Our Story

ROLDA is a charity that helps abused, neglected and unwanted animals in Romania using a responsible, efficient, and humane approach. Our programs also serve pets with financially troubled owners such as senior citizens, retirees, and unemployed people.

ROLDA’s roots can be found in a small band of animal-lovers established in 1999, in response to the explosion of the stray dog population across the country. As the Soviet Union – and their heinous methods of keeping the stray population in check – retreated from Romania, many homeless took refuge in the huge, concrete industrial complexes they abandoned. With no Russian death-squads and newfound breeding grounds, the stray population has skyrocketed to current estimates of over 2 million.
ROLDA was founded by Dana Costin who proudly leads the charity to this day. Dana's eyes were opened to the desperate situation facing so many vulnerable dogs by Printz, a German Shepherd Dana found abandoned – and gravely injured – in a park following an illegal dogfight.

However, what began with Dana and Printz in their tiny apartment has blossomed into an international organization, recognized and registered across Europe, the UK and as far away as the USA and Australia.
To date, we are proud to say we have helped over 20,000 animals; each with a story to tell.

Our Scope

Our 2030 Ambitions, An Overview

- Affect a substantial and sustainable change in the numbers of dogs born in the wild
- Tackle the root causes of pet abandonment
- Educate the local community to be responsible pet owners
- End animal cruelty in both public shelters and the community
- Support animal welfare initiatives
- Continue to rehome responsibly
- Improve current sheltering facilities
- Begin construction of the PawzUp state-of-art care facility and community hub
Our Mission

We currently operate two shelters which offer sanctuary to up to 700 vulnerable dogs where they are cared for and loved.

Our Vision

ROLDA is working towards a world free from unwanted animals that suffer terribly on the streets and in the wilderness; a world where each dog and cat has the opportunity to live out their lives in comfort and happiness with their human companions.

Our Ultimate Goal

Our ultimate goal is to one day achieve a homeless animal population of nil, with every pet appropriately microchipped and added to the national registry, enforcing the legal responsibility between pet and owner.
Animals and people both benefit from healthy interaction but cannot ever justify abuse, neglect, cruelty or exploitation.

Our Core Beliefs

We believe humanity has an incredible gift of sharing our world with amazing creatures that inspire, in any decent human being, a profound sense of affection and wonder. We believe humanity has a moral responsibility to act as guardians of the natural world and all the wonderful creatures we are lucky with which to share it.

Romanian dogs are like every other dog. They are wholly innocent and ask only to love and be loved. We believe they share the same right to life, safety and happiness as any human being. Both ROLDA and the RSPCA agree,

Animals and people both benefit from healthy interaction but cannot ever justify abuse, neglect, cruelty or exploitation.

Every animal life is important in itself.

Animals possess emotions, feelings, memories and rights.

Animals enrich and improve our lives.

Every animal has the right to life and to live it without suffering.

Every animal has the right to die humanely and with dignity.

Every person should reflect on how their decisions and behavior affects animals.

No one should handle an animal ignorant of how they may react to human interference.

Every person can and should play their part in making a better world for both humans and animals.
## Our Major Milestones

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Dana established ROLDA, the first group of animal rescuers in Galati (Romania’s 5th-largest city located in the southeast of the country).</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>ROLDA purchased land in the village of Smardan (near Galati) in order to build what it is today, the first small sanctuary. The same year, ROLDA completed first kennels inspired by British wood model dog sheltering.</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Construction of the small sanctuary began: the first block of 10 kennels is built, inspired by the British model (with insulated indoor areas, outdoor areas and running spaces) and a small house for operational staff and volunteers.</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>In February, ROLDA Foundation becomes a registered NGO in Romania. On 4th of July, ROLDA became an incorporated charity in the United States under the name Romanian League in Defense of Animals, Inc. The same year, ROLDA purchased the land where the large dogs sanctuary is today.</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>4 more paddocks were finished at the large sanctuary, reaching a total of 12 paddocks (120 kennels). Dana was invited as a speaker to a public event organized in Switzerland for ROLDA, there she met Lolita Morena, a celebrity animal activist who had and continues to have a profound impact on ROLDA activity.</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>After Romania and the United States, we open a new branch in Norway, under the name ROLDA – Gatehunderfra Romania. A team from NRK TV (National TV from Norway) visits both ROLDA sanctuaries.</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>ROLDA opens branches in Switzerland (Association ROLDA Suisse), Sweden (Association ROLDA Sverige) and Australia (ROLDA Inc).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>ROLDA starts a new branch in the UK (ROLDA UK)</td>
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ROLDA starts the renovation of the small house from the small sanctuary (which is used as administration office, recovery area for dogs, isolation for the rescued puppies, bathing and grooming area for the dogs etc)

ROLDA celebrates 15 years since it was officially registered as a charity in Romania and in the US.

