables, kennels and a cattery.

**Admitted: 248 | Rehomed: 255**



The former Waterford and Wicklow SPCA affiliate societies joined our national animal centres' network completing the ISPCA's coverage of the South East of the country. Our operations and housing capacity thus expanded with multiple assets and facilities, much needed during the 2023 (and ongoing) crisis of animal neglect and pet abandonment.

We operate four **Dog Warden Services** in counties **Donegal, Kildare, Laois** and **Wicklow** - this accounts for 20% of our operations expenditure. Due to high rates of pet abandonment and straying across the country, these dog pounds admitted approximately **560** dogs, of which 248 in January 2023 alone. **96%** of the total number of dogs were reclaimed, rehomed or transferred to rescue organisations. The number of dogs rescued by the ISPCA itself rose by **47%** compared to the previous year.



# AFFILIATES

Cat and Dog Protection Association of Ireland  
[cdpa.ie](http://cdpa.ie)

Cavan SPCA  
[facebook.com/cavan.spcas](https://facebook.com/cavan.spcas)

Kildare and West Wicklow SPCA  
[kwwspca.ie](http://kwwspca.ie)

Kilkenny SPCA  
[kilkennyspca.ie](http://kilkennyspca.ie)

Laois SPCA  
[lspca.ie](http://lspca.ie)

Limerick Animal Welfare  
[limerickanimalwelfare.ie](http://limerickanimalwelfare.ie)

Limerick SPCA  
Hyde Road, Limerick

Longford SPCA  
[facebook.com/longford.spcas](https://facebook.com/longford.spcas)

Louth SPCA  
[louthspca.ie](http://louthspca.ie)

North County Dublin SPCA  
[ncdspca.org](http://ncdspca.org)

Offaly SPCA  
[offalyspca.com](http://offalyspca.com)

Roscommon SPCA  
[roscommonspca.ie](http://roscommonspca.ie)

Tipperary Friends of Animals SPCA  
[tipperaryfoaspca@eircom.net](mailto:tipperaryfoaspca@eircom.net)

Westmeath SPCA  
[westmeathspca.wordpress.com](http://westmeathspca.wordpress.com)

Wexford SPCA  
[wexfordspca.ie](http://wexfordspca.ie)



As of 2023, the ISPCA is the umbrella organisation for 15 affiliated local animal welfare organisations across most counties in Ireland and, as such, provides support to a dedicated and committed core of hard-working volunteers. Collectively the ISPCA and affiliated member societies rescue, rehabilitate, and responsibly rehome thousands of animals across Ireland.

# ANIMAL WELFARE INSPECTORATE



**CHIEF INSPECTOR**  
Conor Dowling

**SUPERINTENDENT INSPECTOR**  
Kevin McGinley

**SENIOR INSPECTORS**  
Alice Lacey  
Emma Carroll  
Fiona Conlon  
Karen Lyons

**INSPECTORS**  
Jimmy McCormack  
Lyndsey Delaney  
Caroline Faherty

We are immensely proud of the diligent work of our ISPCA Inspectors, who are at the forefront of animal welfare in Ireland and work closely with other authorities and agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, An Garda Síochána and local authorities on many enforcement and prosecution actions every year.

The Society's Inspectorate covers 16 counties and employs a Chief Inspector, a Superintendent Inspector, 4 Senior Inspectors and 3 Inspectors. Together they have dealt with **3,164 calls** through the Animal Welfare Helpline, **1,616 investigations** involving site and home visits and **31 court cases** (in addition to ongoing appeals).

As a result of investigations and site visits, **1,474 animals** were seized or surrendered and taken into care:



30



937



338



169



# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The ISPCA's new strategic framework 2023-27, launched in March 2023, aligns with the Irish Government's national animal welfare protection and prevention guidelines. It outlines our vision for the next five years, focusing on preventing cruelty to animals, protecting vulnerable animals, and prosecuting those who violate animal welfare laws. The strategy addresses post-COVID-19 challenges, such as high pet abandonment rates, decreased donations and financial issues for animal welfare charities such as ours and within society in general, amid high inflation and a continuing cost-of-living crisis. Key areas the ISPCA will focus on until 2027 include improving on education and advocacy efforts, enhancing range and number of services, increasing our centres' and inspectorate's capacity, investing in enforcement and prosecution, and further enhancing rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming capabilities through operational improvements and better coordination with partners, affiliate societies, local authorities and our statutory supporters.

When launching the Strategy The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue, stated, **"I am delighted to launch the ISPCA's new Strategic Framework. As the biggest national animal welfare organisation in Ireland, the ISPCA is at the forefront of preventing cruelty to animals and I want to commend them on their remarkable work. The Department is fully supportive of ISPCA's efforts and its statutory powers. This strategy will continue to build on the solid foundation of trust that the ISPCA has with all stakeholders. The ISPCA provides a voice for all animals and their work ensures that cruelty to animals will not be tolerated."**

**A number of ambitious objectives are set over the term of this strategic plan, including the expansion of the inspectorate service, further investment in our three existing animal centres and adding two new ones."**

(Ms Kerry-Anne Pollock, 2023 Chair of ISPCA Board)

**"Our principal ambition is to ensure that all animals in Ireland can live their best life, always. Our strategic objectives will be achieved in conjunction with our key stakeholders: the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, our staff and volunteers, Local Authorities, corporate partners and member organisations. We would not be able to deliver on this strategy without their invaluable and continuous support."**

(Dr Cyril Sullivan, CEO of the ISPCA)



# FINANCES

The three pillars of our Strategic Framework 2023-2027 underpins our financial requirements and investment in our services:

- **Prevention:** education and public awareness campaigns to prevent cruelty to animals
- **Protection:** increase capacity and number of our animal welfare centres to care for and made animals ready for rehoming
- **Prosecution:** invest more in our inspectorate service to hold perpetrators of animal cruelty to account

Major developments in early 2023 included acquiring the assets and business of the Waterford and Wicklow SPCAs.

