

## Helping Homeless Animals in Korea

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For three years, each Christmas, my husband and I have hosted a Christmas party in our home. We currently live in Yangyang, Kangwon Province. Everyone got excited about our party and wanted to bring Christmas gifts. I thought about it, and I asked our friends to bring a donation for our local animal shelter. I set up a box in our home and guests were very kind and brought bags of cat and dog food. My husband and I also contributed cans and bags of dog and cat food. That was December 14th, 2009 and ever since then, each Christmas we load up our car with the donations from our friends and bring them to our animal shelter in Sokcho.

The previous animal shelter was very small and not sufficient for the animals living there. After a while, I learned that construction had begun on a newer, larger and better facility for the abandoned animals. I knew right away that I wanted to help out these homeless animals in some way and get involved with an adoption or fostering program.

My husband, a friend and I were at our local health club one day. I heard them talking about running in a race. They wanted me to join, but I'd never run before. After a day of thinking about it, I decided that if I was going to run in the **Chosunilbo Marathon** in Chuncheon, I wanted to run it to help animals. I knew I wanted to raise awareness and money for these helpless animals. I started training right away and it was very hard.



The race was in October... just a month away! Could I run 10km? I had to. For animals. There was no backing out.

I made brochures, explaining my passion to help the homeless animals in Korea. I sent them to Canada and I passed them out to my Korean friends, foreign friends and co-workers here in Korea in the hopes that they would support me in my effort to help the homeless animals of Korea. I started to get donations from Korea and abroad. I even got my school, at the time, Youngrang Elementary School, to help. Teachers and students encouraged me so much.

My students made a box and put it in our school for donations. They also wrote letters, promising to help volunteer at the shelter. My students raised nearly 100,000won for our shelter. When I was finished fundraising, I had raised 1,340,000won. I felt so proud of myself and everyone who supported me, especially my Korean students. A news article was even written about the animal shelter in our local newspaper.

After running the race and raising so much money and awareness for the animal

shelter, I decided that each year of my life, I will run a race for abandoned animals and get as many people involved as I can... no matter where in the world I am.

**Marathon.** I raised 1,500,000won. A portion of that money will be used to purchase a heater for the shelter, as the cold winter months approach. Many friends also donated blankets and food. Some students from Joyang Elementary School, my current school, even wrote letters, pledging to help care for animals and love them unconditionally. My very good Korean friend helped me make brochures and, together, we handed them out to everyone we knew and even some strangers. Many people had no idea what this was about, so explaining to them my mission was a real eye-opener for them. It really made them aware that animals here, and all over the world, have problems and it should be up to us humans to help them in any way we can.

When I do my work for our local animal shelter, I feel like I am uniting Koreans and foreigners... working together to make a better life for abandoned animals here in Korea and in the small town of Sokcho. Together, we're letting people know that they can make a difference and that anything is possible.

The new animal shelter is nearing completion. I've visited the shelter several times and I meet regularly with the manager to discuss such things as foster programs, adoption and starting a volunteer program. I managed to get one dog, whose new name is Khaleesi, a new home with a loving family in Sokcho. The new parents are an American



couple who teach in Sokcho, at Youngrang Elementary School. I also got a tiny kitten a home. Another friend of mine from England, who lives in Yangyang, fell in love with the kitten and took her home. Both animals are so lucky to have found loving homes and I personally feel very lucky to have been a part of it.

The shelter currently has between 30-40 dogs and cats who are in desperate need of a loving home. My goal is to help get as many of the animals homes as I can. I will continue to educate people, both Korean and foreign, about the animal shelter and let them know how they can help. Of course, there have been challenges along my journey. Spreading the word about the animal shelter hasn't been easy. Some people are



disinterested and forget about the homeless animals who have been neglected or simply thrown out on the streets, left to die in some cases. Asking people for donations isn't always easy as some people just don't want to listen to my story. Some people don't understand why I ask for donations or even why I care. In spite of these obstacles, I continue to try and do what I can and get people in my community involved.

Being so deeply involved with the animal shelter has really opened my eyes. Through my work, I've educated my students, co-workers and friends on our animal shelter and how to better care for animals. I've seen my students work hard to raise funds. I've watched them become interested in homeless animals and try to think about how they can make a difference. I've also become closer with my colleagues in discussing my shelter work with them.

I've even managed to start a running group here in Sokcho. We have both Korean and foreign members. Not only am I running for the shelter, but I'm also getting people out into our Korean community. Together, we're spreading the word about homeless animals and we're getting healthy and staying active by doing so.

Being a part of my Korean community is so important to me and it's also very important for me to get my friends involved in our community. I vow to continue to work hard for the animal shelter by educating my students, my friends and my colleagues about animals who are in need of a home.

Korea has made me passionate about helping homeless animals. No matter where in the world I am, whether it's Korea or Canada or someplace else, I will take with me what I've learned... that anything is possible and we all can make a difference, even if it's a small one.

I have so many people to thank: my students, my co-workers, my Korean friends, my foreign friends, my family but most importantly, all animals who give humans unconditional love, who always make us smile, who always listen and who always depend on us for love and a safe and warm home. I will help you. This is my promise.

