

New project provides final farewell for family pets

The founder of an East Lothian charity which supports vulnerable children and young people has launched a new project to provide a final farewell for family pets after witnessing the impact of loss first-hand through her work.

Lesley Winton, BEM, has provided support through her humane education organisation Fostering Compassion for more than a decade and worked in the voluntary sector for nearly 40 years.

Now as she prepares to retire from the organisation she is planning to focus on her passion for helping people come to terms with pet loss with the launch of her Compassion Allways Pet Bereavement Consultancy – and its first project is providing bespoke bassinets to give families the chance to say goodbye to their pets in a caring way.

The Bassinet Project, which is supported by Lesley's not for profit organisation Holly's Hugs, provides vets with a custom-made carrier which can be lined with a pillow and blanket to take their family pet from the home after it is euthanised by vet teams.

The first bassinets are now being trialled at a vet practice in West Lothian and Lesley hopes to find an East Lothian partner to get involved.

She said: "I have seen first hand the trauma caused by the loss of a family pet and this is just one way of making their final journey easier for everyone in the household.

"The bassinets are designed to make them easy for vet teams to carry and give some comfort to the families as their much loved companion animal leaves their home for the last time'

"Having to make the decision to let our beloved animals go is one of the hardest things we will ever do and if our pet is put to sleep at home, it may provide us with a little comfort and be less distressing for them, however the reality is, after euthanasia, the animal's body still has to be removed from the home.

"This can be where great compassion and sensitivity is required and if a situation occurs where the pet's body is put in a body bag in front of their owner or carried out slumped in the vet's arms, this can be an incredibly distressing last image."

Lesley came up with the Bassinet Project after a visit to America where she saw some vet practices using the baskets.

Holly's Hugs, which is running the project in conjunction with the consultancy, was set up by Lesley following the loss of her own beloved rescue dog Holly who died in 2013.

Lesley said: "Holly came into my life when I was going through a particularly difficult time and there is no doubt, she gave me a reason to go on. Losing her was one of the most devastating things I've ever had to go through. Holly's Hugs helps raise money for dogs in need and helps raise awareness of how hard losing or being separated from a companion animal can be and how important it is that people are compassionate towards this type of bereavement."

Lesley's move into her pet bereavement consultancy service will allow her to bring her years of experience to support for

vet practices, employers, business and schools, social work and carers as they prepare to deal with loss among those they help.

The Bassinet Project is already being used by Westport Vets in Linlithgow, West Lothian.

Lesley said: "I am thrilled Westport have taken up the bassinets and hope to roll the project out to vets in East Lothian and across Scotland alongside my consultancy work.

Anyone who wants to talk to Lesley about the Bassinet Project or her consultancy work can contact her by emailing her at lesleyjoanwinton@gmail.com.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter