

Qatar animal shelter eyes charity status

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By Peter Townson/Staff Reporter

Two years ago this week, the Qatar Animal Welfare Society (QAWS) shelter was struck by a devastating fire, leaving the kennels and other facilities completely destroyed and taking the lives of around 40 animals in the flames. Since then, the committee has been involved in rebuilding the facilities, and while they still hope for the new “Phoenix” shelter to rise from the ashes at some point, the group is very much back on its feet, catering for more animals than ever at the same site.

Gulf Times spoke to QAWS adoption co-ordinator, Kelly Allen, about the progress the group has made since the fire, and the response of the community to the terrible accident.

“Since the fire in 2009, there have been huge changes to the QAWS facilities,” explained Allen, adding “we had a temporary kennel facility up and running within a couple of months and had moved the majority of the animals back on site.”

These temporary kennels have since been removed, and QAWS now has a new kennel block, a puppy area and two cat housing facilities. The group has also recently received some new portacabins which will allow them to create a dedicated quarantine facility, separate dog and cat isolation wings, larger cat housing facilities, quiet rooms for pregnant animals, administration offices, a treatment room, volunteer lounge and reception area.

After discovering that the fire in 2009 was caused by an electrical fault, the group has been keen to ensure that the farm is now safe, with volunteer electricians checking the systems on a regular basis and the addition of firefighting equipment on site.

“Our aim is to eventually have no wooden buildings to try and reduce the fire hazard but obviously these are much more expensive and as such, we are having to build them in stages, making do with safer wooden structures in the meantime,” said Allen.

“It’s still very difficult for us to look back on the fire, especially thinking about the 40 animals that lost their lives that day,” she said, adding “it’s great looking at the amount we’ve achieved in the last two years, but it’s very daunting looking at the amount of work that still needs to be done.”

“This time two years ago we couldn’t even begin to think about how we were going to get through this, but there were never any thoughts of giving up,” she said, noting “with more than 150 animals counting on us, we still had to carry on as best we could.”

Getting the shelter rebuilt has cost QAWS in the region of QR200,000 already, and they need around QR50,000 for the next phase of expansion. Aside from extra costs such as repair work, construction, maintenance and medical fees, the shelter costs around QR30,000 per month to run.

Throughout their years in Qatar, and especially since the fire, QAWS have fortunately been able to rely on strong community support, with volunteers turning up regularly to help care for the animals, and companies offering assistance in a number of ways.

“Very simply, without the support that we have had from the community, we wouldn’t be here now. From the individuals and groups who hold fundraisers, to the volunteers who donate their time to help us look after the animals at the shelter, we couldn’t do what we do without them,” said Allen.

She also expressed her gratitude to the number of companies that have helped with construction materials and other items over the years, and offered a special thanks to those who rushed to help with the fire rescue operation and to offer their support after the tragic event.

Looking to the future, the group is hoping to achieve charity status so that they can receive donations from the many organisations which have already expressed an interest and desire to help them with their work.

If they can do so, then the state-of-the-art facility they have had designed by professional architects will become a more realistic prospect.

“We’re still working on gaining charity status for QAWS — ideally we’d like our own piece of land that we could be secure long term and begin to build a permanent facility,” she said, “we’re expanding all the time, trying to cope with the number of animals that need shelter and we also have plans for future educational programmes amongst other things.”



The fire meant that QAWS had to house many animals in temporary areas, such as this cat facility

“Project Phoenix is our multi-million riyal dream shelter that is still very much our goal,” said Allen, conceding “unfortunately we can’t even begin to look at that until we have achieved charity status.”

[Back to Article](#)

[Homepage](#)