

StreetVet: Swapping the Practice for the Pavement

StreetVet is a UK-registered charity that delivers free, accessible veterinary care to pets belonging to those experiencing homelessness. Born out of compassion and clinical necessity, the initiative began in 2016 when two vets, Jade Statt and Sam Joseph, armed only with backpacks and a few veterinary supplies, began treating pets on the streets of London. From that modest beginning, StreetVet has flourished into a nationwide charity. Today, it operates in 23 UK locations from Glasgow to Cornwall, with a dedicated network of over 300 volunteers, offering vital care where it is most needed – on the streets, side by side with society's most marginalised.

StreetVet's mission is rooted in recognising the deep and often misunderstood human-animal bond that exists in homeless communities. To their owners, these pets represent far more than companionship. They are family, guardians, therapy animals, and at times, the only constant in a turbulent world.

As one StreetVet client Andy, emotionally said about his dog Bailey: "He is all the family I have got; he's everything – it's like having another heartbeat that is on your side."

For those people who are street-sleeping or living in hostels and emergency accommodation, accessing a veterinary practice can feel impossible. Barriers such as paperwork, proving eligibility, a lack of funds or transportation, anxiety, fear of judgement and reprimand, or of their pet being seized, make clinic-based care impractical. So StreetVet brings the practice to the client, on their terms and in their own environment. Ultimately, we aim to empower our clients to collaborate with us in decision-making and providing the best possible care for their pet.

Outreach clinics are typically established alongside existing homeless services, such as soup kitchens or drop-in centres, ensuring holistic support in familiar settings. Building trust is paramount. Our clients have experienced trauma and exclusion, so seeing familiar volunteers week on week can transform uncertainty into trust. These consistent relationships allow us not only to care for the animal but also to support the owner in a respectful, judgment-free manner.

The majority of our patients are dogs that are generally mid to older-aged. Many of these dogs were much-loved companions before their owners were made homeless, or were acquired later in their pet's life through unexpected circumstances. Often, there is a misconception that those experiencing homelessness acquire pets for sympathy and to increase public donations, but in the vast majority of cases, this is simply not true. Regardless, the bond between human and pet is deep and reciprocal.

In the words of Brian, talking about his dogs Mist and Rain, "My dog loves me and she doesn't care what I have or haven't got or what I have lost."

Contrary to popular misconception, the dogs we see are often in excellent health. Several studies corroborate our

experience that pets living on the streets are often less likely to suffer from obesity or separation anxiety. They are more likely to be mentally stimulated, socially bonded, and physically active, traits which ironically, many pet owners in more stable housing environments struggle to ensure. Their owners go to great lengths to ensure they are fed, exercised, and well cared for, frequently prioritising their pets' needs above their own.

Clinical presentations among our patients are similar to those seen in a regular practice. Skin and ear disease are common, as is cruciate disease, potentially due to an overrepresentation of Bull Terrier breeds. Osteoarthritis is also a frequent issue, consistent with the higher number of geriatric patients seen. Gastrointestinal issues, often triggered by scavenging or sudden dietary changes, are also not unusual. Other common conditions include pyometra and mammary tumours. Leptospirosis is also a concern, perhaps linked to a high number of owners and dogs dwelling close to watercourses, such as canals.

Preventative medicine is therefore crucial. Flea and worm control, vaccinations, nutritional advice, and behavioural support are all part of our routine street clinics. Anything that can be done in a consulting room can be done on the street. For cases requiring surgery or hospitalisation, we are fortunate to have strong partnerships with local veterinary practices and referral networks that support our work. The service provided to our clients is at no cost to the owner and fully funded by StreetVet. For those pets that require emergency care, a free out-of-hours phone number is given to all our registered clients, providing 24–7 support throughout the year, just like any other vet practice.

The benefits of pet ownership for those experiencing homelessness are profound and well-documented. Research conducted in partnership with Battersea highlights a range of positive health and social outcomes: improved mental wellbeing, routine and structure, reduced substance misuse, and increased self-worth. These benefits can reduce criminal activity and ultimately contribute to people escaping homelessness.

StreetVet aims to directly improve animal health and wellbeing, which in turn positively impacts the owner's mental health and stability.

One StreetVet client, Mick, said, "He's my boy – he's the only one who puts up with me. I have no mental health support, but he keeps my head straight. He's my reason for everything."

But pets can create barriers too—access to hospitals, mental health services, or even temporary accommodation is often denied to pet owners unwilling to leave their animals behind. In making the very difficult decision to forgo accommodation to avoid separation from their special companion (and an unknown fate for their pet), people are labelled 'voluntarily homeless,' and many essential services are withdrawn on this basis.

To address this, StreetVet created the Accredited Hostel Scheme, providing training, resources, and ongoing support to hostels enabling them to safely and confidently welcome



pets. There are now 40 StreetVet Accredited Hostels across the UK, with 86 more currently onboarding. As a result of this work, 67 clients and their pets have successfully transitioned into independent living accommodation – a significant milestone for individuals who might otherwise have remained homeless due to pet ownership.

In addition to the Accredited Hostel Scheme, StreetVet is also piloting a new accreditation scheme for day centres and hubs. Accessing these essential services might be the first step towards meeting a person's very basic needs and propelling them towards a tangible and safe future in permanent accommodation.

StreetVet's growth and impact would not have been possible without collaboration with the veterinary pharmaceutical and pet food industries. Donations of vaccines, prescription diets, medications, and diagnostic tools enable us to deliver gold-standard care. Equally, our work is strengthened by the expertise and generosity of the wider veterinary profession – CPD support for volunteers, referral surgeons who give their time to treat complex cases, and pharmaceutical reps who go out of their way to ensure we have what we need.

To work with StreetVet is to be reminded of the very core of our profession: compassion, service, and science in the name of alleviating suffering. We are able to advocate for our patients while treating our clients with dignity. With the continued partnership of the veterinary and pet care industries, we can make sure that no pet goes without care and no person has to choose between their best friend and a roof over their head.

REFERENCES

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Jade Statt

Jade Statt, Co-Founder & Clinical Director at StreetVet. StreetVet is an award-winning national charity offering free accessible vet care and services to pets belonging to those experiencing homelessness. A chance meeting with a homeless gentleman and his dog inspired co-founder Jade, a vet who qualified from Glasgow Vet School in 2002 to take vet care out onto the streets to the people and pets that need it most. What started in 2016 as 2 vets, Jade Statt and co-founder Sam Joseph and a backpack full of veterinary supplies, is now a charity fuelled by hundreds of vet and vet nurse volunteers who swap the practice for the pavement in more than 20 locations across the UK from Glasgow to Cornwall and growing. StreetVet recognises and champions the importance of the human-animal bond and in discovering that less than 10%* of UK hostels are pet friendly, launched the StreetVet Accredited Hostel Scheme in 2020 to make it as easy as possible for hostels to say yes to pets and prioritise keeping owners and their beloved pets together. Nobody should have to face the impossible choice between a roof over their heads or giving up their best friend. For more information, please visit streetvet.org.uk