

‘I talk to the animals more often than I talk to humans!’

# Mansfield’s Dr Doolittle

by NATALIE WHITE

GABBY Mehegan’s home in Tolmie is much like a hospital - but the patients are animals, not people.

Joey kangaroos snuggle in pouches inside a large washing basket and baby wombats charge around the lounge room while they wait their turn to feed.

It is a typical afternoon at the Mansfield Wildlife Shelter, where eight kangaroos, three wombats, three possums, two magpies and a kookaburra make their home while recovering from being abandoned or injured.

Looking after animals has been Gabby’s voluntary full-time job for two years. She helps to rehabilitate the animals, preparing them for their re-release in the wild.

“I feel like Dr Doolittle most of the time,” she said.

“I talk to the animals more often than I talk to humans!”

The Mansfield shelter takes in many animals on a regular basis after receiving calls from local vets, individuals who may have unintentionally hit the animal in their car or from the Help for Wildlife call centre.

“We are never without an animal to look after at any one time,” said Gabby.

“When the animals are young they need four hourly feeds and constant looking after.

“I don’t get too much sleep, but might try to get some in during the day when I have a spare moment.

“If nothing else, we are never short of entertainment.”

Gabby’s friend Rick, who runs a snake catching service, said he



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is always enthralled by the animals’ behaviour.

“The baby wombats run across the floor and remind me of a bull leaving the gate at a rodeo,” he said.

After all the caring is done, the animals have to be released into the wild - a task Gabby says is not often easy.

“It is very hard to let them go, but it has to be done,” she said. “It is good to know you are doing something to help.”

Gabby spent three years as a foster carer before she could run a licensed shelter.

The pair’s love of wildlife means Gabby is happy to run the

shelter, but she admits it is expensive to provide for the animals.

The shelter receives no financial support from the government and the formula, food and medication for the animals does not come cheap.

“We are trying to raise money to build a new, bigger enclosure and it is happening in very small stages because of the cost,” said Gabby.

“But a lot of support comes from the veterinary clinics in Mansfield, and if the animal requires treatment, they will do it for us.”

Gabby urges people to get in contact with her if they find an orphaned animal. She offers the rescue call-out service 24 hours day.

“It is important to keep the animal warm and preferably wrapped in a blanket and try to handle them as little as possible because they can die of shock,” she said.

“And if an animal is hit by a car, you should always check the pouch for babies.”

The Mansfield Wildlife Shelter welcomes donations of blankets and hessian bags that can be made into baby animal pouches. For additional information please call 5776 9678

The Mansfield Wildlife Shelter is just 500 metres from Wombat Hills Cottages. For a chance to cuddle these adorable creatures and for unique photo opportunities, allow us to arrange a visit for you. A donation towards the care required before their return to the wild would be greatly appreciated.