Our Challenges

Environmental
- Milder winters are more hospitable for bacteria and parasites
- Warm nights and long summers are perfect breeding conditions for mosquitoes who carry deadly diseases like Dirofilaria
- Securing alternative heating/lighting for the PawzUp center

Societal
- COVID restrictions impede adoption and volunteering
- Lonely, isolated people need animals for moral support
- People should be better educated to understand that animals play a vital role in our daily life

Technological
- How we live, work and interact changed in the past 30 years
- Highlight the good aspects of social media (e.g. fast spreading messages and alerts) but also negative aspects (superficiality)
- Highlight other technologies which ROLDA is testing to benefit animals e.g. crypto donations
  https://cryptoforanimals.org

Economic
- Rising fuel, electricity and utility prices
- Animal abandonment for financial reasons on the rise
Our Challenges

Reduce the animal over population by sterilizing minimum 1500 pets per year

It is only recently that sterilization became part of the national debate in Romania as a solution to tackling the homeless dog crisis. It is the only humane way of affecting real and lasting change in the numbers of dogs born and living wild.

In 2016, the short-sighted Romanian government, under public pressure to reduce the number of stray dog incidents, made rescuing, neutering and returning illegal. Safely neutering, vaccinating and releasing healthy dogs back into their territory and sheltering/treating those in need was how ROLDA was achieving real progress in reducing stray populations.

Whilst the Romanian government persists with its foolish policy, ROLDA refocused our efforts to neuter pets living in poor rural communities because this is where pets give birth to litters which families cannot afford. To date, ROLDA have humanely sterilized almost 20,000 dogs and the success of our campaigns has earned international support.

After focusing in Galati for 20 years, we decided to extend programs – as funds allow – to neighboring counties. ROLDA has identified 2 potential collaborators: one located across Danube river, in Tulcea county and another in the city of Caracal, Olt county. We hope to begin working closely with them at the earliest opportunity to unite our resources and manpower.

Reduce animal abandonment by 50%

Animal abandonment continues to remain the principal cause of overpopulation and whilst the practice is tragic and abhorrent it must be understood to be stopped.

Romania is one of Europe’s poorest countries and – especially in rural areas – people live extremely harsh lives. Sometimes – heartbreakingly – people have to choose between feeding their families or feeding their pets.
ROLDA is tackling abandonment in the spirit of compassion, not punishment. We provide food aid and emergency medical support for impoverished families who otherwise cannot afford to keep their pets.

Another key factor contributing to abandonment is the lack of education. People often mismanage their pets and the situation becomes mutually unlivable. Inspired by a British model, we created a National Study to communicate with owners who need help to understand better their pets, address issues healthily and live a happy life. If all other avenues of prevention have failed, we do the best we can to take unwanted pets in danger of becoming homeless, at the owners’ request.

**Educate community to be responsible pet owners**

Responsible pet ownership doesn’t have a strict definition but is a combination of common sense, respecting the applicable laws and considering the animals changing needs and their environment. A dog that barks continuously might disturb the neighbors, poop left in the park alleys and walking with dog off leash in busy places also rude, ignoring the frequent visits to the vet to make sure the pet stays healthy is wrong, keeping animals chained because of a tradition is cruel.

**Continue to shelter & rehome responsibly**

Once an animal arrives with our rescue team and their wounds are treated, they undergo a quarantine period in which they’re kept safe, well-fed and as comfortable as possible whilst receiving broad-spectrum vaccinations. This procedure is necessary to protect both the welfare of the animal and those already in our care. It also helps prevent the spread of communicable diseases.

Once cleared, they go on to join our community within one of our shelters, in which they can be physically and emotionally rehabilitated and recover from any illness or injury. They will stay with us until a new home can be found. Some may stay with us for the rest of their lives due to behavioral problems or being unfit to travel.

**Support other animal welfare initiatives**

Expand support to other activists in Romania and through them support animal lovers who cannot afford to pay vet bills and assist them in organizing sterilization campaigns.
Stop illegal animal smuggling

Animal trafficking happens everywhere. Animals are subjected to brutal conditions that cause them unimaginable suffering with many of them dying before they reach their destinations.

One of the driving forces behind the wildlife trade is the desire to own exotic pets, such as tigers, alligators and bears. These animals are separated from their families—usually from birth—and wrenched from their habitat, forced into a distressingly unfamiliar environment.

Another driving force behind the illegal wildlife trade is traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). TCM has helped drive some animal species to the brink of extinction. Despite the advances Western modern medicine has made, TCM remains popular today even though its efficacy has been widely unproven.

