Zimbabwe has a donkey population of about half a million, mostly in the drier, less habitable, rural areas of the country. For many impoverished subsistence farmers, donkeys are kept solely as working animals - providing draught power for pulling scotch-carts and ploughs, which are often overloaded and too heavy. Major welfare problems include the use of wooden yokes which cause chronic wounds on the brisket and necks, infectious diseases, malnutrition, internal and external parasites, hoof problems, poor shelter, overworking and abandonment on completion of their working life. Most of these transgressions are due to ignorance and/or neglect by their owners.

The Department of Livestock and Veterinary Services and Veterinarians for Animal Welfare of Zimbabwe have formed a strategic partnership with the objective of raising animal welfare awareness through education and training, using the World Organisation of Animal Health (OIE) standards as defined in Chapter 7.12, Welfare of working equids, of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code - Welfare of Working Equids, as a baseline. The partnership delivers outreach programmes and animal welfare work through DLVS countrywide network of 5071 offices. Teams travel to targeted areas where wooden yokes are replaced with harnesses (at no charge), training in donkey husbandry is given, veterinary nursing care and treatments are administered, and education pamphlets explaining the welfare standards are handed out.

This project has been running for the past four years and there is a noticeable improvement in the quality of life of donkeys where the partnership teams have been. Moreover, the owners have become more aware of animal welfare issues concerning their donkeys and other animals. On-going plans include increasing the number of workshops to educate more veterinary staff, community leaders, school children and other stakeholders on animal welfare standards and practices, thus being able to disseminate information across the greater part of Zimbabwe both more efficiently and effectively.

Key words: abandonment – husbandry – malnutrition – transgression – welfare – yoke.