

## **WEST MIDLANDS EQUINE LINK PROJECT**

RSPCA Inspector Jackie Hickman and West Midlands police, supported by numerous equine charities, recently worked together on an equine project in Bilston to promote responsible horse ownership.

In December, horse owners in Bilston saw the first signs of the 'Equine Link Project' with two equine welfare days which were run in the town.

On Friday 16 December and Saturday 17 December between 10am and 4pm on both days, two equine vets were on hand along with officers from the RSPCA and Bilston police to offer welfare advice specifically aimed at horses. Some local horse owners were involved in the planning of the event and welcomed the project.

All local horse owners were invited to bring their horses along to Carder Crescent on Friday and Batmans Hill Road, Weddell Wynd on Saturday so their animal could have a health check by the vet, be microchipped, have passport applications completed, for worming and for assistance with funding for horse castration if required.

It is now a legal requirement that every horse has a passport before it can be moved or sold and all new passport applications have to include your animal being microchipped - for equines this can only be done by a veterinary surgeon. Equine passports applied for during the event were charged at a minimum cost of £10 each. Donations were invited towards the costs of the RSPCA microchips on the day.

Inspector Hickman's message after the event speaks for itself.

'This was designed as a pilot scheme and weren't sure how the local horse owning community would react. The response was overwhelming with a staggering 103 equines attending over the 2 days ! There were requests to do more but this just wasn't possible due to time and running short of micro-chips (I ordered 100). I had estimated that a maximum of 67 would attend and didn't expect such a positive response.

To welfare/vet check this many horses at the owner's request is, in itself, a huge benefit to these animals and goes a very long way to changing their owners perception of the RSPCA in future.

This event would not have been possible without the support of Redwings, The British Horse Society, World Horse Welfare and the local Police and goes a long way to show what can be achieved when we all work together. I am extremely grateful to all the individuals for their commitment and involvement on the day/s.

I was surprised by the positive attitude of the horse owners, the scheme was very well received by them, regardless of their background, or previous experiences of the RSPCA. Many questions were asked by them on horse welfare and management, various ailments were discussed.

The condition of the horses seen overall was good with only a few giving us some concerns which were advised accordingly.

Roxanne and Nicola the Redwings Vets provided an excellent service, working tirelessly, even in rain, sleet and freezing temperatures.

Lee, Julie and the BHS team were fantastic and completed all the passport identification forms continuously and provided the wormers, which was a huge bonus, especially as they were administered on site under Veterinary supervision, and explanations were given to the owners regarding the correct dosage and procedure for this. They were also shown how to calculate their horses weight and worm accordingly.

RSPCA Inspectors Caroline Hall and Julie Lyons, and World Horse Welfare Field Officer Rachel Andrews were extremely efficient at completing the chipping paperwork and liaising with the owners.

PC Michelle Eaton was present for both days and provided a roadside unit as a base and facilities for hot drinks; she also liaised with owners and assisted with handling the horses.

Throughout the event I made general inquiries and was pleased that most people asked for the first "talk" to be in relation to Equine Welfare, Health and Management - this is something I can easily arrange in the new year at the local community centre.

We have learnt a lot from this event and have already identified ways to improve any future events, especially in relation to timings and a queuing system.

We expected 67 horses to attend – we got 103 (and another one seen off site for a hoof problem)

93 were microchipped

97 were passported

100 were wormed – courtesy of the BHS.

Some owners were also given the opportunity to arrange castration of entires via a local vet, - also funded by the BHS.

A BIG thank you to all involved in this pilot scheme, I look forward to future Equine Link Events -in better weather, of course!'