Our financial situation over the year 2023 is as follows:

- **Opening Balance** € 2,680,544
- **Total Income** € 5,628,034
- **Gross Expenditure** € 4,850,124
- **Closing Balance** € 3,458,455

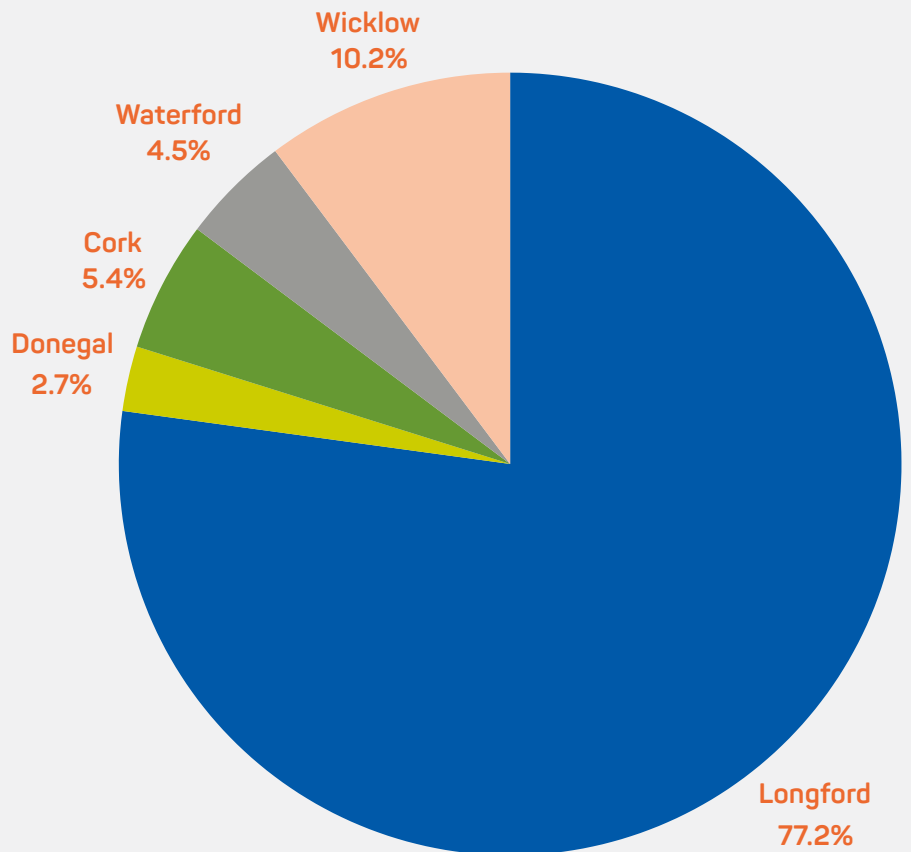
A considerable part of our overall income comes from public funding and donations, as well as corporate partnerships, all of which we supplement with fundraising campaigns and events that pay for the costs of care, treatment and rehabilitation of rescued animals housed in our centres.

We maintain a robust trading and investment stream, with all proceeds reinvested into the overheads, vehicles and staff costs that go towards our inspections, home visits, emergency and daily needs of the animals in our care.



# PUBLIC FUNDING

The ISPCA receives its main public funding for operating its charitable activities from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). The statutory grant in 2023 was distributed among our animal welfare centres as follows:

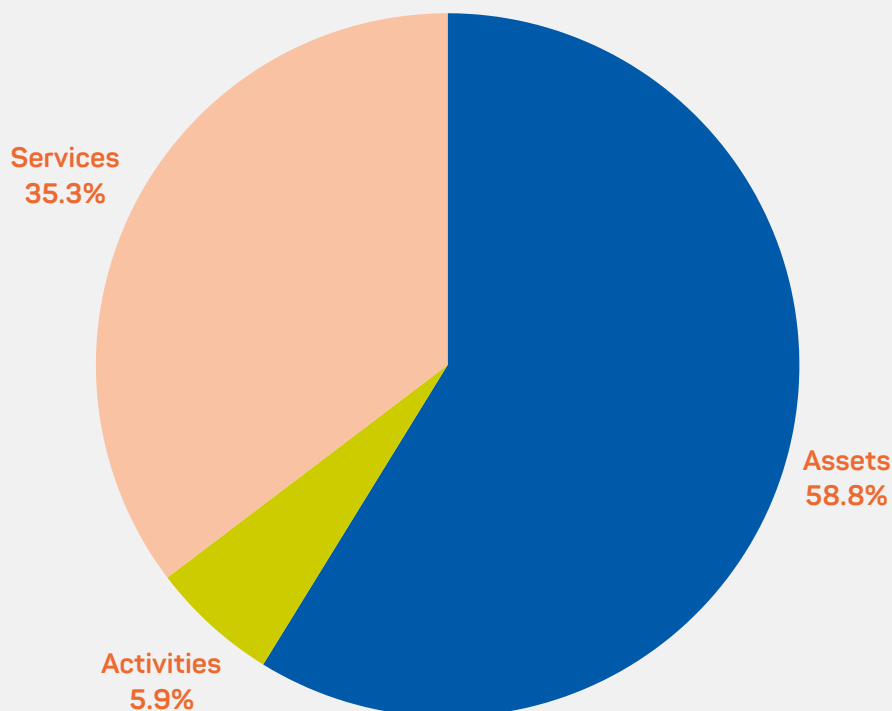


National Animal Centre Longford	€931,750
Animal Rehabilitation Centre Donegal	€32,400
Equine Rescue Centre Cork	€65,175
Waterford	€54,400
Wicklow	€123,750

Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	€1,033,325
Dept of Rural and Community Development	€35,000
Revenue Commissioners Tax Refunds and Credits	€75,839

# SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

Our internal income streams in 2023 were derived from animal welfare services we provide for local authorities, such as the dog warden services, affiliates fees and new assets we acquired last year, in addition to trading proceeds to supplement our operational budgets. .



