

NOTES FROM CONVERSATIONS HELD WITH THE WORKER BLOWING THE WHISTLE ON MBR (2022)

Sophie* applied to work at MBR Acres because she likes dogs. She had been working for just a few weeks when she decided to blow the whistle and give testimony of what she was witnessing. She has had dogs all her life and thought she understood them well, until she saw the dogs at MBR and observed many behaviours she had never seen before: running up and down repetitively, constantly going in circles, chewing the mesh of the pens, frantically panting, and behaving in a totally manic way. She described this as “deranged behaviour” and believes it is because the dogs are completely bored, as there is nothing for them to do, and anxious because they are desperate for attention. She explained that the males fight very frequently due to the lack of stimulation. She also noticed that every pen has a dog toy attached to the end of a thick chain, but she has never seen a dog playing with one. She believes the dogs are so deprived that they no longer know how to play.

She remarked that seeing the mothers broke her heart. She described them as “being knackered” and said she wished they would let them go. Sophie explained that the way the beagle mothers looked into her eyes made her feel as though they knew they were being abused and were trying to communicate this to her.

She first told us about a small puppy she named Poppy. Sophie said the puppy was not eating or drinking and showed no interest in anything. She offered to adopt her, but instead Poppy was put to sleep. Her body was wrapped in a plastic bag and placed in a chest freezer — just like a large household chest freezer — secured with a padlock.

She then told us about another small puppy she named Minnie. Minnie was inside Building 21 and was particularly small — possibly even smaller than Poppy. Sophie told us she had become attached to this puppy and had been secretly bringing her food hidden in her pockets and feeding her, as she did not want Minnie to end up in the chest freezer. She asked senior staff to provide Minnie with a special diet. She explained that although Minnie was very small, she appeared to be a healthy puppy: she was eating and drinking, came up to her when she entered the

* pseudonym used to protect the real identity of the whistleblower

pen, and lit up when Sophie called her “Minnie”, having already learnt her new name. Sophie was amazed at how much the puppy was learning with the small amount of attention she had managed to give her when none of the other workers were around.

Sophie spoke to us again a few days later sounding very concerned, as she believed Minnie was going to be put to sleep. She had heard one of her superiors telling the vet that there was a puppy in Building 21 that was not eating. Sophie was worried because Minnie had not grown much, but she knew that the puppy was thriving, eating well, drinking, and running around. Minnie was only small because she was the runt of the litter, unlike Poppy, who had not been eating. Sophie said she had weighed Minnie the previous day and that she had gained some weight; she was now 1.7 kilograms, although still much smaller than the others. She believed MBR saw caring for Minnie as a waste of money, but Sophie was confident that Minnie could grow to a good size with time and a better diet.

A few days later, we received a message from Sophie in which she was clearly upset. She explained that Minnie had been put down and taken into the chest freezer, along with Poppy and many other puppies.

Management and staff

Sophie described the company as “managerless” and explained that nobody checks or reviews the work she has done, stating that “nobody is bothered”. She highlighted that staff are lazy and that during her training she was shown how to get away with cleaning less — for example, by placing extra shredded paper where the puppies sleep to hide dirt that had not been cleaned underneath. During weekends and bank holidays, there is a rota marking which buildings will not be cleaned at all, while others are only swept, as staff work only half a shift.

She stated that the upside-down plastic barrels where the puppies sleep had never been washed since she started working there over four weeks earlier. She believed they might be jet-washed occasionally, but she was horrified by how dirty they were from the puppies’ faeces. She was appalled that bedding materials in the young puppies’ nests were changed only on Mondays and Fridays. Even when soaked in

urine and faeces, she had been instructed to simply add more shredded paper on top.

Sophie described a strong stench of ammonia, especially in the males' pens, where fans run all year round to dissipate the smell. She said she noticed that the dogs tend to defecate by the door, as if trying to go outside their pens, which they are unable to do. She explained how the workers use a long-handled scraper to scrape away the waste from the floors.

She said the pens have nipple water dispensers, but these are often clogged with dirty sawdust, and the dogs urinate on them. On several occasions, she had seen faeces in the trays beneath the dispensers.

Sophie felt that staff had become desensitised to what was happening to the dogs. As an example, she said that a building where dogs are put together to mate is referred to by staff as "the brothel", the push the dogs when they are jumping on them, and don't display any feelings when puppies are put to sleep.