



Lois Sinclair, who founded the Gracehounds charity – pictured with some of her precious pooches. Staff Photo: 07/08/08/MA/greyhound1

Picture by Gordon Fraser

Advertiser reporter DAWN MORRISON meets a woman whose love for greyhounds led to her starting her own charity.

A sanctuary has been set up in Lasswade to care for racing greyhounds once the dog-days of their careers have come to an end.

Former NHS nurse Lois Sinclair saw many greyhounds and lurchers while working for Ian Butt vets surgery in Loanhead. "I just fell in love with this type of dog," said Lois. "They would come in injured by the week. They are such gentle, quiet dogs. "I started to acquire a few myself and I thought I would actually like to work with them. I never thought I was going to start my own charity."

Her new-found affection for the dogs, described by the Retired Greyhound Trust as 'couch potatoes', led Lois (54) to establish a fostering and rehoming charity called "Gracehounds".

The name refers to the elegant and graceful nature of the dogs, and because the old collective term for a group of hounds was a greyce.

In addition to greyhounds, the charity has also helped lurchers, salukis and whippets. The "rehabilitation" of ex-racing dogs includes familiarising them with new people. The dogs are placed with foster

families before being adopted into permanent homes. Lois explains that many racing dogs have spent most of their lives trackside and come to the charity 'institutionalised', but start to blossom when placed in a home environment.

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A greyhound's career generally ends between the age of four and six, but many have to bow out sooner due to injury. Recent years have seen many racing tracks close, leaving dogs without a home.

"I'm concerned about the fact that if it all stops suddenly, what's going to happen to the dogs?" explains Lois. "I'm not anti-racing, my concern is the welfare of the dogs when they are racing and what happens afterwards." Lois, who runs the charity along with her husband

Colin and her friend Rhona Laing, now has three dogs of her own. Greyhound-deerhound cross Max, who had to be rehomed after his owner died, whippet-saluki cross Sophie, who was also left without an owner, and Bess, whose racing career came to an end after she suffered a bad fracture.

Although greyhounds do not require a vast amount of exercise, Lois warns the decision to adopt one should not be taken lightly: "It's a huge commitment, it cannot be taken lightly. It's like fostering a child, you've got to be prepared to put lots of time in.

"They need a decent walk every day, like any other dog, but they don't need to be walked for hours and hours. They're very relaxing dogs, very peaceful. They don't bark and they don't yap."

Keeping the charity going requires a significant amount of fundraising and the recent "Hot Dog" show at Vogrie Park proved a great success, raising over £1,200.

Gracehounds also requires volunteer walkers to help dogs gain new experiences of different places.

Lois admits feeling mixed emotions when new homes are eventually found for the dogs, but adds: "I know them all individually, and I just love each one of them. But the whole point is getting them ready for their new home."

For more information on the charity, visit www.gracehounds.plus.com