



cats and even guinea pigs amid the cost of living crisis.

‘Leonard’s lunchbox’ meets at St Matthew’s Church in Bethnal Green east London with the support and advice of the church’s Rector, Mother Erin Clark.

The new service for pets follows the rapid growth of Bethnal Green food bank, founded by the church in January 2020.

The food bank met in the church’s hall until 2021 when it moved to another site and now provides food for around 900 people a week.

Grace Hui, who has three rescue dogs and founded Leonard’s lunchbox – named after one of her dogs - said: “I work with a lot of animal rescue centres and I have three rescue dogs. I know how much they contribute to people’s mental well-being.

“For some people, especially elderly people, who live on their own, walking a dog is their only way of going out and seeing other people, especially during the pandemic when it was very lonely.

“Giving up your pet because you can’t afford to feed it would feel like letting down your best friend.”

Mother Erin, who owns a Great Dane called Soren, said she had noticed people coming to the food bank choosing cans of dog and cat food over extra food for themselves.

“People were choosing dog and cat food which is quite a sacrifice to make when you could choose other items for yourself, she said.

“It was a sign of just how much pets mean to people.

“We do not realise how much people rely on their pets for their mental well-being. There is a lot of poverty around here and other social issues, I think for a lot of people their pet is their lifeline, it is what gets them out, it is a big part of their well-being.”

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