

How One Hour a Week Can Change the Lives of Animals

Mary Jo Rulffes discovered how a simple action can help animals in need and, at the same time, bring out kindness and compassion in people. Now she wants everyone to know the value of one hour and how it can make a difference in the lives of animals in your community.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Mary Jo Rulffes, president of the Australian Cattle Dog Rescue Association (ACDRA), was nominated for a Game Changer Award by Nancy V.
- A serendipitous meeting during a 2013 shopping trip in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, brought Mary Jo Rulffes together with ACDRA, after she worked with them to rescue a cattle dog in need
- Not only were they able to rescue the dog, but Rulffes ended up adopting her — and soon became president of ACDRA
- ACDRA is run completely by volunteers and is 100% foster home based; since 2019, they've pulled about 850 dogs from Georgia alone
- Rulffes continues to be inspired by those she's met along the way; her favorite part about working with ACDRA, aside from the dogs, is "the rescue family in the rescue"

A serendipitous meeting during a 2013 shopping trip in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, brought Mary Jo Rulffes together with the Australian Cattle Dog Rescue Association (ACDRA), and they've been together ever since. Nominated for a Game Changer Award by Nancy V., Rulffes has changed the lives of hundreds of cattle dogs looking for homes — and it all started with Tanger.

"My husband looked down under a stairwell at the outdoor mall and saw this little red face looking out at him. It was a red cattle dog," she says. After finding out that the pup had been camped out at the mall for some time, with no one to help, she turned to social media.

"Within 10 minutes I had 72 responses from people offering to help us there in Lancaster. And most of them were with the rescue group I'm with now, ACDRA. We went that night to try to capture her, and she had been there so long that she wouldn't let us catch her. And a huge snowstorm was coming and we had to leave, which broke my heart. These very kind people set up a watch 24/7."

Saving Cattle Dogs From Georgia to Maine

Not only were they able to rescue the dog, but Rulffes ended up adopting her — and soon became president of ACDRA. "That started my journey with Australian Cattle Dog Rescue, because they were there to help me. They made me an immediate member so that I could help them and it just escalated from there. I started joining more

committees and here I am. It's due to Tanger that I'm part of this rescue, and now the president of this rescue," she says.

ACDRA is run completely by volunteers and is 100% foster home based. They have 800 active members, about 700 additional less active members, and rescue dogs from Georgia to Maine, going as far west as Kentucky and Tennessee. "[That's] simply because that's the limit of the resources we have as far as financial and membership right now. And with what we have now, it's hard to grow, especially in states further west," Rulffes says.

She and her husband have personally fostered about 250 cattle dogs so far. She's not sure how many dogs in all have been saved by ACDRA, but since 2019 about 850 dogs have been pulled from Georgia alone. And for dogs outside of their reach, they still try to offer help and keep the dogs out of shelters:

"We do have a re-homing team as well that helps people in states we don't cover, as far as foster homes and whatnot. We do help people as far as California re-home their dogs. They're listed on our website, they choose the home, we just help them a little bit."

Rescuing Brings Out Kindness and Compassion

It takes a special type of person to commit to animal rescue, and Rulffes continues to be inspired by those she's met along the way. Her favorite part about working with ACDRA, aside from the dogs, is "the rescue family in the rescue":

"I've met so many amazing people that I didn't realize truly still existed, because it's so hard sometimes to see the kindness and compassion and humility from people. But when you get into this kind of family, it's amazing what they will all do to save one of these dogs. I mean, I think the most favorite part of the rescue is the fostering of the dogs."

"But I have to say that the family and the people I have met ... I mean, I have friends in southern states, that work their butts off for me I've never met. It's pretty amazing. And I think it was great for me to go back to realizing that there are still good people."

Rulffes also encourages people to offer kindness and compassion to others, including those who are in the position of giving up their dog.

"Just remember that everybody still needs kindness and compassion and humility. Especially those people that are sometimes having to give up their dogs. I see a lot of really negative posts sometimes on people who are trying to find a new home for their dog."

"And I don't think sometimes people take the time to look into the backstory and find out that sometimes it's not really their choice. I would just really encourage everybody to be more compassionate and kind, and understand that it's not always their choice."

She stresses the importance of educating the community that rescues are an option, as well. "I mean, educate, educate, educate. Especially in the Southern states, they just, they need help. And they just don't understand the importance of spay and neuter, and the importance of reaching out to a rescue that can help you find a really good home for your dog, not just giving it to anybody."

Volunteer Your Time — Every Little Bit Helps

ACDRA is always in need of volunteers and fosters to help dogs in need — as are most rescue organizations. If you can spare any time at all, you can make a difference for animals in your community. "Join a rescue," Rulffes says. "You don't have to be active all the time. Just ask them, 'What can I do to help?' And don't be afraid to try."

If you'd like to learn more about the **[Australian Cattle Dog Rescue Association \(ACDRA\)](http://acdra.org)**, their website is acdra.org. "There is a link on there to our adoption application, our foster home membership applications," she adds. "We are always looking for new members and foster homes, need them desperately. And then we are on Facebook as Australian Cattle Dog Rescue Association. We are also on Instagram as Australian Cattle Dog Rescue Association."

Remember, even an hour a week or an hour a day can make a world of difference to a rescue organization near year. If you can't commit to volunteering or fostering, many rescues also have wishlists posted online for items or services they need. However, by volunteering you'll be able to serve not only animals but also your community, and you may end up with a new "family" in the process, just like Rulffes did.