## ANIMAL WELFARE SERVICES

Animal Adoption Fees	€156,894
Dog Warden Services	€ 752,714
Affiliates Fees	€ 1,778

**NEW ASSETS** €1,516,541

**COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES** €151,859

Last year the ISPCA acquired the assets and business of the Waterford and Wicklow SPCAs. As a result the overall net assets of the charity have increased by **€777,911**.



**LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
FEES FOR SERVICES**

€752,714

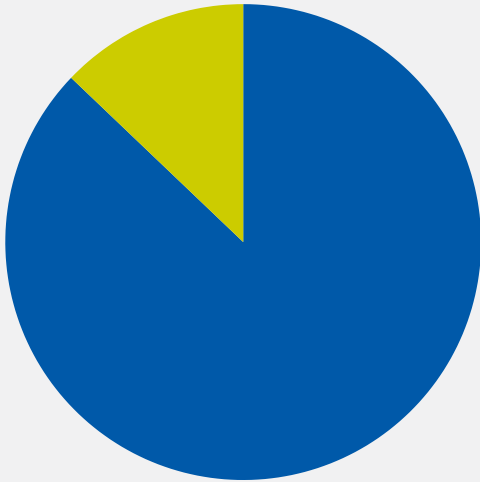
**NEW  
ASSETS**

€1,516,541

# DONOR REVENUE

In addition to public funding grants and supports, the ISPCA relies heavily on the generosity of private donors, corporate partnerships and legacy gifts. Those who contribute bequests play a vital role in enabling the rescue and care of animals affected by neglect and abuse in Ireland.

Corporate (donations, gifts, goods)  
12.9%



Private (bequests, donations, individual giving)  
87.1%

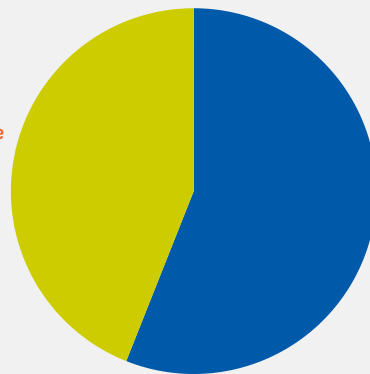
Bequests	€874,411
Regular giving	€377,247
Donations	€334,598
Corporate donations	€76,041
Major gifts	€155,591
Goods	€2,713

# FUNDRAISING INCOME

Through regular events and with help from volunteers and partners, we raise funds that subsidise life-saving work, housing and food for the animals in our centres. The indefatigable fundraising team across our Engagement, Strategic Partnerships, Individual Giving, Corporate Donors and Communications departments is irresponsible for income generation across a variety of revenue streams such donations, sponsorship, partnerships, e-commerce and events. A new Fundraising Strategy was developed in 2023 to complement the ISPCA Strategic Plan for 2023 – 2027.

ISPCA merchandise includes: cards, calendars, pet toys and bedding, gifts for animal lovers, wedding favours, and gift vouchers for caring for animals in our centres.

Merchandise  
44%



Events  
56%

## LEGACIES

€874,411

## DONATIONS

€711,845

## FUNDRAISING

€89,233



The ISPCA is most grateful for yet another much-needed increase in funding in 2023 for 2024 and extend its sincere thanks to Minister Charlie McConalogue and his Department for their steadfast commitment.

'We are incredibly grateful for next year's allocation of €1,207,475 representing an increase of 24% compared to 2023 which will make a significant difference to the ISPCA's work throughout 2024.

The Department pledged to double the funding for animal welfare charities, and the ISPCA is thrilled to see this promise fulfilled. This grant is especially timely, as the need for funding has never been greater. It will contribute significantly to addressing the soaring costs, now at an all-time high, the consequences of irresponsible breeding, abandonment, and neglect during a cost-of-living crisis.'

*(ISPCA CEO, Dr Cyril Sullivan)*

The funding we receive from grants, legacies and donations is essential to our services and activities. We are grateful for any donation, large and small, and we work hard to use our fund efficiently in order to provide training and supports to our staff, and the best care and rehabilitation to all animals in our care.

In 2023, funding for animal welfare charities in Ireland overall increased to €6 million, a €200,000 rise from the previous year. The additional funding was largely aimed at supporting charities involved in rehoming dogs, reflecting that particular challenge during the year. The increased funding recognises the critical role of organisations such as the ISPCA and it funds new initiatives to promote responsible pet ownership in 2024.

