

CROSSKENNAN'S URGENT APPEAL FOR HELP DURING EQUINE WELFARE CRISIS.

Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary is making an urgent plea to all the horse-loving folk of N. Ireland to dig deep into their pockets to help the sanctuary to continue with its much needed rescue service for horses in need. Over the past 12 months, Equine Welfare in Northern Ireland has unfortunately deteriorated to crisis point. Northern Ireland is a region that historically has a poor record in animal welfare, and in particular equine welfare. With the exception of The Donkey Sanctuary, the only equine welfare presence in N. Ireland is Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary, a small, independently, volunteer-run horse sanctuary with the capacity for between 25-35 horses. They have one voluntary equine welfare officer, who works in conjunction with Allen Andrews from The Donkey Sanctuary and his assistant Jane Bruce.

Crosskennan have been trying to cope with the escalating number of equine welfare complaints generated in part by the economic downturn throughout 2009. The number of calls reporting abandoned or compromised horses has increased by 150% yet the sanctuary's personnel and facilities have remained the same, and its income (generated mainly by donations from the public) has decreased in line with most charities during the recession. There is no system in place by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to respond to equine welfare complaints, so therefore all equine welfare complaints are being directed to Crosskennan. The Sanctuary simply cannot cope with the increased workload placed upon its shoulders, and desperately requires financial assistance by way of donations from the people of N. Ireland to prevent a collapse of the organisation. Chairperson of the sanctuary, Janice Watt stated 'We also need to recruit more volunteers to get involved and ease the burden of the crippling workload generated by the number of neglected, starved and abandoned horses across N. Ireland. Since mid October, there has been a sharp rise in reports of horses in need of assistance, with as many as 6 cases a day being reported from across NI. The Sanctuary is at capacity and is currently not in a position to admit anymore horses. We would describe the situation as critical.'

Crosskennan are currently in talks with some of the larger mainland based equine welfare charities who are aware of how critical the situation has become for horses in N. Ireland. The sanctuary also plays a very active role in campaigning for improved animal welfare legislation in N. Ireland via the Northern Ireland Equine Welfare Forum and the Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Committee. However, the current crisis is escalating at an astounding rate, with more and more horses entering the welfare system on a daily basis.

During the severe snow and freezing temperatures, many horses were simply left out in fields to weather the conditions with no access to food, water or shelter. People need to recognise that during such harsh conditions it is their responsibility to provide these basic requirements for their horses – it is simply

not acceptable to let them fend for themselves and expect them not to suffer. Dehydration and hyperthermia can only be prevented if horses are well rugged and have constant access to forage and water.

Crosskennan has struggled during these arctic conditions to ensure the 30 horses they have on site were tended to throughout the endless blizzards and freezing temperatures. Due to the sanctuary's rural location, volunteers were unable to access the roads to get on site, leaving the sanctuary's founder to shoulder the most of the physical burden with the assistance of some dedicated friends. Lyn said 'Trying to get through the daily work during these extreme conditions has been horrendous. Our water supply was frozen for 3 days; we had burst pipes; water was being manually carried to the stables over treacherous underfoot conditions; we couldn't risk letting the horses out of their stables for fear of them slipping – the past 3 weeks have been a complete nightmare!'. On top of this, the sanctuary volunteers were still venturing out to respond to horses in desperate need of assistance.

'What we really need from the people of N. Ireland is their time and whatever money they can spare to donate to us. The cost of running Crosskennan is now approximately £8,000 a month – and every penny of that goes on the animals feeding, bedding and veterinary care – we have no paid staff or administration costs, so you can be assured your donation will go directly towards caring for our animals. N. Ireland cannot afford to lose this excellent facility for rescued horses – Crosskennan is all we've got; the horses depend on us, especially during this unprecedented equine welfare crisis. We need your help to continue to provide a safe haven for the abandoned, neglected and forgotten horses of N. Ireland.'

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