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Rescue me!

Big hearts give little dogs a second chance

By Lisa Treen

For many years Monika Biernacki and her crew of volunteers have been taking in the homeless and unwanted dogs from Sydney pounds and successfully re-homing as many dogs as possible. Monika's started rescuing abandoned dogs over 15 years ago and is now a private registered charity.

Monika estimates that they re-home over 800 dogs a year. When they had the previous shelter premises, they estimate that the numbers were greater—more towards 1,000 dogs per year. Since the advent of microchipping in 1999, Doggie Rescue has managed to place in excess of 6,000 dogs in permanent homes.

Doggie Rescue primarily concentrates on placing smaller dogs but they also have larger breeds that they re-home. The numbers are smaller for larger breeds due to not having enough carers who can manage bigger dogs. Apparently it's harder to find people with the necessary handling skills to take in the bigger breeds.

This little organisation has seen an increasing and alarming rise of Fox Terriers and similar crosses through their doors. Monika attributes this to several reasons. One is the rising fashion in 'handbag sized' dogs and this is a trend that has come from overseas magazines and celebrity watching through the media. "People don't understand that these little dogs are high energy. They require lots of exercise, training and attention. They're ideally suited to people who enjoy exercising them. Little dogs are so intelligent and they need mental stimulation."

Doggie Rescue also receive the 'escapeologists'—those little dogs who dig or who are not kept in a secure home environment. These little pocket rockets need stimulation



and like most dogs, can become curious about their environment—boredom leads to inquisitive and sometime destructive behaviour. Of course some come with baggage from their past and so potential adoptive families need to realise that there will be a period of adjustment and acclimatising for all concerned.

Around 85% of the dogs that Doggie Rescue acquires come from the larger pounds throughout Sydney. These include Renbury, Blacktown and Hawkesbury pounds. The dogs are picked up on a weekly basis. In Sydney's pounds, animals that aren't microchipped are housed for seven days before they are euthanased. A microchipped animal is kept at the pound for 14 days and if the owner is not found and does not come forward then their fate is the same. Doggie Rescue gives these death-row dogs a reprieve—they're taken in and go to foster homes until a permanent home can be found.

There's no government funding offered to Doggie Rescue, so the organisation survives by donations they receive from private individuals or money raised through the sale of merchandise. It comes from people who believe in what they're doing and want to help give these dogs a second chance—people who want to help dogs that would've been destroyed.

Doggie Rescue runs on love and caring folk who volunteer their time and energy into making their dogs get an opportunity for a better life. As Monika explains, "We probably have about 100 volunteers that come to us regularly and help out with all manner of jobs. There's plenty of functions for volunteers—it's endless actually. We need volunteers for walking dogs—and this can be at any time during our opening hours. We also need volunteers for transporting our rescue dogs—from picking them up from the pound to delivering and picking up from the vet."

Volunteers are also welcome to help out with administrative functions like answering the phone to data entry and those with time on their hands and have basic office skills are always encouraged. "We're always looking for skilled people who have IT or marketing skills who can regularly give us even a couple of hours a fortnight. Helpers can also be involved giving basic care to our dogs with feeding, cuddles, washing/grooming, playing with them and generally giving them some much needed and appreciated attention. It's also great to have outgoing people who can greet visitors and show them our dogs available for adoption."

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Doggie Rescue has faced some major hurdles. Over a year ago they had to find alternative premises. The previous facility had room to shelter dogs but their current shop front in Drummoyne doesn't have the same space or set-up. It's for this reason that they need more foster carers. "Fostering is so important to us. It's a little like adopting, an enormous commitment. Because once a dog goes into foster care, we prefer it to stay there until we can find it a permanent home."

"We're particular with our requirements because people have to be willing to commit not only their time and energy for the temporary care of the dog, but they also have to be prepared to bring the dog in each Saturday to our office at Drummoyne. The dogs come each Saturday so that they can be available to prospective adopting families. Of course this is also time where the dogs receive some kindly treatment and love. Some of our carers are amazingly dedicated folk who will even pay for things like the occasional vet bill. It's not something that we ask for—but it's just that little extra contribution that we appreciate. So fostering is a bit like adopting a dog, only you don't keep it forever."

Each Saturday, a number of dogs are taken to Petbarn in Alexandria so that the public can get a chance to meet and greet some of the dogs available. Over a year ago, this became a regular feature at Petbarn as the CEO heard about the plight in the relocation of the shelter. Knowing that Doggie Rescue were looking for premises, they offered the opportunity to showcase some of the dogs awaiting adoption. Petbarn has also offered their support at Christmas time where customers can purchase much needed gifts for the dogs—from food, to toys or flea and tick treatments. "It's been a huge support for us being that this is a very visible venue in the Inner West where so many dedicated pet lovers reside."

Not every dog lover can adopt, foster or even spare time in volunteering but you can always check the Doggie Rescue website for some of the items that they're always in need of. Items can range from dog chews, collars and leads, even photocopy paper and postage stamps. If people are able to, they're encouraged to sponsor a doggie, where a financial commitment is made to care for a specific dog. One of the more mundane but much needed items that Doggie Rescue literally chew through are the hard plastic id tags commonly found at hardware stores. As Monika explains, "These cheap little tags are fabulous as they provide easy identification—a name tag that our carers can quickly read, they're not chew proof but they're pretty sturdy."

All dogs available through the Doggie Rescue program come de-sexed, micro-chipped, wormed, checked for heartworm and vaccinated. They have a full health check once they come from the pound and if there is treatment prescribed, the dogs receive it before being put up for adoption.

You can imagine that the folk at Doggie Rescue see some sad little faces when they first pick up an adoption hopeful. However, Monika believes that what keeps her and her volunteers striving to find good homes is the feedback they get from the people who've adopted a dog. "We often get cards from people and photos of the dogs they've adopted. It's a delight to see them so happy and in a much better state than we picked them up. They've put on weight, their coats are glossy and they just look like different dogs."

Sometimes you hardly make a connection because they're now receiving care and love. It's just such a good feeling to know that what you've done has been instrumental in getting them into a good home."

Monika's Doggie Rescue
www.doggierescue.com
70 Victoria Road
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