## PUBLIC FUNDING INCREASE

	2022	2023
DAFM	€668,500	€1,033,325
DRCD	€35,000	€35,000
		+ 52%

## GIVING INCREASE

	2022	2023
	€1,582,977	€1,947,173
		+ 24%

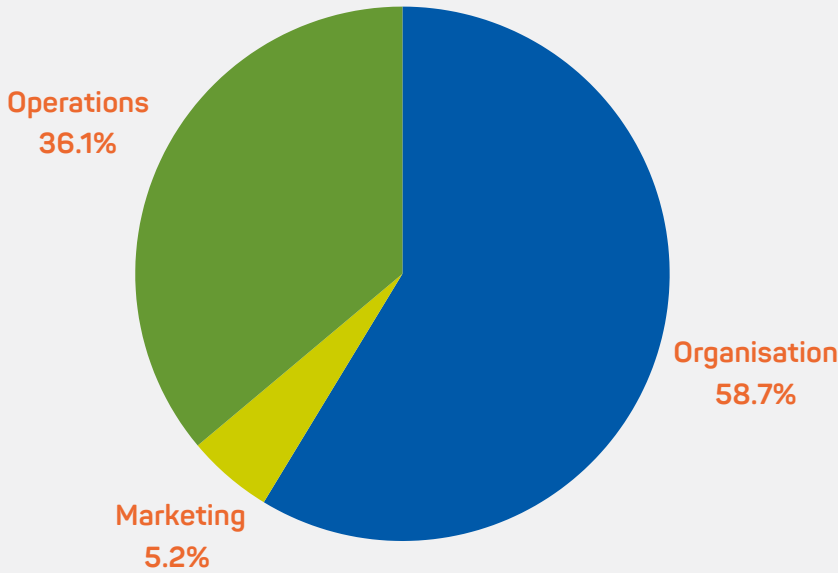
## ASSETS INCREASE

	2022	2023
	€2,680,544	€ 3,458,455
		+ 29% <sup>(NET)</sup>



# EXPENDITURE

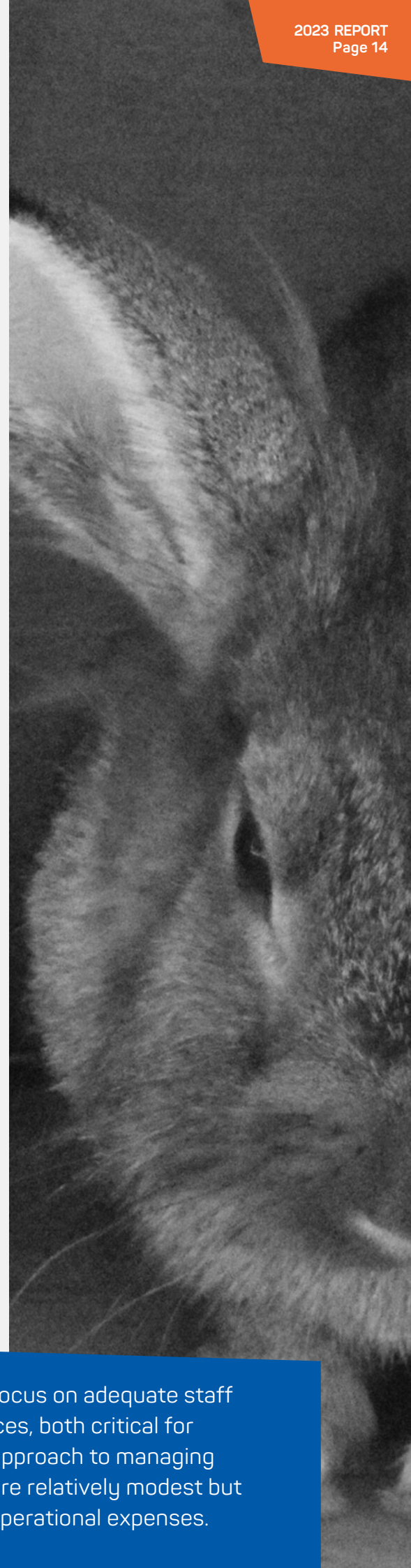
The ISPCA strives to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to core areas such as staffing and operations, so that the organisation can continue to meet its objectives while managing its operational infrastructure and governance.



A careful allocation of funds for operations ensures that we are delivering the functions and activities that support the organisation’s core mission. The marketing expenditure, a smaller component of our overall budget, is vital for public awareness and promoting the organisation's fundraising campaigns.

<b>STAFF</b>	<b>€2,315,798</b>
<b>FACILITIES</b>	<b>€376,157</b>
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE</b>	<b>€315,574</b>
<b>LEGAL</b>	<b>€122,212</b>
<b>SERVICES</b>	<b>€1,318,049</b>
<b>FUNDRASING</b>	<b>€244,539</b>

The breakdown of our expenditure demonstrates our strong focus on adequate staff levels and requirements needed for the provision of our services, both critical for sustaining our operational capacity. We maintain a balanced approach to managing facilities, administrative functions and our fundraising costs are relatively modest but effective in raising valuable and much-needed funds for our operational expenses.



# 2023 FACTS & FIGURES

Our main operations include the three animal welfare centres in Longford, Cork and Donegal (to which Wexford and Wicklow were added in 2023) a national animal health and welfare inspectorate and the National Animal Welfare Helpline – the first port of call for reporting animal cruelty, abuse and neglect. The Dog Warden service we provide on behalf of local authorities operates in Donegal, Kildare, Laois and Wicklow and supports a number of affiliated members across Ireland.

The National Animal Cruelty Helpline deals with many thousands of calls every year and the resulting registered complaints are progressed for further investigation by our local inspectorate members.

The three main ISPCA centres received 1,474 animals, either seized or surrendered, in addition to the 313 animals already in our care at year-start. In total, 2,379 animals passed through our centres in 2023, with some remaining in our care into care and over 82% of the overall total fostered and rehomed.

At year end and many times during 2023, the ISPCA animal centres were over capacity in terms of animals present and necessitating on-site care with the biggest influx and the single largest source of overcapacity being generated by dogs (+15%).



