

Sochi Dogs Seek Homes (Video)

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Animal lover Igor Ayrapetyan relaxing with two of his canine companions.

Volunteers who rescued 35 stray dogs from the Olympic city of Sochi in February to prevent them from being exterminated as part of a pre-Olympics clean-up campaign are still looking for new homes for many of the animals.

In a Facebook community launched for helping the Sochi canines — named "Doroga domoi," or "The Way Home" — volunteers have been posting photos of some of the dogs accompanied by details about them.

Staff writer Natalya Krainova discusses her story about a Moscow resident who rescued stray dogs in Sochi from possible extermination ahead of the Winter Olympics.

Sochi's stray dogs came into the spotlight in the run-up to the Winter Olympics after news of their possible extermination as part of citywide clean-up efforts for the Games prompted a major outcry among activists and animal lovers. Although local authorities said the reported tenders to "remove" stray dogs from the city were cancelled, dozens of animal rights activists in the area petitioned the government to build an animal shelter for the animals.

Moscow region resident Igor Ayrapetyan, 41, came up with his own initiative to help the stray dogs, heading out to Sochi in February with his friends and bringing the dogs back to their private homes and apartments in Moscow and the region.

He now faces the task of finding homes for the remaining dogs.

One of the dogs, a golden retriever named Zlata, was described on the group's Facebook page as "seeking any opportunity to sit next to you, sticking her head under your head and waiting until you pay attention to her, and then furrowing her brow in pleasure."

All of the dogs have been inspected, treated and vaccinated by a veterinarian, as well as washed and groomed.

But Ayrapetyan has conceded that taking care of the dogs has been very difficult.

Despite volunteers' efforts, however, four of the Sochi puppies died from a virus. They had spent several days in a private veterinary clinic in a last-ditch attempt to save them, and treatment cost more than 128,000 rubles (\$3,700), which volunteers collected in a fundraising campaign on Facebook.

One female dog who got sick in late March is struggling to recover after a negligent Sochi veterinarian who sterilized the dog left a gauze pad in its bowels, requiring the dog to undergo another surgery.

A day after Ayrapetyan brought the dogs back to Moscow, three of the Sochi pups staying with him and another one of his dogs became ill and had to be hospitalized at a veterinary clinic.

Two of the three Sochi puppies who were hospitalized later died at the clinic. Another one got sick in late February despite preventative treatment and was rushed to the clinic, where it died a few days later. One more dog died abruptly in late March.

"Morally, it is very hard for me, the only thing that brings me joy are the dogs," Ayrapetyan said by phone. "When I wake up in the morning and they lick me, they give me strength to live," he said.

Ayrapetyan himself is living on a salary of 9,000 rubles (\$260) per month working as chairman of a partnership of homeowners where he lives, and he feeds the dogs using donations from supporters in Russia and abroad who contact him [on Facebook](#).

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