



Dogs on Hills Canine Behaviour Rehabilitation Center

Context:

Romania managed to become famous worldwide thanks to its stray dog issue. The problems started in the 80's when Nicolae Ceausescu aimed to industrialize Romania; people were forced to leave the countryside and move into cities. As there was a huge demand for more apartments, Ceausescu decided to demolish all small houses and build vast apartment blocks instead. The number of people in the cities exploded and families had no option but to share an apartment with many other families. At that point animals were abandoned on the streets due to lack of space. The dogs obviously reproduced rapidly and soon the streets were filled with homeless dogs and their puppies.

For over 20 years the dogs have been chased, captured and killed in numerous cruel and painful ways. They have been shot, poisoned, hung, burnt to death or crammed into small kennels to die of hunger and thirst.

Today, the problem still persists and there are two main causes - people do not neuter their dogs, these dogs reproduce themselves and the unwanted puppies are thrown away on the streets. There is a law in Romania that makes it mandatory for owners to neuter their dogs - Law 258 / 2013 - but the majority does not respect it. The law clearly says that only dogs with Pedigree can reproduce, but the law is not known and/ or is mostly not respected.

The other cause for why there are so many dogs in the streets is because people abandon their dogs when they don't know what to do with them, because the dogs misbehave or because they adopt a dog and the dog has behaviour issues and they don't know how to fix it so they decide to give the dog away, abandon the dog or keep the dog chained or locked in a kennel.

The public shelters in Romania or the NGOs working in animal welfare try to find homes for these abandoned dogs, but for the majority of them it is almost impossible, because these dogs are already traumatized, they are afraid of human contact, they are not properly socialized so they end up living in these shelters till the end of their life or until they are euthanized because there is no other solution.

Contact:

Lend a hand :)

Dora Ghecenco
0740 768 762

Crețu Anamaria
0758 485 037

SWIFT: BTRLRO22
RON: RO70BTRLRONCRT0438616101

EUR: RO20BTRLEURCRT0438616101
USD: RO24BTRLUSDCRT0438616101
Paypal: dogsonhills@gmail.com



Abuse of a dog can be active in the form of physical attacks or punishment. It can also be passive, for example, neglect, inappropriate or lack of socialization. Some examples of dog abuse:

- Depriving a young dog of its mother through too-early weaning
- Chaining or tying up a dog; forcing him to spend most of his time in a kennel or cage; making him live outside, away from his human family
- Yelling, hitting, or other forms of verbal or physical punishment; causing chronic stress or pain
- Lack of proper care in feeding, grooming, and attending to health needs
- Depriving a dog of daily walks and interaction with different situations
- Partial or complete social isolation; lack of appropriate learning experiences

Abused animals are often withdrawn, distrustful, and depressed. A particularly sensitive animal may cower in a corner, unwilling to venture further into their environment. Will refuse to interact with humans with the possibility to react aggressively if handled.

Abused dogs display higher levels of several behavioral characteristics that are common reasons people give for relinquishing their pet to a shelter, including hyperactivity and aggression toward unfamiliar people and dogs. The aggression we speak about is not a genetic one. Very few dogs are genetically aggressive. Here the aggression is an effect after cause. The cause can vary from negative interaction with different stimuli or lack of interaction the effect being the need to protect themselves by attacking. After all, they learn from us and the best defense is the fastest offence.

So, no matter how hard they try to find families for abused dogs, the people or NGOs who try to do that fail most of the times because instead of trying to work with abused dogs and then give them for adoption and informing the future owner of the problems the dogs have, these dogs are promoted for adoption as normal dogs with no real problems.

Our approach:

To break this chain and change mentalities, we want to create a canine behaviour rehabilitation center where these dogs could learn again how to behave and then find families for them.