# ANIMAL CENTRES





National Animal Centre  
Co Longford

Animal Rehabilitation Centre  
Co Donegal

Equine Rescue Centre  
Co Cork

Rathdrum  
Co Wicklow

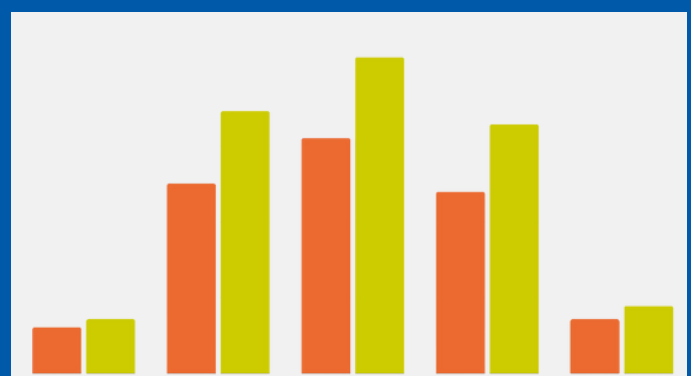
Clashrea  
Co Waterford

2023	TOTAL				
ON SITE JAN 2023	355	50	146	88	29
ADMITTED	1,727	81	1,281	573	131
IN CARE 2023	2,082	131	1,427	661	160
REHOMED/FOSTERED	1,640	76	1,197	547	138
REMAINING DEC 2023	442	55	230	114	22

Comparison reveals year-on-year increases across all metrics for 2022 vs 2023.

## 2022 vs 2023

ON SITE IN JANUARY	301	355
ADMITTED OVERALL	1,249	1,727
IN CARE OVERALL	1,550	2,082
REHOMED/FOSTERED	1,195	1,640
REMAINING DECEMBER	355	442



# ANIMAL WELFARE HELPLINE

## COMPLAINTS

RECEIVED	10,516
PROGRESSED	3,164

## INVESTIGATIONS

ADVICE	2,234
SITE VISITS	1,610

Total calls to the National Animal Welfare Helpline are up by 1,199, an increase of 13% compared to 2022.

## OUTCOMES

### ANIMALS SEIZED / SURRENDERED



## LEGAL ACTION

31 files were submitted and subsequently finalised in District Courts throughout Ireland. The charges varied from failure to safeguard the health and welfare of animals, neglect, causing unnecessary suffering, cruelty leading to starvation and death, abandonment, theft, and operating illegal and improper breeding facilities.

## 10-YEAR SNAPSHOT OF ISPCA ACTIVITIES 2013 to 2023

	up to 2013	up to 2023	2013 - 2023	% Change
HELPLINE CONTACTS	20,516	143,310	122,794	+ 499%
INSPECTOR INVESTIGATIONS	3,407	32,194	28,787	+ 745%
ANIMAL ADMISSIONS	676	10,718	10,042	+ 1,386%
COURT CASES	19	155	136	+ 616%

# MAKING AN IMPACT

In 2023, we were strongly dependent on our funders, supporters, sponsors and donors to meet an unprecedented demand for animal welfare interventions, services and education across the country.

In a year when more dogs than ever before were surrendered, abandoned and euthanised in Ireland, we, as other organisations, struggled to rescue, accommodate and rehome most dogs received in our care. This was only possible due to increased income and resources; however remains unchanged in 2024.

It is a constant battle for dog welfare services to withstand the abandonment crisis of the past few years while welfare law enforcement and owner obligations remain unsatisfactory. To help our efforts, the microchipping and licence registrations need to be looked at and, most importantly over-breeding and unregulated puppy-farming for fashionable dog breeds must be contained and strictly regulated. There is an urgent need to educate the general public about animal welfare in general and dog breed suitability especially.

As always, last year the ISPCA highlighted a need for animal welfare elements to be added to the school curriculum at primary and secondary level so that animal welfare and responsible pet ownership are engrained in the basic education of our society's youngest members.



# RESCUE CASES



One day in March 2023, our ISPCA Animal Welfare Inspector Kevin was called to assist a fox trapped in wire fencing. Most likely, he had become trapped while out hunting the night before and had been there for many hours though thankfully was not injured.



Sweet little Valentine was found as a kitten, beside a busy car park. At the ISPCA, she was found to be suffering from multiple pelvic fractures and a hernia, both of which necessitated surgeries and long-term rehabilitation.

# REHOMING APPEALS

Each year, the ISPCA rescues and takes in hundreds of animals in need of care. We work hard to rehabilitate these animals and match them with loving forever homes once they are ready to embark on a fresh chapter in their lives.



Every animal that comes into our centres will receive full vaccination, parasite treatment, microchipping and spaying/neutering before being made available for fostering or adoption. Dogs will receive basic training, cats and kittens will learn to use the catflap and litter box before being placed in new homes so that their transition to a new home will be easy on them as well as prospective adopters. Equines are equipped with passports, and stallions and colts are responsibly gelded prior to their rehoming.

# HAPPY TAILS

Every successful adoption story begins with our inspectors rescuing or seizing distressed animals. Once received in our care, animals we save from terrible situations are nurtured back to health by our dedicated staff and our invaluable volunteers and fosterers.

But our responsibilities for our rescues does not end here. Adoption of these animals into a good, forever home is our final goal. Adoption is also an important step in increasing animal welfare on our island. Adopting will make a profound difference in the life of an animal in need - the opportunity to experience love, care and companionship in a forever home.

Adopting a pet from an animal shelter or rescue organisation such as ours helps alleviate the burden of pet overpopulation and reduces the number of animals in need of rescue and care. Our fosterers and adopters transform the lives of many lonely and suffering animals while enriching their own lives in ways never imagined.



Barney was less than a year old when he was rescued near a beach. There was no grass to eat and he was very underweight. He had sores on his back and his lovely coat was in poor condition. He was still too young to be separated from his mother and not getting the nutrition he needed. After a few months in our care, this sweet and friendly little guy was brought back to health, was gelded, and made ready for his loving new, forever home.

# ENFORCEMENT

## ANIMAL CRUELTY

A Laois woman was banned from owning or keeping animals for 10 years in September 2023. The 28-year old defendant was found guilty of several animal neglect and abuse in a case that the judge described as “horrendous” and “disturbing.” ‘This has been a prolonged and challenging case involving a persistent offender [who] left it until the very last minute to enter a guilty plea and had put the state to enormous expense.’, ISPCA Senior Inspector Kevin McGinley said. Judge Cody imposed a €2,000 fine and €1,000 in ISPCA legal and veterinary costs.

