

Hats Off to Saving 800,000 Cats and Dogs Since 2003

In a country that has 10 to 12 million dogs on the streets and thousands in shelters, saving lives isn't easy, even when the animals are treated as part of society. Now with Dr. Ala's compassionate care, Soi Dog Foundation in Thailand is changing one animal and one person at a time.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dr. Alicja Izydorczyk, or Dr. Ala as she's known, was nominated for a Healthy Pets Game Changer Award for the incredible work she's doing with Soi Dog Foundation
- Established in 2003 in Phuket, Thailand, Soi Dog was formed to help street dogs and cats on the island
- They've since expanded to Bangkok and at least 25 provinces around Thailand, working with 13 mobile teams
- In addition to CNVR, which stands for catch, neuter, vaccinate, return, Soi Dog is actively engaged with the community to provide education about humane treatment of animals
- Since 2003, Soi Dog has reached nearly 800,000 animals; they also have a dog hospital and a cat hospital, where 150 dogs and 200 cats may be present at any given time
- Soi Dog's shelter may have up to 1,600 animals in their care, facilitating 40 to 50 adoptions each month. Most of their adoptions are local, but they also do international adoptions

Dr. Alicja Izydorczyk, or Dr. Ala as she's known, was nominated for a Healthy Pets Game Changer Award by Kris G. and Billi T., along with several others, for the incredible work she's doing with Soi Dog Foundation.

Established in 2003 in Phuket, Thailand, Soi Dog was formed to help street dogs and cats on the island. They've since expanded to Bangkok and at least 25 provinces around Thailand, working with 13 mobile teams. Each team consists of two vets, support staff and dog catchers who go into remote areas to sterilize free-roaming animals, helping to reduce the stray animal population.¹

According to Soi Dog, "Global studies have shown that once 80% of the population has been neutered, the number of animals living on the streets begins to decline naturally. By 2025, there should be very few strays on the streets and beaches of Phuket."² And this is only the start of the work this wonderful organization is doing.

Thai Dogs Are Living Longer, Better Lives Thanks to Soi Dog

Dr. Ala, a veterinarian, is originally from Poland, but having grown up in Singapore she was drawn back to Asia whenever she got the chance. "Every opportunity I had to travel, I would always be going back to Asia, volunteering and so on.

And when this opportunity popped up to be able to work in Phuket, in Thailand, for Soi Dog Foundation, I grabbed it immediately. It wasn't really even about the place. It was about Soi Dog Foundation and about the job," she said.

Dr. Ala has been working with Soi Dog Foundation for six years, and in that time they've experienced tremendous growth:

"Animals are very much treated as a part of society, so that is why we are able to do the work that we are doing in Thailand, because there's a wide acceptance of these animals out there in the streets.

Obviously, their welfare is a little bit compromised as well. So what we're trying to do and what we can see that we have already achieved in Bangkok, for example, and in Phuket to a large degree as well ... we're at such a stage where the dog population's very stable.

We have a growing old dog population, so the dogs are living longer, healthier, better lives. Right now we are battling an explosion in the cat population so we are very much focused on cats in Phuket, but in Bangkok, it's still dogs.

In the other provinces, it's still dogs. Dogs were the ones who ... suffered cruelty and neglect, poisonings and things like that. So we are actively battling against animal cruelty through different means."

In addition to CNVR, which stands for catch, neuter, vaccinate, return, Soi Dog is actively engaged with the community to provide education about humane treatment of animals. When they started, Dr. Ala estimated that only about 20% of dogs in the area had a sign of ownership, such as a collar or a water bowl that was dependably put out for them. Now, 80% of dogs have owners — an amazing change in just six years. They even help with outreach at local schools.

"We have a humane education program for kids at schools," Dr. Ala said. "We have kids who are 4 or 5 years old. They come over to the shelter, they spend the day. We visit schools. So before COVID, we had good numbers, we were reaching over 10,000 kids every year ... And now this year we are starting to get back to normal, so I'm hoping that it's again going to grow." Similarly, they work with the community to help free-roaming dogs:

"We've got community engagement, also doing workshops for people in the community, for adults as well, for people who are feeders for these dogs, because most of these dogs have some kind of feeder. There's no official owner. Some do have owners and they're free roaming, but most of them are community dogs, community cats.

So it wouldn't be one person who would say, 'That that's my dog,' but many would feed them and take care of them. And the only missing thing is the veterinary care and so on. This is where Soi Dog comes in also, into care. So every day we pick up dogs and cats for treatment, about 20, 30 animals every single day."

Soi Dog Has Reached 800,000 Animals Since 2003

Soi Dog is enacting positive change one animal and one person at a time. Since 2003, they've reached nearly 800,000 animals.³ They have a dog hospital and a cat hospital, where 150 dogs and 200 cats may be present at any given time. Dr. Ala said:

"I'm inspired by the people that work at Soi Dog, by the perseverance of our vets and veterinary staff and the vet support staff. It's not an easy job every single day to be able to cope with ... The animals that come into our hospital are in a very bad state.

If they are well enough to be treated offsite, so in the temple, on the beach, wherever these animals are, in the homes of people who are low income, we will go out there with our community outreach program and we will treat those animals there in situ.

We do about 1,500 treatments every month offsite. So any of the animals that come into our hospitals are really in a serious condition ... be it a cruelty case, be it a road traffic accident ... It can take its toll, but our team is very strong. I'm very, very proud of them. Very, very proud."

Meanwhile, their Soi Dog's shelter may have up to 1,600 animals in their care, facilitating 40 to 50 adoptions each month. Most of their adoptions are local, but they also do international adoptions.

"I would like everybody to know that you always have a choice," Dr. Ala said. "You can choose the more compassionate route or you can go for the easier route or do what everybody else is doing, but it's important to choose what is right, what you feel is right.

And in the case of animals, it'll be adoption ... Especially in a country that is struggling with an overpopulation of dogs and cats like Thailand. We estimate about 10 to 12 million dogs on the streets in Thailand and thousands in the shelters."

If you'd like to learn more, you can find Soi Dog at their website soidog.com,⁴ as well as on social media. "We're very quick to respond," Dr. Ala said. "So please reach out. The more donations and support we have, the more work we can do. And we are super grateful for that."

Sources and References

^{1, 2, 3} [Soi Dog, About Us](#)

⁴ [Soi Dog](#).