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Dora Ghecenco **Crețu Anamaria**
0740 768 762 0758 485 037

SWIFT: BTRLRO22
RON: RO70BTRLRONCRT0438616101

EUR: RO20BTRLEURCRT0438616101
USD: RO24BTRLUSDCRT0438616101
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Plus, on the long term, it is much more wisely to invest in rehabilitating the dogs, informing people about canine behaviour rehabilitation and working on creating a sustainable solution for both the dogs and the community. As previous solutions failed, we strongly believe that a different approach needs to be taken to handle the stray dogs' situation in Romania.

Also financially wise is better to invest in rehabilitating a dog and faster promote it for adoption than keeping the dog in a shelter and spending money on accommodation, food, treatments, or solve behaviour problems that an already adopted dog has than to ignore the situation and prolong the suffering and distress on either part. Prevent abandonment and human/ dog misunderstandings.

Objective:

We want to create a canine behaviour rehabilitation center where we could work with these abused dogs, change the mentality of people who adopt shelter dogs and offer a sustainable solution for the dog abandonment problem. We want to change the now known shelters where dogs are kept in kennels and feed while people think that is wonderful and enough.

We also aim to develop educational programs for the community so that they can acknowledge the necessity of canine behaviour rehabilitation and understanding that a dog needs more than food and water to be happy and well. We want to develop a collaboration with public shelters and NGOs to implement these programs with them.

Activities:

- Rehabilitating a previously abused/ not socialized dog requires patience and realistic expectations.
- Providing a stable, calm environment, and protection from fear triggers are essential to building confidence and trust for the dog in need.
- Desensitization combined with counter-conditioning are the next step after an abused pet is stabilized.
- Every case is different and requires different approach. Also, depending on the level of the situation the time is adjusted.

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- Working on a regular basis with every case, providing controlled areas that are similar to the everyday life in a family for a better and faster development.

We will only use positive reinforcement methods when working with our dogs, as we believe that this is the only way to rehabilitate the dogs and have good results on a long term.

One of our mottos is: "Fearful dogs are not broken!" and we base on it with every new case.

In our vision the rehabilitation center will be in need of:

- Our dog team - dogs we work with and that we know very well which can help us with problematic dogs and their development
- Individuals kennels
- Outside play yards
- An indoor play yard
- Separate outdoor / indoor spaces where we could socialize dogs taking into consideration how they interact with each other and the environment (spaces that reproduce day to day life scenarios)

Our experience:

Part of our work can be found on our Facebook page - [Dogs on Hills](#), and also in the links below:

- Duke, adopted from the public dog shelter în Sighet - senior dog screaming of fear if only touched, now living in a loving family. Video of Duke [here](#) .
- Raava, almost a wild dog, gave birth to 7 puppies in a dangerous area, impossible to be caught. The video of how we caught Raava is [here](#) . We started working with her as you can see [here](#) , then [here](#) and [here](#) . Now Raava has her family and this how she is [now](#) .
- Lisa, one of Raava's puppies, was the shyest one. So we found a foster for her and started working with her as you see [here](#) . Now Lisa is the happiest [dog](#), adopted by Calin Grebles who can guarantee :)
- Another case of a seriously abused dog is Brick, and you can watch how we try to get him used to being brushed [here](#) .
- You can also check puppy [Masa](#), who was thrown away în a raffia bag over a tall fence and she was terrorised about everything. In this [video](#) we are trying to get her used to normal day to day activities.

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In the links above you will find just a small part of the evolution of several different dogs we work / worked with.

- Dogs that we managed to find families for till now: <http://bit.ly/2FoCtTh>
- Dogs with health issues which we try to help: <http://bit.ly/2hq2Fpp>
- Dogs which need canine behaviour rehabilitation: <http://bit.ly/2mmwTJs>
- Donations which we received up to this point: <http://bit.ly/2CVGvEm>

Up to this point we managed to buy a house with a big yard at the countryside to peacefully work with the dogs :)

And we also bought a backyard wooden house through an United Way and Accenture sponsorship to build for the dogs.

Thank you!

The Dogs on Hills team - Ana and Dora

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