

A doggedly determined group of volunteers

Members of the Canadian Chihuahua Rescue and Transport group will go to any lengths to help a little dog find its new home.

TONY CLARKE

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Like most pets, chihuahuas need love, too. Canadian Chihuahua Rescue and Transport (CCRT) is a national charitable organization made up of volunteers throughout Canada, who work together to rescue, foster and provide necessary care for homeless, abandoned and neglected chihuahuas across Canada.

The goal of CCRT is to assist in finding new homes for pets whose owners, for various reasons, can no longer provide care for them. Eventually they match dogs with friendly adoptive homes that have been properly screened and approved by regional volunteers, who also provide ongoing support to new owners.

The idea to form an organization focused strictly on chihuahuas, said Nathalie Houle, chair and co-founder of CCRT, came after a similar group in the U.S., in the late 1980s, had no volunteers in the state of Vermont.

A number of chihuahuas, she said, needed to be rescued from a pretty bad situation during that time, so a few Canadians decided to fly down and bring the dogs to Canada.

From there, she explained, it was clear there was a need to form a Canadian group to help chihuahuas, and in 2001, they obtained national charitable status.

"It just started to evolve throughout the country and here we are today with over 160 volunteers and we are closing in on having rescued and re-homed nearly 400 chihuahuas and chihuahua mixed breeds," said Houle.

"There was really no official, strategic plan to get it started. To be quite honest, it really just happened," she said, noting she met some fellow chihuahua lovers while chatting online and it took off from there.

In making sure each chihuahua they receive ends up in a good home, the CCRT will transport a dog anywhere in Canada. It's possible a rescued dog and a potential new



HERALD PHOTO BY NORMAN

Lethbridge resident Bobbi Davis watches Chase the chihuahua at her home in West Lethbridge. Davis is a member of a volunteer organization called Canadian Chihuahua Rescue and Transport, which helps the small dogs find new homes.

home could be at opposite ends of the country, or as close as neighbouring towns. Whatever the case, Houle said if a dog is a good fit for a loving home, they will get the dog to its new owners.

"We will fly a dog to its new home as long as it is healthy enough, and if it's close, we will drive them. Volunteers always step up and find a way to deliver the dog."

The work and commitment of volunteers is crucial to the success of the organization. Some dogs they have are ready for adoption while others are in foster care.

Lethbridge resident Bobbi Davis is currently fostering a one-year-old chihuahua named Chase.

This past August, Davis felt the need to do something different and decided to volunteer with CCRT. She went through what she describes as an extensive but important application process. From there, she agreed to foster Chase, who was shipped to her all the way from

Nova Scotia.

"I've always looked after other people's dogs and so I applied to foster a dog and Chase was eventually sent to me," said Davis.

"I think it is definitely interesting that they send dogs all over the country, but with that being said, I think it is great."

She added she respects the CCRT for going to such lengths to ensure good homes for chihuahuas.

Davis said Chase is a well-behaved dog and adds she will continue to foster the dog until he is ready for a good home and one becomes available.

"I find it so rewarding to help get him ready for a forever home. It's hard not to get attached, but I have to keep telling myself that he will eventually go to a home where he will get all of the attention he deserves."

Since she already owns a few dogs and cats, Davis said the thought of adopting Chase has crossed her

mind, but deep down, she feels she would fit better in a home with on-one attention.

Houle points out about 50 per cent of the dogs the CCRT rescue come from over-crowded, understaffed and under-financed shelters and humane societies.

There are many valid reasons, she said, why people can no longer care for a dog such as illness, relocation or people passing away, but added there are other reasons which sometimes makes CCRT volunteers roll their eyes. What the reason, though, she indicates they never say no to taking a dog.

The CCRT also ensures all chihuahuas placed through the organization are microchipped, spayed or neutered and properly vaccinated.

If you are interested in adopting a chihuahua, volunteering in your region, or want further information, e-mail info@ccrt.net or go online to www.ccrt.net.