Case Study:

Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home

Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home has been carrying out its mission to rescue, reunite and rehome stray, lost and abandoned dogs and cats across Edinburgh and the Lothians for almost 140 years. In addition the Home now supports the community through it's pet food bank and education outreach programme.

The animal welfare sector is often described as a ‘career of passion and calling’ and front-line staff are commonly low paid rather than financially rewarded for their hard work. The Senior Management Team and Board of Trustees at the Home have long voiced the need for change within the sector, with the aim of challenging this misconception. It was for this reason that they decided to adopt the real Living Wage and, by taking this step, hope to encourage others in the sector to recognise the knowledge, dedication and experience that are required to work with animals – particularly in a rescue centre environment where animals can come with a variety of challenges.

“In April 2019, Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home became the first animal welfare organisation in Scotland to be awarded Living Wage accreditation. The inspirational organisation then went on to win the Newcomer of the Year Award at the 2019 Living Wage Scotland Awards.

“The real Living Wage represents the empowerment and betterment of staff in a world where inequalities continue to grow. It’s the right time to acknowledge that valuing staff should not only be set in organisational statements but also in organisational action.”

Lindsay Fyffe-Jardine, CEO

The Process:

The first step towards Living Wage accreditation began with a new business plan for the Home. This was used to identify all the factors and costs which would be involved in undertaking their ambition to pay the real Living Wage alongside other improvements the management team wished to implement.

With the health and wellbeing of all employees at the heart of everything the Home does, they began by engaging with NHS Healthy Working Lives and carried out an employee survey to determine how they could best use their resources to provide support to staff. This consultation process was carried out through several different face to face and written communication channels, aiming to be as transparent as possible and allow employees to be involved. The Senior Management Team felt that using a variety of communication channels would be the best way for open and honest feedback.

“We are the first animal welfare organisation in Scotland to embrace this important change and we’re extremely proud to be seen as industry leaders and trend setters as small and local as we are.”

Lindsay Fyffe-Jardine, CEO
The results of the consultation led the Home to look at improvements in several areas:

- Introducing the real Living Wage to all staff
- A commitment to have no zero-hours contracts
- Changing working patterns to ensure a better work life balance

Once the areas for improvement were identified, the team worked hard to implement the changes quickly so that employees could start to experience the benefits of these as soon as possible.

The decision to implement the real Living Wage led to more than half of Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home’s employees receiving a wage increase to the real Living Wage. This made a real impact on employees and worked to help address any money worries their team were experiencing.

As well as the real Living Wage, a new rota system was also implemented to ensure staff were given their shifts as far as 12 months in advance. This meant that they could better plan their life around work. Zero-hour contracts were also converted to fixed hour contracts to reflect the hours staff were working.

**The Benefits:**

Since their accreditation, Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home have reported a tidal wave of positivity and engagement from their team. Staff members advise they feel more valued and this has had a positive impact on their morale and productivity. The sense of pride that comes from the decision to implement the real Living Wage has been immeasurable for the Senior Management Team.

“**A lot of work in animal care is on minimum wage but it’s really hard work, both physically and emotionally, so being paid the real Living Wage shows how much Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home appreciates us. I think everybody feels more valued. I was always proud to work here but this was an extra boost for everyone.**”

Carla Tait, Kennel Assistant

As well as seeing increased morale and positivity from staff, the Home has also seen several more tangible benefits:

- 2% reduction in staff absence rates- saving £7000
- Improved retention rate across staff but especially amongst high performing employees who were leaving due to not being appropriately rewarded
- Applications for kennel assistant roles have quadrupled
- Improvement in the quality of the applicants

Wendy Mullen, Kennel Manager who has worked for Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home for 34 years, explained that while she has seen a lot of change in her time with the Home, the adoption of the real Living Wage is the most positive change she has seen.
“Staff well-being has improved, and this has had a big impact on team morale and productivity. Although making the decision to commit to the real Living Wage costs the business more money, it’s enabled us to keep high performing staff members and this has saved us in recruitment and induction costs.”

Wendy Mullen, Kennel Manager

In January 2019, as part of the business plan, the Home also carried out a stress audit which had highlighted two high risk areas: staff working hours and equality of pay. Following the implementation of the real Living Wage and new rota pattern the stress audit was repeated and the results showed both areas as being of low risk to the organisation now.

Mental health and compassion fatigue are also serious issues within the animal care sector and staff can often experience burn out from the challenging and emotional situations which they are faced with. This is something the Home are also keen to tackle and have created a new chill out area called ‘Paws and Chill’ which staff can access if they need some time to relax and process the daily challenges of their work.

As well as enjoying their new chill out space, staff also believe that being paid the real Living Wage can contribute to better mental health and a sense of well-being.

“I think the real Living Wage is great as it is calculated on what employees and their families need to live. I am a mother of 3 children. I am now finding that when it comes to school holidays the additional money comes in handy for keeping the kids occupied. As you can imagine this can be quite a pricey time of year!”

Lynda McDiarmid, Receptionist

Learning & Advice:

Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home’s Living Wage commitment formed part of a wider wellbeing strategy which launched at the same time. Through making considered changes to other areas of the organisation as well as adopting the real Living Wage, Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home have ensured that they experience as much benefit as possible from their investment in paying the real Living Wage.

“We are very proud to be leaders in this movement within the Scottish animal welfare sector and to contribute to moving the sector forward to recognising the skill, professionalism and expertise that is required to work with animals - particularly rescue animals.”

Carla Tait, Kennel Assistant

Lindsay Fyffe-Jardine, CEO
The real Living Wage makes a real and immediate difference to the lives of workers and at the same time, has proven social and business benefits. Living Wage accreditation is widely recognised as a mark of a responsible employer. The accreditation process is straightforward and there is a team of trained accreditation officers who can provide support and guidance. The real Living Wage is calculated annually according to the real cost of living in the UK and London.

Join Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home and the real Living Wage movement today

For the team at Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home, becoming an accredited Living Wage employer provides clear recognition of the organisation’s ethical focus and allows them to demonstrate leadership within a challenging industry and for Lindsay herself, the benefits are apparent at both a personnel and an operational level.

“At Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home we believe that if people are your greatest asset then looking after them, helping them to become more successful and feel more valued will show not only within your staff culture but also your productivity.”

Lindsay Fyffe-Jardine, CEO

“We have found this to be a rewarding and engaging process and would recommend it to any other employers considering this change.”

Lindsay Fyffe-Jardine, CEO

About Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home

Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home believes that every unwanted or abandoned animal deserves a voice and the chance to be safe, warm and well fed. The team work tirelessly to find permanent and loving homes for those in need, however long it takes.

Get in touch

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