

SHE BRINGS 'HOMELESS' HOUNDS OUT FOR WALKIES

AFTERNOON

By GERALDINE COMISKEY

volunteers a day on hand, they usually take four at a time for a walk.

Katja, from Germany, points out: "It's better than staying at home, shivering. "I am roasting," she laughed as she took yet another pair of greyhounds for a run in the muck.

With a surname like Van Damme, Frenchman JB had enough muscle to deal with the American bull terrier.

Sloppy

However, it was more like the dogs taking me for walkies. Golden labrador Richie likes the take the lead and nearly lifted me off my feet. "He thinks he's human," staff worker Dick Maher laughed.

Boxer dog Barry, with his black stubbly face, looked like a cool dude with a five o'clock shadow, so I didn't mind when he gave me a sloppy kiss.

Staffordshire bull terriers Tara and Zara rugby tackled me as I entered their cage, but then rolled over for a tummy tickle.

The elegant greyhounds were easier for me to manage. And while they have a fearsome reputation on the

coursing field, some are just big scaredy cats.

"We got one greyhound who was afraid of hares. That's why he ended up here, he was no good for coursing," part-time staff member Amy Commins said.

Meanwhile, two retired gundogs were happy to share a kennel. The English setter and black labrador, who arrived together, have long given up playing fetch.

"They were left in by a guy who was emigrating to New Zealand," centre boss Gina Hetherington said.

The Kildare woman started Paws in Sallins with her mum in 1997, before moving to Mullinahone. Her thatched cottage is home to all the dogs she can't fit into the kennels.

Paws no longer receives funding from Bord na gCon - the body responsible for the promotion and regulation of greyhound racing - and an annual €20,000. Department of Agriculture grant can't pay the vet bills, which ran to €27,000 last year.

Some of the rescued dogs have gone on to find celeb owners, or even become stars themselves. RTE's Paddy O'Gorman adopted his cairn terrier, Snoop Dogg, from Paws.

Presenter Amanda Byram and

radio host Sean Moncrieff also adopted dogs from Paws.

Our own Amanda Brunker and singer Cathy Davey take part in the thrice-annual greyhound walks and musician Sharon Shannon has promised to play the accordion at the next walk in Dublin on June 16.

With 22,575 greyhounds born every year, it's no wonder Paws is overrun.

Lucky

Most of the dogs spend just a week there before they are sent to bigger shelters abroad. The greyhounds go to Sweden and Prague, while the rest go to the Blue Cross in England.

But one lucky dog won't be making that heartbreaking boat trip.

Luke (11) and Rachel (9) Whelan from Clara, Co. Kilkenny, had ulterior motives when they arrived with their mum and dad, Dermot and Sandra, to walk some of the smaller dogs. "We want a dog to take home," they revealed.

It was like the Voice of Ireland for dogs as the pooches barked and wagged their tails. In the end a scruffy mutt called Rose won their hearts.

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FRISKY: Amy Commins of Paws helping Geraldine to control boxer dog Barry

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