Commenting after the case, Inspector McCormack said: ‘This was a severe case of neglect to two dogs. The vet was of the opinion that these dogs had endured unnecessary suffering and neglect. It might be a lesson for others that these acts of cruelty are being punished and hopefully will prove a deterrent for others going forward.’

## PUPPY FARMS

A Cork puppy farm facility was finally closed in late 2023 due to extensive and consistent breeding violations following a failed, protracted appeal against a closure notice imposed by Cork County Council. While recognising everybody’s right to legal recourse, the protracted nature of this case demonstrates how difficult and costly it is for any local authority to take action under current legislation.

The breeding establishment posed a serious and immediate threat to animal welfare, as evidenced by the conditions in which the dogs were found. The ISPCA assisted throughout the process by providing the expertise of our Inspectors and aiding in the removal and rehoming of seized dogs.

This establishment, like many others, was not operating anywhere close to the satisfactory. In fact, veterinary examinations revealed a variety of health and welfare issues to which dogs removed from the premises were subjected.

This is but one of similar cases the ISPCA was involved in over 2023. As Ireland is becoming known as the puppy farm capital of Europe, the ISPCA advocates for enhanced standards of care in premises where dogs are bred for profit.

## LEGAL ACTION

Ireland's Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 makes it illegal to cause animals unnecessary suffering or compromise their health and welfare in any way. This includes both direct harm and negligent or reckless care. Nevertheless, in 2023, the ISPCA has had to deal with 31 animal welfare cases in the courts, resulting in a range of convictions, from custodial sentences to life bans. Violence against ISPCA officers also resulted in convictions for assault in Cork and a death threat in Longford.

Cases of cruelty to dogs in particular were prevalent. A Waterford man received a custodial sentence and a decade-long ban from owning dogs, while his seven dogs were removed. A large family in Tipperary faced a 25-year ban each and custodial sentences for neglecting 20 dogs. Similarly, cases in Waterford, Wicklow, Mayo and Tipperary led to the removal of dogs living in poor conditions, with the perpetrators facing bans, fines and custodial sentences. Particularly severe was the lifetime ban and mandatory volunteer work for a man in Mayo found guilty of cruelty to a range of farm animals.

Animal fighting was another issue tackled through the courts, with a Carlow man receiving a life ban for ear cropping, indicative of dog fighting. A family in Longford was also restricted in the number of dogs they could keep and were prohibited from breeding, after being found guilty of cruelty to a large number of dogs. Several other cases involved illegal practices such as docking tails and ears of puppies, leading to fines and probation in Tipperary and Wicklow.

From September 2023, owning a dog with cropped ears is prohibited and importing such dogs requires a special licence. Furthermore, the sale or distribution of cropped-ear dogs is largely banned in Ireland and such dogs are prohibited from events and shows.

Cases of severe neglect are a perennial issue. In Laois, an individual was penalised for selling illegal tropical rodents, while another woman received a lifetime ban and had all of her farm animals removed due to neglect.

The courts regularly dealt with neglect of all species of animals, including cats, horses and ducks, with many individuals facing penalties and bans, as seen in Cork and Donegal, among other counties.

# 2023 IMPACT REPORT...

In 2023, Ireland experienced a significant crisis in animal welfare, particularly due to an unprecedented surge in the abandonment and surrender of dogs. This issue was exacerbated by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw a spike in pet adoptions as people spent more time at home. However, as normal life resumed—and many pet owners were obligated to return to workplaces—a sharp increase occurred in the number of animals being relinquished to shelters, as their care could no longer be sustained.

The situation put immense pressure on animal welfare organisations, which all struggled to accommodate the crisis observed throughout the country. Records from the ISPCA, along with reports from other organisations and the media, indicate that the number of dogs abandoned or surrendered in 2023 surpassed total figures from previous (pre-COVID) years, highlighting a distressing trend: pet owners underestimating the long-term financial and time commitments involved in caring for an animal. In addition to the physical needs involved in adequately caring for a pet, behavioural issues – which often develop when pets do not receive adequate attention or training – are among the top reasons cited for abandonment.

The issue has brought to light the broader implications of impulsive pet ownership and the need for comprehensive public education on responsible pet care in Ireland. It is evident from our experience as an organisation, and that of our carers and volunteers, that without a significant shift in public attitudes and support for animal welfare initiatives, the cycle of abandonment and surrender is likely to continue, underscoring the need for a more sustainable approach to pet ownership in post-pandemic Ireland.



Over 8 months between January and August 2023, **724** dogs were rescued by the ISPCA, compared to **680** for the full year 2022. By the end of 2023, the admission rate for dogs increased by 340% over the previous decade. According to recent data, 20% of all Irish owners acquired their pet during COVID-19. Immediately after, however, requests to surrender 'pandemic pets' increased by 300% across the country.

The cost-of-living and housing crisis were contributing factors but the main reasons for abandonment centred around inability to provide the time and care commitment pets require. Our own 2023 survey with Mars petcare revealed that behavioural issues were the main reason for giving up their dog (41%), followed by a change in housing situation (28%), and the inability to properly care for the dog (23%).

The ISPCA has been vocal about the challenges faced last year and beyond, from overcrowding in our facilities – which, over 2023, consistently operated over capacity – to increased financial strains stemming from the rise in inflation, as well as the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

Organisations such as ours are essential in providing care and rehabilitation for abandoned animals, and we work tirelessly to rehome them; however, this has become more difficult over the last year. The influx and sheer volume of pets needing a place in our care facilities led to extended waiting lists for surrenders, highlighting an urgent need for additional resources. This was further compounded by the financial and logistical demands of caring for the increased number of animals, many of which require medical treatment and behavioural therapy, which are resource-intensive and increasingly costlier.

