

Hero Project

Asha Andrews

“It is just the nature of the work that we do, the fields that we are in. It can be hard because people don't understand why we do what we do, a lot of people don't see farmed animals as the individuals that they are, just as food or products.”—Camellia Schinner

My description of a hero is someone that truly believes in the good of humanity and stands up for a cause no matter what other people say. Everyone can be a hero if they want to be. People like firemen, police, or doctors are considered heroes, but there are also people that impact their community in small ways and put a lot of effort into doing what they think is right. For my Hero Project I interviewed Camellia Schinner, the sanctuary manager at Rancho Compasion. Rancho Compasion is a non-profit animal sanctuary that rescues abused and neglected farm animals and gives them a safe, healthy environment to live in. Camellia takes care of the animals at Rancho Compasion with the help of others and manages the sanctuary.

“I started working there because it's actually my family's animal sanctuary, and I wanted to do something where I could be with the animals that I already knew and loved so very much; and I wanted to do something that was connected to the land and the animals and the community.” Camellia also spoke about how working at Rancho Compasion has affected her in many positive ways, but she has had to deal with a lot of grief and death. She knew that it was going to be hard and exhausting work to care for the animals knowing that she would have to watch some of them die. I think Camellia and her co-workers are heroic because without their team so many animals would have died or suffered. Her team knew that there were animals that needed shelter and they could give it to them even if it wouldn't be easy. They stood up and took on the challenge.

“I'm constantly having to experience the difficulties of dealing with real beings, real individuals who have their own complex lives, and sometimes that can be really hard to deal with emotionally.” Camellia has to deal with her own life and her own emotions while also constantly dealing with other individuals' emotions. There is a term that Camellia brought up called compassion fatigue and that it is a big part of working there because it can be so demanding and exerting to give so much. “Whether you're always caring in a compassionate way for rescued animals who are dependent upon your help, or whether you

are dealing with volunteers, staff, or visitors, or always being the face of the sanctuary, it can lead to compassion fatigue.” Even though it can be very rewarding being in a line of work where you’re giving back, it is also incredibly hard to manage the stress and exhaustion it can cause, which is why it is so important to be grateful to the people that do heroic work.

Camellia talked about her duties such as managing the animals' diets, sleeping situations, their medical treatments, and also directing the volunteers whilst hosting events, fundraising and teaching students. “It brings a smile to my face whenever we have kids come out to the sanctuary. People who have never been around farmed animals before and they get to rub a pig's belly or get a headbutt from one of our goofy goats, it can be a really fun experience for people and to see their hearts kind of opening up” Camellia said that one of her favorite things about working at Rancho Compassion was hosting the fun events that gets the community more involved in the cause and the environment. Another fun element to working there is impacting the members of the community. Not just helping the animals but also getting other people to acknowledge that animals are more than what society is led to believe. Sadly there are things preventing the organization from doing that.

“There's always going to be a lot where we could improve but I would say I want to continue to impact more people and get more people to the sanctuary, and just do even better in the way that we can communicate our mission to the public.” There are many things Camellia thinks they could improve at the sanctuary such as refining the systems, procedures for the animals, and better communication. They mostly want to get their message out there and improve as many animals' lives as possible. “Part of it is the budget, we’re always needing to fundraise, and not a lot of people know about us or want to give money to a farmed animal sanctuary because they don't understand the work that we do. I would say the other thing is our location. It's sometimes hard to find volunteers.” Having a non-profit organization can be taxing and difficult, especially trying to keep the sanctuary going in hard times and making sure that you have the finances to do that.

“I think in 10 years we are going to completely refine what it means to be a farm animal sanctuary. People won't see our residents as food, they are able to see them as individuals with their own lives, their own enriching thriving lives. We are going to be expanding and will be a lot bigger. We're going to have more stuff and programs to impact our local communities. Our name will be a lot more known in our area, maybe even around

the country.” Camellias organization is mainly known in Nicasio right now, but hopefully in the next 10 years it will have grown greatly. They want new programs and more money to build their organization and give farm animals happier lives. With the dedication she puts in I believe that they can get to that point.

Getting to know Camellia and what goes on behind the scenes and the great work she is doing is inspiring. Bringing awareness to the needs of neglected farm animals and doing the work to rescue them and get them healthy again is important work. The lives of farm animals usually aren't on many people's minds but thankfully is on Camellia Schinners and the people that she works with. I am incredibly grateful for the work that Rancho Compassion does and Camellia Schinner is truly a hero to me.