



National Mill Dog Rescue™

# 2016 Annual Report



## *From our* **FOUNDER**

Dear friends,

As 2016 drew to a close, the realization hit that the 10th anniversary of Lily's rescue was just a few weeks away. What a journey the last decade has been

for all of us! Incredible highs, devastating lows, and everything in between, but each experience continues to be deeply rewarding. At the end of a decade of work, each and every day our focus remains the same—it's about the dogs. That said, 2016 was a year of reflection—looking back across nearly a decade rescuing dogs, almost 12,000 of them! Remembering so many faces, so many stories of healing and redemption. Although the core of our mission remains unchanged, throughout 2016 we worked on strengthening the organizational framework for the future of National Mill Dog Rescue.

Across the year, we rescued 938 dogs and set new goals for several of our programs, including a restructuring of the Adoptions Department. We strengthened our relationships with transfer partners and added new ones, and we examined strategies for taking our marketing and social media efforts to the next level.

While we had slightly fewer adoptions than the previous year, the population of dogs that are being surrendered to us have more complex health and behavioral issues that need to be addressed prior to placing them into permanent homes. The number of commercial breeders continues to dwindle; and while that is good news, many of those who release their dogs to us are turning over dogs that are older and have far greater medical needs.

Our volunteer base continues to be strong and is the life blood of the day-to-day work that keeps our organization growing and strong. My gratitude to our volunteers is truly immeasurable, as not only have they helped make my dream come true, but without them, thousands of dogs would have never enjoyed their final years as cherished family members.

Last, but certainly not least, our supporters are vital to our success.

Without you, what we do would not be possible. By the year's end, we had saved 11,800 dogs; and, quite honestly, we could not have done it without the unwavering support and encouragement of each and every one of you.



The eyes of these survivors reflect the gratitude that we feel every day for being able to give them the lives they so richly deserve. We are blessed to witness miracles, as the most broken among them transform into the dogs they were always meant to be. These precious souls are often terrified and confused when they are rescued from the confines of their wire cages, the only lives they have ever known. With love, medical care and time, each dog we rescue teaches us great lessons in forgiveness and resilience. From the moment the dogs are in our arms, experiencing their first moments of freedom, to the day they go to their forever homes, our hearts are filled with joy.

In closing, as we prepare for a new year and new challenges, one thought stands out. We are the lucky ones. It is our honor, our pride and our joy to be able to guide these dogs on their journey to freedom.

With love and gratitude,

*Theresa Strader*

Executive Director



## *Mission* **STATEMENT**

To rescue, rehabilitate and rehome discarded breeding dogs and to educate the general public about the cruel realities of the commercial dog breeding industry.

National Mill Dog Rescue is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Peyton, Colorado.

## *Our Humble* **BEGINNINGS**

National Mill Dog Rescue (NMDR) started with a one-sentence email plea for help with a large number of dogs in need. Over the subsequent decade, it has grown into a mission that has saved well over 11,000 dogs.

In February 2007, Theresa Strader received a brief email soliciting help for “Fifty Italian Greyhounds in need.” Twenty-five years of rescue work, coupled with a lifelong love of the breed, compelled her to offer her assistance. She then learned that a large commercial dog breeding facility, a puppy mill, was going out of business. The breeder would be auctioning off her entire kennel, 561 dogs; 49 were Italian Greyhounds.



Three days later, Theresa loaded up her van, and, along with her teenage daughter, made the 750-mile journey to the auction site in Missouri. With nothing more than the desire to help dogs in need, they had no idea what to expect.

After registering for their auction number, Theresa and her daughter entered the first of several buildings that housed the dogs. Within moments of entering the building, overwhelmed by the scene of hundreds of dogs frantically pacing in small wire cages, breathing in the stench of the filth the dogs were forced to live in and witnessing the fear and desperation in their eyes, Theresa knew she would spend the rest of her life bringing a voice to the dogs held captive by this shameful industry.

## “I will love you ‘til you die ...”



It was in the second building that Theresa would first lay eyes on #251 . . . a fragile, 7-year-old Italian Greyhound, huddled in the back of her cage. Taking a closer look, she could see and feel the years of neglect this little dog had suffered. Her face was twisted and deformed, her lower jaw had rotted away. She was thin and trembling in fear.

As #251 looked into her eyes, Theresa whispered into her cage: “I’m gonna take you from this hell and love you ‘til you die.” Theresa made that promise on February 17, 2007, and in that moment National Mill Dog Rescue was born.