The overall crisis was acknowledged by our funding partners and generous donors, and, as the leading animal welfare organisation in Ireland, we invested considerable effort in mustering public support and increased financing, as did the entire animal care sector, which aims to encourage more adoption from rescues and shelters rather than buying from sale sites.

**“Research shows that cost, behavioural concerns and a lack of dog-friendly housing are the biggest factors impacting pet adoption at present. It also identifies the fact that, if shelters could guarantee that behaviour (27%) and health (22%) were not an issue, and provide training to pets (26%), people would be more inclined to adopt. To do this, we need the funding.”**  
(Dr Cyril Sullivan, CEO)

This ongoing crisis highlights the sector’s immediate needs – such as increased funding – but also the importance of long-term strategies, which include educational prevention and awareness programmes so that potential pet owners are fully aware of the responsibilities involved in caring for an animal. 2023 was a call to action for the entire animal welfare community, from shelter workers and volunteers, to pet owners, activists, and policymakers, to ensure that animal welfare is prioritised and that the lives of these animals are safeguarded through both immediate and enduring solutions that will make Ireland an exemplar of animal welfare in Europe.

## ADMISSIONS INCREASE 2013 - 2023

	TOTAL		
2013	676	380	144
2023	2,066	1,281	573
+ %	305%	340%	400%

### 2013 - 2023

#### FINANCING INCREASE ADMISSIONS INCREASE

**+ 145%**  
**+ 305%**

Though funding from statutory and local government, as well as donations, have increased over the last few years, the ISPCA, like similar organisations within the sector, requires much more to withstand the exploding costs across all of our operations.

### 2022 - 2023

#### ADMISSIONS INCREASE ANIMAL CARE VEHICLES/EQUIPMENT VETERINARY FEES OPERATIONAL COSTS DIRECT COSTS ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS ELECTRICITY & HEATING TOTAL OVERHEADS

**+ 38%**  
**+ 97%**  
**+ 169%**  
**+ 51%**  
**+ 34%**  
**+ 39%**  
**+ 18%**  
**+ 41%**  
**+ 34%**

Compared to 2022, we received **60% less** tax rebates and credits and **44% less** in-kind income; our trading recorded **35% less** revenue.



# ADVOCACY & AWARENESS

Our work for the advancement and enforcement of animal welfare is at the centre of our efforts to educate the public and engage with the various animal-related industries. Alongside our national and international partners, we continuously strive to improve animal welfare in Ireland through engagement and collaboration with all the relevant stakeholders for the benefit of both animals and society.

## PARTNERSHIPS

The ISPCA was the charity partner at the 2023 **Forever Young Festival** and partnered with **Elves** in order to join efforts in supporting animal welfare.

## CONSULTATIONS

We need strong national policies and robust local enforcement to regulate inadequate animal breeding and pet sales in order to prevent an escalation of this crisis.

Part of our work with the **Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare** in 2023 involved campaigning against the use of flat-nosed dog breeds, such as pugs and French bulldogs in advertising. Sadly, these breeds' increased popularity in Ireland underscores a lack of awareness about the dogs' struggle with various health issues and severely reduced life expectancy due to their distinctive facial features.

## CAMPAIGNS

Over 2023, our campaigns focused on promoting responsible pet ownership, and encouraging community participation in animal care and protection efforts across Ireland. In this most difficult year, we raised not only awareness but also funds critical to supporting the ISPCA's sustained operational efforts, particularly in the area of housing and treating abandoned and neglected dogs.





**SpayAware** was launched to encourage pet owners to neuter/ spay their pets, aiming in order to reduce unwanted and subsequently abandoned cats and dogs in Ireland. The campaign highlighted the health benefits of these procedures but also the sad consequences of accidental and unwanted litters, and the impact of these on the lives of innocent animals and animal rescue and treatment centres around the country.



The **Cruelty No More** campaign marked Ireland's first National Animal Week and was designed to highlight the sad realities of pet breeding and ownership in Ireland, and generally promote ways in which we, as a society, can work to eradicate animal cruelty.

The **Dog Ownership Awareness** campaign aimed at prospective dog owners highlighted the undeniable joys but also the clear responsibilities of rescuing a dog and getting ready for a long-term financial and emotional commitment.



The **International Legacy Giving Day** focused on encouraging supporters to consider leaving a legacy gift to the ISPCA - this is crucial for ensuring long-term support for the organisation's activities and is one of the invaluable fundraising streams organisations such as ours depends on.

Our annual **National Fireworks Awareness** campaign in collaboration with the Department of Justice promoted safer celebration practices during events like Halloween. Protecting pets is important when **celebrations** involve fireworks and other loud noises in the area. Horses should be securely stabled or moved to a different location during fireworks displays or bonfires. as they get easily spooked Birds and small mammals should be kept indoors with a blanket covering their cages or hutch to act as a sound barrier.



**'Anyone considering the purchase or use of illegal fireworks, think of the fear and distress it can have on all animals'.  
(Dr Cyril Sullivan, CEO)**

Animals in our shelters often arrive from the most challenging circumstances and have already endured considerable hardship in their short lives. Without our staff and volunteers, many animals would never experience the care and love they deserve.

ISPCA's ethos is based on the five **fundamental freedoms** all animals should enjoy: freedom from hunger and thirst and malnutrition, freedom from discomfort, disease and injury, freedom to express normal behaviour, as well as from distress and fear. We, as a society, can only achieve this through sustained efforts to improve the lives of animals and keep them out of harm's way - the responsibility a pet parent undertakes cannot be overstated.

**Responsible ownership** goes beyond basic care and shelter. It starts with making a very important choice: choosing to adopt a pet, one that suits lifestyle and home, one whose specific needs you can cope with and provide for. Providing adequate nutrition and exercise not only prevents vet bills but keeps your pet - and you - happy. Medical care (particularly the preventative type) and microchipping are essential for safety and quality and life.

