

Rescuing the rabbits

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Easter brings visions of happy little bunnies with bows and chocolate eggs, but there is an underlying tale of neglected, abandoned and injured rabbits that will shatter those idealistic images.

"I'm dreading Easter, I'm just dreading it," said Lisa Hutcheon, volunteer foster co-ordinator at the SPCA. She says that shortly before Easter, parents flock to pet stores and animal shelters to pick out the perfect fluffy-tailed, doe-eyed bunny for their children to cherish.

But, six months later, she adds, families tire of their floppy-eared friends and either release them into parks or dump them at shelters. Every fall, like clockwork, a flood of homeless bunnies begins to arrive at the SPCA. Hutcheon estimates up to five per week are dropped off at the Burnaby location alone.

"They're not disposable. They're living creatures," Hutcheon said angrily. "They're living beings. They're not just a novelty and, when you get tired of them, you can't just dump them and get off scot-free."

In her three years of volunteer work, she says she's seen battered and bruised bunnies being dumped off at the SPCA, their delicate bodies suffering broken bones, chewed ears, infections and their fur filthy from neglect.

"It's just so disgusting," she said, adding that she got a little rabbit in just last week who was blind and maimed, and one three weeks ago whose broken leg had to be amputated.

Hutcheon says the homeless bunnies live in limbo until the shelter finds a home for them, which could take up to nine months. Hutcheon notes that at the Burnaby location they find a home for a bunny once every three months. Burnaby has over 40 rabbits living in foster care, waiting for a permanent home.

She adds that many people are under the false impression that bunnies don't require attention.

"What happens is they think (their bunny) should live outdoors so they put it in a hutch outside ... and so the rabbit sits in the hutch day after day after day," she explained, with a hint of sadness in her voice. However, what people don't know, she noted, is that rabbits enjoy being inside, can be litter-box trained and spayed, and love to be around people.



Lisa Hutcheon holds Justin, who was found in a park with a compound fracture of his leg that required amputation.

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ALMOST BLIND: Hope, above, was taken from a family who bought her at a pet store and then neglected her, makes her food."

Hutcheon encourages people to think long and hard before they buy a bunny, and says it's best to try living with one before making the commitment.

"The good thing about (rabbits) being in foster care, is