Theresa and her daughter came home with 13 dogs, far more than they had anticipated. What Theresa also came home with was a burning desire to tell the truth about the reality behind pet store and internet puppies. She got right to work, building her mission, filing for

nonprofit status; and she began to educate far and wide. People listened, and volunteers began coming to her home to help care for the dogs. NMDR was on its feet!



## Who WE ARE

National Mill Dog Rescue is known and respected around the globe for its work in rescuing puppy mill survivors. We are a registered 501(c)3 organization and rely on donations to continue rescuing more dogs from the confines of their wire cages.



National Mill Dog Rescue, or NMDR, was started in the backyard of Theresa Strader's home in February 2007. In the years that followed, it has grown into an organization that is known around the world. NMDR employs 22 people and is grateful for the devoted work of hundreds of volunteers to handle the day-to-day operations.

As we close in on another landmark, 12,000 dogs rescued, we never stray from the founding mission statement: It's about the dogs. We will celebrate the 10th anniversary of Lily's rescue on Feb. 17, 2017. It is in her memory that thousands of dogs will get the love, medical care, and, ultimately, the homes they so richly deserve.

It is our goal to increase our financial resources, so that we can continue to provide top-notch care for these dogs that were neglected and used as "breeding machines," while we aid them in every aspect along their journey to freedom.



# 2016 SUMMARY

## Rescue Statistics

3 rescue vans  
60 or more dogs rescued per trip  
Frequency of trips: At least one per month  
Average cost of rescue mission: \$2500/trip  
938 dogs rescued  
756 dogs brought to our kennel

## Adoptions Program

606 dogs adopted  
Average # of Adoptions per month: 50  
Average time from arrival to adoption: 86 days  
100+ dogs living at the kennel  
Approximately 100 dogs living in foster care

## Veterinary Care & Rehabilitation

Average cost per dog for basic care: \$300  
Dogs needing extensive dentals: approximately 50%  
Costs for specialty care: \$10,000 per month  
475 spay/neuter surgeries  
Average number of dogs in rehab program: 13  
700 lbs. of dog food used monthly

## Education & Outreach

Adoption Fairs: 18  
Community Programs: 44  
Groups Volunteering: 2 per month

## Volunteers

95 percent volunteer-based  
589 people registered  
19,898 hours recorded  
177 foster home

## Social Media Platforms

Facebook  
Twitter  
Instagram  
YouTube

## *Dog Rescue* **AND CARE**



### **Rescue**

A typical rescue trip involves a two- to three-day journey covering 1,500 to 2,500 miles across several states. Our rescue teams keep the dogs safe and comfortable during the journey home and are able to provide basic medical care when necessary. Occasionally, there will be an emergency stop at a veterinary clinic if a dog needs more skilled attention.



### **Intake**

Our rescue teams begin assigning numbers for intake and collaring the dogs while still on the road. When the teams arrive back at Lily's Haven, our offloading team is ready to welcome the new arrivals. The dogs are placed in kennel runs with nutritious food, fresh water, a bed and a blanket. For many, these basic comforts are all "firsts" that these dogs have been denied for their entire lives.

Any dogs requiring immediate veterinary care are transported to Powers Pet Emergency and Specialty in Colorado Springs.

The newcomers are given time to acclimate to their new surroundings before completing the intake process. We typically wait a day or two, and then our intake team takes them through various stations. The dogs are named,



photographed, documented, examined, vaccinated, dewormed and heartworm-tested.



Finally, our grooming team works magic with our new residents. Their “spa day” washes away what is often years of filth, and their true beauty begins to emerge!

In the days that follow, the veterinary team performs spay/neuter surgery, microchipping, treatment for severe dental disease and a multitude of other necessary procedures.



## Rehabilitation Program

National Mill Dog Rescue is fortunate to have an exceptional rehabilitation team of volunteers who work with our most troubled dogs. These dogs are too traumatized to be ready for

adoption when they arrive at our kennel. Our tireless volunteers work with each dog on his or her individual issues until the dogs learn to trust and realize that we are not going to hurt them.

