

# A VOLUNTARY EXPERIENCE WITH GOZO SPCA.

As students at Sir M. A Refalo Upper Secondary School, it is part of our studies to conduct a project which involves a one year experience with any NGO of our choice. As animal lovers, we decided to carry out our project with Gozo SPCA. Unfortunately, our adventure has now come to an end and therefore, we would like to share our experience when helping at the centre. Since we started our journey, at the beginning of January, there were several chores in which we could lend a helping hand. One of the main jobs we helped with was dog walking. We would usually be assigned a dog each and we would take him for a walk. The time taken highly depended on the dog's physical ability and health. Throughout these sessions we were given the opportunity to get to know the dog better while building a relationship with it. Infact, after repeatedly walking the same dog, we could notice a change in its behaviour towards us. They felt more at ease in our presence and this made the walk more pleasant. With us we always carried a couple of plastic bags just in case the dog littered in public areas.

Another task which we frequently carried out was cleaning. When referring to cleaning one must not generalise because it not only involved that of the premises but also kitten cages and kennels. The session of premises cleaning involved taking out the cages which were empty due to all the kittens being rehomed. Then, the walls were wiped and the floor was swept. The same was done with the cages and kennels, after which newspapers were laid and the animals' beds were also made. Finally the bowls were filled with food and water. Cleanliness was a vital aspect since good hygiene diminishes the chances of infections being spread among the other animals at the centre.

Throughout the year several fundraising activities are held in aid of Gozo SPCA. These involve Car Boot sales held at Marsalforn and Victoria between September and May. Collectors were also on the ferries where passengers were able to make their donations. We had the opportunity to attend several car boot sales, held on Sunday mornings, in which we were in charge of books and DVDs.

In order for this organisation to increase animal awareness and knowledge among citizens, the initiative of visiting various schools around Gozo and giving talks to students is taken. We attended a talk at Gozo College Nadur Primary School where the subjects discussed were mainly that of neutering and animal care. The children participated by writing a short paragraph about their pets which were then collected to be read later and some of them even published.

Helping out at Gozo SPCA proved to be a boomerang experience: we dedicated a good number of hours to helping animals but in return we gained friendship, both from the animals and the other volunteers, as well as a rewarding sense of satisfaction. Indeed, we gave our time and energy but we received much more. Thank you Gozo SPCA!

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