

# Tackling Pet Overpopulation: A Matchmaker for Rescue Dogs

Imagine describing your lifestyle, personality and what you're looking for, and having someone with a proven track history match you up with the ideal homeless dog. It's happening right now, and here is how you can get involved.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dr. Turkan Ertugrul, nominated for a Game Changer Award by D. Roe, founded Saver of Souls Pet Rescue, located in Hampton Roads, Virginia
- Saver of Souls Pet Rescue initially focused on saving California Chihuahuas, but now does a lot of local rescues as well, with Chihuahuas and other breeds
- They're entirely volunteer-based and rely on donations for funding. All of their animals live in foster homes while they're waiting to be adopted
- In addition to focusing on dogs with health or behavioral issues, Dr. Ertugrul has a knack for matching people with the dog that's the right fit for them — and finding the perfect pairing
- If you'd like to learn more about Savor of Souls Pet Rescue, you can find them at their website, [SaverofSoulsPetRescue.com](http://SaverofSoulsPetRescue.com), as well as on Facebook

Dr. Turkan Ertugrul, nominated for a Game Changer Award by D. Roe, always knew she wanted to be a veterinarian, but her passion for rescue came later, after a Chihuahua “that fit in one hand” came into her clinic. “It was an instant connection with him,” she said, but his owner, a backyard breeder, didn't really want him.

“So I took this little dog,” Dr. Ertugrul says, “and he's my heart and soul. I still have him. That was about ... 10 years ago. So then, the Chihuahuas won my heart after that.” Soon, she began to look for a chihuahua friend, and fell in love with one at a shelter in California. It was another kismet meeting, as it introduced her to a need for help finding homes for California Chihuahuas.

## Bringing West Coast Chihuahuas to Homes in the East

After adopting her pup from a California shelter, Dr. Ertugrul realized there were many others still looking for homes. “As I got back online looking at other little Chihuahuas ... I noticed that a lot of these little Chihuahuas I was interested in, a few days later, we'd see, 'Rest in peace. Sorry, we failed you.' These dogs didn't get adopted.” As she began networking with rescues in the area, she realized she needed to do more.

*“So I got involved with other rescues out there, and it sort of evolved into, I need to become a 501(c)(3) so I can get some donations so I can help transport some of these dogs to the East Coast where everybody's looking for Chihuahuas. Whereas California and Texas, they roam the streets, and so that's kind of how it evolved.”*

Dr. Ertugrul started Saver of Souls Pet Rescue, located in Hampton Roads, Virginia. They're entirely volunteer-based and rely on donations for funding. All of their animals live in foster homes while they're waiting to be adopted. Saver of Souls Pet Rescue now does a lot of local rescues as well, with Chihuahuas and other breeds.

"We used to fly them over but the prices have gone up dramatically. So I can't get as many from out there as I used to, but I still get one periodically ... If I can get them here, I get them here," she says.

## A Gift for Matching the Right Home With the Right Dog

Dr. Ertugrul and her team are often able to help out the pups that no one else will — those with health or behavioral issues:

*"A lot of dogs we get — and we're kind of known for this now — they either have behavior problems or they have medical problems. Medical problems, because people know I'm a vet, and so they're, 'Give it to her, she'll fix it.'"*

*The behavior problems ... Chihuahuas are known to be aggressive fighters, and they're really not. They're just terrified because people don't socialize them properly, so I love seeing these dogs either come to full health, or their behavior changes. I really work on trying to socialize them, because they've never been socialized.*

*They've been coddled and carried their whole lives because they're Chihuahuas and they don't have any self-confidence. So I like to build their confidence, get them to where they're not terrified of every person they see. They don't have to like everybody they see. They just can't try to bite everybody they see."*

She also has a knack for matching people with the dog that's the right fit for them — and finding the perfect pairing. It's one of the things she loves most about her rescue efforts:

*"We don't want just any home. We want the perfect home for that dog. And I'll have people, they'll message me, 'Oh, I really love this dog,' and they'll tell me a little bit about their lifestyle, and I'm like, 'Yes, this is a great dog, but this is not your dog. Why don't you meet this one? This one is going to fit in with your personality style.' So I'm kind of like a matchmaker in that way. And people laugh because I really do have a knack for putting the right person with the right dog."*

## Working Together to Help the Pet Overpopulation Problem

Being in the trenches, Dr. Ertugrul sees the heartbreaking reality of pet overpopulation daily. "We're having to say no to taking in dogs now, well, because I just don't have the foster space for it," she says. "It got worse since the pandemic. Everybody went out and got a dog because they were staying at home, and now they're back at work and they're dumping these dogs. Every shelter is full."

She encourages all pet owners to get pet health insurance, "because they do get sick. And if you can't afford it, that's when animals get dumped and they end up in shelters or they end up coming to me ... So ... I think everybody should try to get it for their pets. It really does help out immensely." Dr. Ertugrul also shares the importance of **spaying and neutering** pets and avoiding puppy mills:

*"We're not going to rescue our way out of it. The only way to stop it is to fix your pets. If you want a purebred animal, that's fine. Get it. Do your research. Don't support these puppy mills that are just pumping out poor quality dogs. I feel sorry for the dogs. Somebody needs to get them. But you're supporting an industry.*

***Look for a reputable breeder.*** *If you can't meet the parents of that dog, or at least the mother of that puppy you're getting ready to buy, then it's probably a puppy mill. Because a reputable breeder, they will interview you for the puppy. They don't just let anybody have it. So if you're going to buy a dog, buy a dog, but be responsible about it. Support the good breeders that are promoting betterment of their breed. Don't support these puppy mills."*

If you'd like to learn more about Dr. Ertugrul and Savor of Souls Pet Rescue, you can find them at their website, **[SaverofSoulsPetRescue.com](http://SaverofSoulsPetRescue.com)**, as well as on Facebook. In addition to relying on monetary donations and volunteer fosters, they're looking for volunteers to improve their website so they can reach a wider audience. To get in touch, email [SOSPetRescue@yahoo.com](mailto:SOSPetRescue@yahoo.com) or message them through their Facebook page, Saver of Souls Pet Rescue.

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