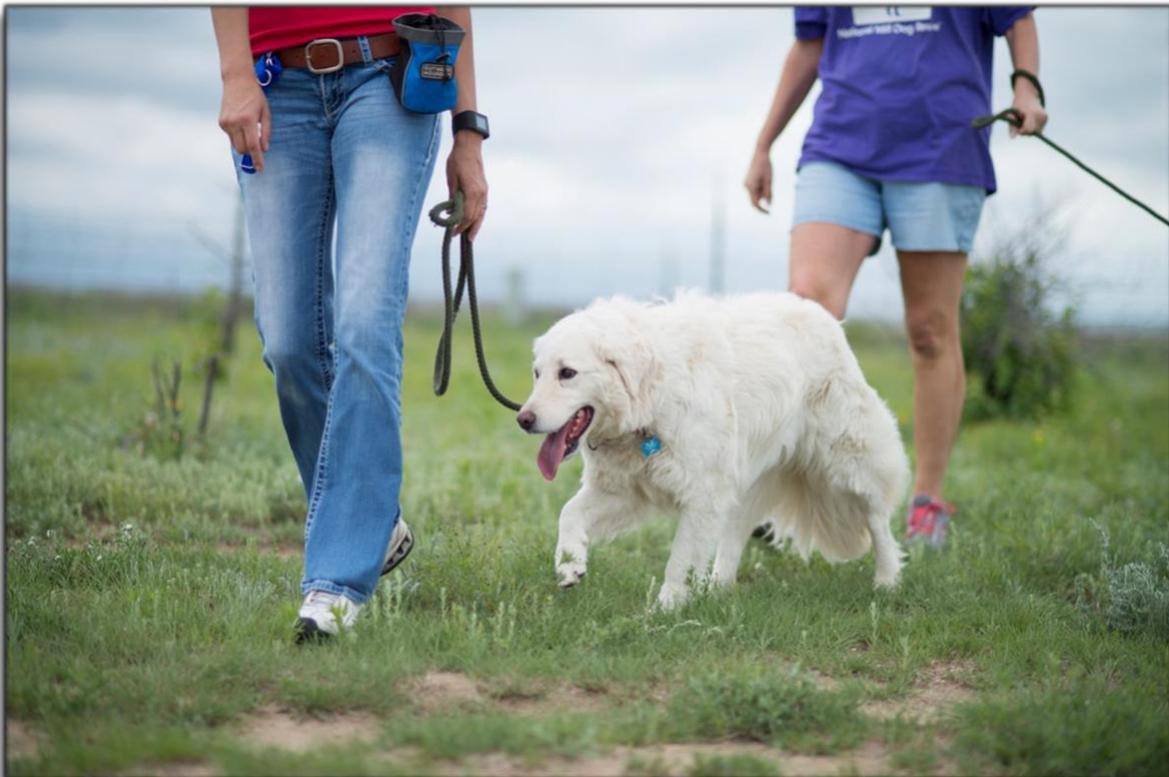
The process starts at intake, when red, yellow, or green cards are put on the dogs' paperwork to indicate how





stressed they are. A green dog is more social and can be handled by any volunteer. Yellow dogs are timid and will only be approached by experienced volunteers. Red dogs can only be handled by select members of the rehabilitation team who are trained in special techniques for working with very fearful dogs. This system has greatly reduced the

number of dogs who are labeled as biters, because their temperaments are taken into account, and the scared dogs are handled more carefully.



The dogs are given a week to settle into their new environment before they are evaluated for rehabilitation. If a dog is placed in the rehab program, three or four rehab team members are assigned to work with that dog. An assessment is completed, and a treatment plan is developed. Many dogs on rehab are fear biters.

Some walk well on a leash, and others resist. Many are afraid of being touched or picked up, because they've never experienced gentle touches in their lifetime. The rehab team meets once a month to assess the progress of each dog and make adjustments to the rehabilitation plan.



Very often, the process of working with an individual dog begins with a rehab team member simply entering the enclosure, sitting quietly, and possibly tossing treats in the dog's direction without making eye contact. In the dogs' prior experience, any time someone approached them, they were treated roughly or actually hurt, so the first thing they learn is that the mere presence of a human being is not threatening. The time



move on to such things as offering a treat to the dog to take from his or her hand, gently touching the dog, picking up and carrying the dog, and introducing the leash. Walking on a leash is a requirement for graduating from the rehab program.



frame for this trust-building varies widely with each dog. Once trust has been established, the volunteer will

move on to such things as offering a treat to the dog to take from his or her hand, gently touching the dog, picking up and carrying the dog, and introducing the leash. Walking on a leash is a requirement for graduating from the rehab program.

A sensory enrichment program is often implemented using essential oils, aromatherapy and other olfactory stimuli such as frozen baby food.

Desensitization to common sounds, including the grooming room, and listening to soothing music or a cuddling in a rocking chair are used for calming.