Though ROLDA’s focus is and will remain the rescue and rehoming of stray animals in Galati, we are actively involved in advocating for the end of wildlife trafficking worldwide. We lend our voice and support to animal activists and organizations fighting for its full and final end.

Close down illegal public shelters

The boom in Romania's stray dog population has created a new market for public shelters that are financed from public funds: money that comes from the Romanian government who pay them according to how many dogs they can ‘remove’ from the streets.

They do not care about the welfare of animals, they euthanize at any opportunity and there are no regular/unannounced inspections to hold them to account. The management does not care if the shelter has become a cesspit within which starvation, disease and violence are common.
ROLDA is adopting whenever possible from public shelters as life inside them is worse than in the wild. As often as we can, ROLDA takes dogs away from that nightmare into our shelter and search for a loving new home.

Every year this number represents only 5-10% of dogs ROLDA rescue. It is essential that dogs are removed from this toxic atmosphere as soon as possible.

The longer they spend in these awful places the longer they are exposed to violence and disease. The experience many dogs suffer in public shelters impacts them for life in the form of lifelong psychological scars.

These dogs require much more time and resources to rehabilitate – it can cost thousands of pounds in specialist care – and some never recover to the degree they could be rehomed; many still remain in our care.

**End live animals captive for tourists**

In Romania, animals such as wolves, snakes, bears, monkeys, and lions are illegally owned by individuals for hobby and profit. These animals have been smuggled into the country or trafficked further abroad without regard for their wellbeing.

One of the most deceptive and profitable businesses involving captive animals is wildlife tourism.

Wildlife tourism exploits animals from birth until they are either euthanized or abandoned once they are no longer considered “valuable” by their owners. These animals endure years of suffering at their owners’ hands, who use cruel training methods to teach them to perform for tourists.

**End the culture of animal cruelty**

It is still a way long to go for authorities to take animal cruelties seriously. The newly established Animal Police division is still far from the level of RSPCA inspectors. Many animals are still on their own and the only chance they have is the individual civic responsibility, every of us, the citizens to report a cruelty and be a voice for the voiceless.
To achieve ambitious goals we need to

Increase community engagement

To encourage the community involvement, we encourage supporters to become ROLDA Ambassadors with the relevant pack, which people can order directly on our website. It is a different pack each year and the items are meant to raise awareness about ROLDA’s achievements and goals.

We created the National Study, to learn from people with dogs with behavior problems what goes wrong, to help them to better communicate with their pets and prevent abandonment.

ROLDA is hyperaware of the importance to invest in educating children with regards to animal welfare to ultimately create more knowledgeable and compassionate generations.

To this end, we created the ABC online to help kids understand the basics of caring and safely interacting with animals and help them recognize the value of animal life. Likewise, in collaboration with a local talented student, we create a coloring book to be distributed for free in rural areas to communities who need the most to learn basic things about respecting animal rights in a fun and engaging medium.

Partners other individuals, communities and organisations to create a united front of animal welfare response in Romania

We have reliable organizations like Swiss Animal Protection, SPCAI, Lady Free Thinker and others that support our work and some Romanian companies as sponsors. We got a grant for sterilizations from Nestle Romania and created a presentation to reach more companies. International corporations can match the gifts made by their employees via Benevity.

Strengthen our international network

To create a website dedicated to volunteers to highlight their important role for our charity, to have periodic discussions with branches representatives to adjust the strategy (communication, fundraising), to create posts and web articles in native language to address to supporters from Norway, France, Sweden, Germany etc
Conclusions

Strays were declared national safety matter, when both people and animals lost life (vulnerable people: kids, seniors killed by dogs bites, or mass murder of innocent dogs), these tragedies will continue unless we realize that we have a common goal (no matter if we love animals or we don’t) to not see these dogs on streets. For organizations like ROLDA to use existent logistics (shelter) to take these dogs from streets, we need funds. It is our duty to be transparent but it’s the society duty to get involved to solve its own problems.

Next steps

- Improve small shelter facilities for dogs
- Deepen our relation with ROLDA supporters
- Begin construction of the PawzUp state-of-art care facility and community hub
- Strengthen our international branches network
Priorities

- Rescue and care each dog in need of us
- Prevention: sterilization, vaccination, disease control management
- Advocacy: against PS, anti chain, wild animals captive for dogs amusement, smuggling/illegal live animals transport
- Support: grow support from international community, increase Romanian animal lovers’ involvement, increase the overall income which will enable to expand services and help more animals in need, create and grow fundraising groups, marketing for micro-websites, use the power of social media channels to increase support, accept modern tools to generate income