

ESTHER HONEY FOUNDATION

**PIP, SURFSIDE NEW BRIGHTON VETS,
CHRISTCHURCH**

Pip from Surfside New Brighton Vets recently visited Avarua, Rarotonga where she volunteered at the Esther Honey Foundation Animal Clinic. We asked Pip to share her experience with us in her article below.

After months of planning and excitement, I finally stepped foot in Avarua, Rarotonga on October 2nd at some ungodly hour of the night. And after crossing the International Date Line I got to live Tuesday all over again (a little like Groundhog Day).

I had no expectations of what the working conditions were going to be like when I arrived at the Esther Honey Foundation Animal Clinic which is a charitable trust run from America, they operate purely on donation of funds, drugs, equipment and volunteer staff. Vets and nurses travel from all over the world to work there and it is a great opportunity for students and new grads to

practice their new skills before going into paid work. When friends would ask me what I would be doing there I simply said "spaying cats and drinking Pino Coladas on the beach" (plenty of both was achieved!) Pleasantly surprised with the clinic and living quarters set up I was straight into work the following morning with two new grad Vets from the UK.

The first week was a bit of a blur, we had an endless supply of patients either in road traffic accidents or with fish poisoning as well as the routine surgeries and were constantly running out of the drugs and supplies that were required. It was hard work! The days were long and hot but incredibly rewarding and the local people were very appreciative and generous keeping us well supplied with local produce and the odd bottle of wine.

Nine out of ten cats on the island are ginger! Tiny little cats and they are everywhere. They are not such a popular pet in Rarotonga so the clinic was inundated with unwanted cats and kittens and we had a large caged area at the clinic where at one stage we had forty plus kittens.

The dogs are the most interesting looking I have ever seen - most have short, stubby turned out legs. Although most of them are owned and loved they are not held in by fences and spend their day kicking around with their doggy friends and taking themselves for a swim at the beach. Because they are so well socialized most of them were a real pleasure to work with and a walk on the beach with our two clinic dogs often turned into a pack of up to 10 dogs just running along together happily on the beach.

Benji (pictured in the yellow sling) was one of my favourites! When I first arrived he had just been admitted with fish poisoning (the fish in the lagoon can carry a toxin and when eaten by people or animals it effects their nervous system). He was a severe case, emaciated, dehydrated and had no control of his movement. I felt he was on deaths door and held little hope for his recovery. For the first couple of weeks there was very little change and he was being fed through a naso-gastric tube as he had lost his swallow reflex, but then one day I saw the slightest wag of his tail when I went in to check on him and from that moment on he hit major milestones everyday. We took him swimming with us to the beach in the evening for a little hydrotherapy and made him a sling which hung from the washing line to help him get the use of his legs back again. The day he walked to me with no assistance brought tears to my eyes.

I can not even express the impact this trip had on me. You are giving a little back to the world while living in paradise and making some wonderful new friends. The clinic seems to have no trouble attracting vets but not so many nurses. Every clinic needs that special nursy touch and I would recommend this trip of a lifetime to all the clever kiwi nurses out there.

A special thank you to all the reps, drug companies and suppliers who made donations of drugs and equipment for me to take over.



MORE ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Esther Honey Foundation (EHF) is an international organisation with the undivided determination to control animal populations on islands. EHF have developed partnership programs to raise necessary funds and recruit volunteers to provide compassionate veterinary services to the needy companion animals of the South Pacific.

The Foundation works in unison with local governments, businesses, the community, and their program partners to improve the health conditions and quality of life for these animals. All animals, including the homeless, receive the same level of veterinary care and no healthy animal is euthanized.

WANT TO HELP?

If you would like more information or are interested in assisting or becoming a volunteer for the Esther Honey Foundation please visit www.estherhoney.org