Before dogs are taken off rehab, they are exposed to many different volunteers to make sure they are comfortable with all people and not just the few they have learned to trust. The most rewarding part of the rehab team's job is to see the dogs who once would bite or otherwise avoid all human contact, now happy in a home and acting just like any other dog.

## Veterinary Care Program



We are committed to taking care of all the dogs who are released to us, no matter how sick or how old. The dogs arrive with many medical concerns. These include severe dental disease, eye, ear, uterine and skin infections, neurological and cardiac conditions,

orthopedic problems, cancer and genetic deformities. Some dogs are blind or deaf and some are psychologically damaged from years of confinement.

We have two highly skilled veterinarians on staff, Dr. Traci Duncanson and Dr. Debbie St. Louis. They are assisted by our outstanding support staff of veterinary technicians and assistants. This team provides the complex medical care and attention required to facilitate healing.

Each dog receives a comprehensive medical exam, and a treatment plan is developed. Some are referred to specialists in the community, and all are provided with pain management to assure maximum comfort as they undergo life- saving procedures.

## Adoptions

Our adopters come from all over the country to adopt our special population of dogs. Education is at the forefront of our adoptions process. While most adopters have heard of puppy mills, most do not



realize all that it entails to actually welcome a puppy mill survivor into their home. After we receive an adoption application, each applicant participates in a phone interview with an adoptions counselor. It is at this time that we ensure that applicants are properly educated on our dogs, and we take time to answer any questions or concerns.



our most difficult ca

After the phone interview, approved adopters are invited to visit the kennel. We consider our staff to be “matchmakers,” and we go to great lengths to ensure that adopters leave with the best fit for their specific lifestyle.

Once a dog is in his or her forever home, we offer post-adoption support. A volunteer team member does a follow-up phone call on every adoption. If the dog or adoptive family is having a difficult time transitioning, we offer advice and continue to stay in touch until any problems are resolved. Our rehab team leader occasionally makes house calls to help.

## Post-adoption behavior support

For six months following an adoption, we offer free and expert guidance to help the adopters understand and correct behaviors that are common with mill dogs. A Facebook group called “From Puppy Mill to Pet” gives support to mill-dog adopters across the country. The page also offers members a platform to interact with each other about their experiences adopting a puppy mill survivor.



## Post-adoption lost dog support

Years of confinement and a lack of socialization leave many of our dogs fearful and potential flight risks. Our lost dogs team is made up of some of our most deeply committed volunteers, ready to mobilize on a moment's notice. They search for the dog and immediately mass-produce and distribute informational flyers on social media and throughout neighborhoods.

In 2016 our lost dogs team responded to 18 reported lost dogs. Fifteen of the dogs were successfully recovered.

Among those recovered was Foxey a small, long-haired Chihuahua. She went missing in Woodland Park, in the middle of a late winter storm. Volunteers drove through blizzard conditions on dangerous mountain roads to search for this little one. Humane traps were set and checked daily. Miraculously, after eight days in the Colorado wilderness, this tiny Chihuahua was found walking down a mountain road at night. The good Samaritans had seen posters that volunteers had hung up and knew who to call. Thankfully, Foxey was uninjured and returned to her grateful family.



## Education & Outreach

The education and outreach team embodies the second part of National Mill Dog Rescue's mission: to educate the general public about the cruel realities of the commercial dog breeding industry. They present information to schools that raise funds for NMDR, YMCA day camps, library groups, and anyone who is interested in hearing about puppy mills and adopting instead of buying from a pet store or on the internet. Many times, adopted puppy mill survivors accompany the volunteers and share their stories with the audience, much to the delight of children and adults alike.

The team also supports NMDR fundraisers, such as "Dining for the Dogs," with informational brochures and adopted or foster dogs, when permitted. These events are also a great opportunity to reach people who otherwise would not learn about puppy mills. Through education, we can make a difference in the future of the puppy mill industry.



## Fundraising EVENTS

### Dog Jog 2016



Our annual DOG JOG 5K FUNDRAISER took place in August at Cottonwood Creek Park. This family-friendly jog/walk featured five contests, music, food and costumes.

There were 24 sponsors, 349 participants, 32 vendors in the expo

and 100+ volunteers who made this event a huge success.

Dog Jog 2016 raised over **\$16,000.00!**



### Little River Band Benefit Concert



The Little River Band performed a fantastic concert on our property in Peyton in August. We rolled in a stage and prepared a field area for concert goers to spread out with lawn chairs, blankets and picnics. For more than two hours we enjoyed the band's excellent music and took pictures with the band. Concert-goers were invited to tour the kennel and meet the dogs.

