



Photos courtesy Rugby's Rescue House of Pagosa Springs

Rugby's Rescue House of Pagosa Springs founder Amy Wilson is seeking volunteers help to fund-raise and find permanent and foster homes in her quest to save and rehome stray dogs. Below: One of Wilson's rescue dogs with her puppies.

# 101 and counting:

## Rugby's Rescue House works to save and rehome stray dogs



**By Joe Napolitan**  
Staff Writer

Since its establishment in 2019, Rugby's Rescue House of Pagosa Springs has been working tirelessly to save and rehome stray dogs from area Native American reservations.

Founder Amy Wilson and her team recently passed a significant milestone in their mission to "rescue, save, and repeat."

"Since I officially started the rescue, we have successfully saved 101 dogs to date. That's transferring 11 dogs to other Colorado rescues and 90 dogs adopted out directly through Rugby's Rescue House," Wilson explained on April 20. "With six to eight foster families, that number could easily double."

Wilson shared that as a new nonprofit amidst a pandemic, she has faced difficulties finding foster homes,

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# Rescue

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fundraising and spreading the word about her shelter.

"The foster families are the big one. That's something I really need help expanding on," she said.

Wilson founded Rugby's Rescue House, named after a dog she rescued from Hurricane Katrina, after 20 years of working in the veterinary industry, where she saw firsthand the magnitude of the crisis surrounding homeless animals on reservations.

"The Navajo Nation has a huge, huge problem with stray animals and the numbers are just staggering of how many dogs are homeless," Wilson said. "They tend to pack up and they can be a problem for other people and their household pets."

One figure reported by Navajo Nation Animal Control Officer Kevin Gleason in 2011 estimated that there were roughly 450,000 stray animals within the reservation.

At that time, Gleason also estimated that there were 25 livestock damage cases each month.

Another report by Hannah Grover of the Daily Times (Farmington, N.M.) in 2014 estimates that 3,000 people are treated each year for animal bites, and attributes cases of Rocky Mountain fever spread to domestic pets to ticks from reservation strays.

"I think the management has gotten a little bit better, but it's just so overwhelming down there.

There are a lot of organizations in the Navajo Nation that do spay and neuter clinics every weekend to slowly chip away at the problem," said Wilson, who estimates the number has reduced to 200,000 over the last decade.

"People in that area are starting to get more education, they really want to get their animals taken care of, they just don't have the means. That's where I come in and try to work with the Chama humane society and different organizations, and together we try to find places for these animals as quickly as we can."

The dogs are often recovered in poor condition.

Wilson explained that half of the dogs are surrendered from their owners. Others are strays, found with litters in ditches covered in ticks and fleas, and infested with heartworms. One rescued mother had to be separated from her babies seven days after birth to receive life-saving medications for a tick-borne illness. All dogs are unfamiliar with living in homes and human interaction.

"When they come to my house, they are brought into a home environment and treated like one of my dogs who sleep in the house and spend time with kids and other dogs. They're integrated pretty quickly that way so they can start adjusting to what life could be," Wilson said.

Wilson explained that any dogs

that arrive at her shelter are vaccinated, sterilized and microchipped before they are adopted, care funded through adoption fees. Additional care including medical treatments, food and puppy pads between arrival and adoption costs hundreds of dollars beyond what is provided by adoption fees.

Along with managing a veterinary hospital full-time and directing her nonprofit, Wilson is working to obtain an animal transporter certification that grants more streamlined efficiency to her mission of resolving the reservation dog crisis.

There are several ways you can help:

- Register to adopt or foster a dog at [www.rugbysrescue.com](http://www.rugbysrescue.com). Foster families care for dogs anywhere between several days and one month while a permanent home is found.

- Offer a donation through the website. In addition to monetary donations, supplies such as food and puppy pads are tremendously helpful.

- Help spread the word and follow the shelter at [www.facebook.com/rugbysrescue](http://www.facebook.com/rugbysrescue) or on Instagram, @rugbysrescue, where you can view rescued dogs available for adoption.

- Use the contact form on the website, [rugbysrescue.com](http://rugbysrescue.com), to learn about volunteer opportunities with Rugby's Rescue House.

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