NGOs such as ours and the relevant statutory and local authorities in Ireland strive hard to promote the importance of pet owners' legal responsibilities in Ireland - this does not simply mean simply adhering to local laws, such as licensing, lead walking and cleaning up after your pets in public. It also means being considerate of your community and being aware of your pet breed's specific needs and requirements. Last but not least, adequate training and socialisation as well as providing a loving and stimulating environment will prevent pet unhappiness and destructive behaviours, including by arranging for your animal's care when you are away or if they outlive you.

Highlighting the need and benefits of **spaying and neutering** pets was particularly important in 2023, when pet abandonment rates in Ireland were at an all-time high. These procedures provide significant health and behavioural benefits, such as reducing male and female cancers and curbing aggression and straying. These surgeries also prevent unwanted litters, aiding population control. They are safe, simple and allow for swift recovery, but they must be performed at the right time: kittens at four months and puppies around six months.



'SpayAware, our ISPCA campaign, has the continued support of Veterinary Ireland, with many veterinary practices providing fact sheets in animal clinics and surgeries across the country. The overriding message is simple. When you get a young dog or cat, be sure to discuss spaying or neutering with your vet. Spaying and neutering is important for two reasons: first, for the sake of your pet's health and behaviour, and second, to help combat Ireland's overpopulation of cats and dogs.'

*(Dr Pete Wedderburn, ISPCA director, veterinary surgeon)*

## A SPECIAL THANKS

Charlie Bird, the beloved journalist and national treasure, significantly contributed to animal welfare in Ireland through his long-time involvement with the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. His animal welfare charity work was driven by his deep connection with his adopted dog, Tiger. This bond inspired him, and so many of us, to advocate for the welfare of animals and promote the importance of responsible pet ownership in Ireland.

Over the years Charlie has made a remarkable impact on the animal welfare sector, and we at the ISPCA were honoured to be one of the charities he supported.

Charlie was actively involved in some of the ISPCA's most impactful campaigns, notably the 2023 Christmas appeal, aimed at raising awareness and funds for our organisation at a time of severe crisis. He participated in promotional activities, including an emotional advertising campaign that highlighted the plight of abandoned animals.

His invaluable contribution to the cause of animal welfare in Ireland on behalf of our organisation helped us raise awareness and funds to support care-giving and medical treatment, particularly during times when our centres were at full or over capacity.

A compassionate advocate for animal rights and many other ethical causes, Charlie left behind a profound and long-lasting legacy through his journalistic career, his dedication to many causes affecting Irish society and, lastly, his courageous battle with MND. His advocacy was immensely inspiring through his unwavering commitment to his most cherished causes until the very end.

Charlie was a man who embodied his values, and used his public voice to advocate for the weak and needy. We know that his attitude to life and his work for animal rights and causes effected undeniable change. We thank him for his generous time and the opportunity to have worked together.



**ISPCA**  
CARING FOR ALL ANIMALS

*thank you*

# OUR VOLUNTEERS

The collective impact of our volunteers cannot be overstated. Their unwavering dedication and tireless efforts enable our rescue and care centres all over Ireland to fulfil their mission of providing shelter and hope to vulnerable animals.

The ISPCA's substantial and committed team of volunteers plays a truly crucial role in our overall mission to rescue, rehabilitate, and rehome some of Ireland's most neglected and abused animals. Our volunteers across the country provide essential care such as walking, feeding and general facilities maintenance. Human interaction is vital for these animals; dogs eagerly anticipate walks and playtime, while horses, ponies and donkeys also require movement and engagement.

Moreover, volunteers act as ambassadors for the organisation and its various centres. They engage with the public to raise awareness of animal welfare issues, organise fundraising activities, contribute to outreach programmes, and support adoption initiatives.

The ISPCA is always looking for dedicated volunteers to help out at our animal centres and affiliated member societies. Volunteers work in various roles such as cat, dog and equine care assistant, dog walker, digital marketing assistant, fundraising administrator, groundskeeper, photographer/videographer, rehoming and adoption assistant.



**To every volunteer who has lent their time and talent to animal welfare in 2023, we say 'Thank you'. We could not have done it without you in one the most difficult years in our organisation's history.**

**Learn more at: [ispca.ie/volunteer](https://ispca.ie/volunteer)**

# MEMBERSHIPS & CAUSES

Together with other members in our national and international animal welfare networks, the ISPCA advocates each year on a number of animal welfare issues in Ireland and Europe. Our campaigns look for legislative changes, public awareness and education, as well as donations to secure improved welfare conditions for all animals.



The ISPCA is a member of Eurogroup for Animals, Europe's largest animal welfare lobbying group since 2016.

With 70 member organisations in 25 EU member states, alongside the UK, Switzerland, Norway, Australia and the USA, Eurogroup challenges EU decision-makers to bring about positive change for animals by using coordinated advocacy and organising joint campaigns.



The Association of Dogs and Cats Homes is an umbrella group for dog and cat rescue fostering, caring for and

rehoming groups across Ireland and the British Isles. It promotes best practices in animal welfare and rehoming for dogs and cats. Their goal is to help all members work for the benefit of the animals in their care, through education, networking, and establishing and sharing best practice. Our ADCH membership ended in 2023.

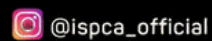


The Irish Pet Advertising Advisory Group works to improve the welfare of animals advertised for sale.

It introduced a set of minimum standards for websites to ensure that the welfare of animals sold online is protected and that any illegal activity is identified and investigated. IPAAG also educates the buyer on what criteria to use to identify a responsible breeder or seller.

THE ISPCA IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION (CHY5619), REGISTERED WITH THE CHARITIES REGULATOR (20008734).

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