This event raised over **\$17,000**

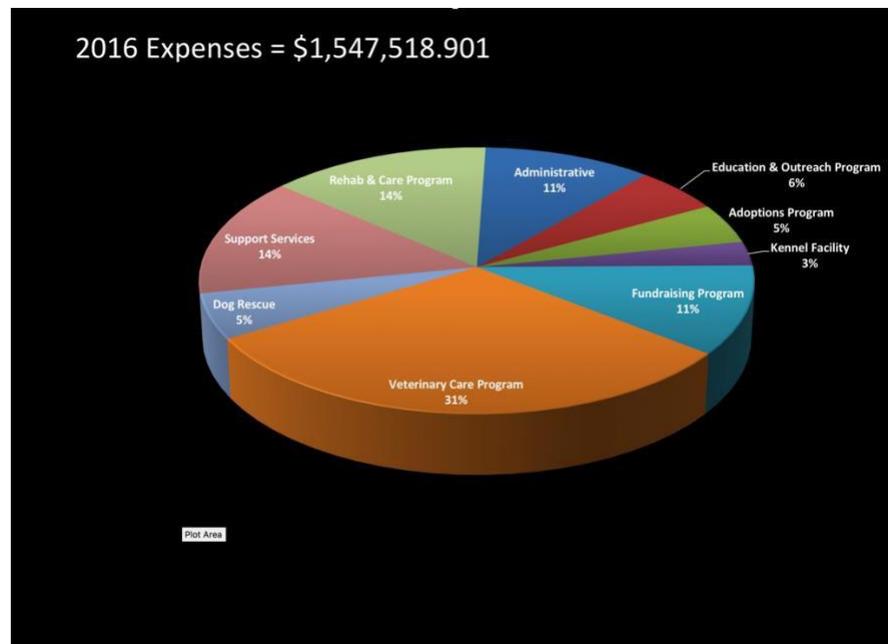
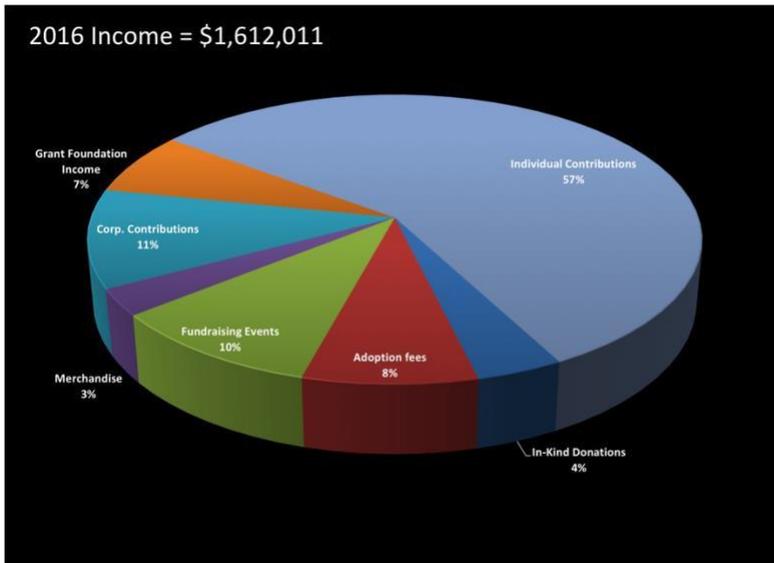
### "Believe" Gala

Our annual gala was held at the Wedgewood Inn in Black Forest in October. This event was emceed by meteorologist Rachael Plath. Guests watched a moving presentation by Theresa and viewed a video highlighting the NMDR mission and dogs rescued over the last nine years. There was a dog meet-and-greet area, and all enjoyed a delicious dinner. The silent and live auctions had great items and the bidding continued throughout the evening. This event raised over **\$26,000.**



## *Financial* INFORMATION

Compassionate individuals who care about our mission make up more than 50 percent of our donor base. They range from a handful who have the means to support us generously to those who can only drop spare change in a canister. We are incredibly grateful for ALL levels of support!



## *Board of* **DIRECTORS**

**Chairman:** Chris Thornton

**Vice Chairwoman:** Dee Ruppert

**Treasurer:** Richard Strader

**Secretary:** Helen Freeman

**Other Members:** Ron McClelland  
Charles Arnold