

Sofia Prado

## HUAPERROS ESSAY

To close your eyes will not cease another's pain" Chinese proverb.

An activist does not sit by and watch things they do not agree with, an activist firmly stands behind what they believe in. An activist is determined, perseverant and most of all passionate. Passion. Something none of us should live without.

Whether it is for recycling, reading, writing, drawing, or life. Life in general, your life and the lives of others. By others I mean our fellow beings, not just humans. One of the things I disagree with the most is speciesism, I believe that equality should be practiced for plants, people, and animals alike. Life is life, animal, plant or human.

That is why I started Huaperros.

My name is Sofia Prado, I am 16 years old and live in Monterrey, Mexico. In the summer of 8th grade I opened up my own dog shelter. I am 16 years old now and in 10th grade. Truthfully, I had never planned to do this, it was one of those wild and amazing dreams that you have as a kid that I probably never would have fulfilled later in my life, something I would have regretted deeply. I was actually writing a goal sheet for my eighth grade class, something I never took seriously, I hated goal sheets, I never looked back at them after giving them in to my teacher, and this one was no different. Its not that I didn't want to, I just wasn't thinking of starting a dog shelter that year, not at the time. But this year was different, this wasn't just another goal sheet, this wasn't just another dream, this wasn't just another teacher. I love my eighth grade teacher.

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Miss Roberts called me over and pulled out my goal sheet a few weeks after, enough time for me to have totally forgotten about it. She told me it was very ambitious but it was possible. Possible? Was this really possible? I had never really thought about that, was it really possible for an eighth grader to start a dog shelter? I seem to work very differently from others, whenever someone tells me I can't do something I go for it, I go for it like there's no tomorrow, and when I set my mind to something I can do anything. I asked a couple of my friends what they thought, some said it was out of the question, but most just responded dryly, sure go for it.

This is where my real challenge began, financing and running a dog shelter. I started out with one or two dogs at a time, although I was no stranger to dogs. I already had five of my own and had picked up strays and found them homes before, (after spaying and neutering them and getting them dewormed and vaccinated) but this was very different. I had also volunteered at two different dog shelters in Monterrey but left, unhappy with their euthanasia policies. I do not put dogs to sleep because of restricting time limits, I have had dogs with me for over a year waiting for a home. I have had my dog shelter for three years now, and have helped over 30 dogs find homes. I usually have 7-15 dogs at a time. Before I put the dogs up for adoption, I make sure they are healthy and behaviorally set. I get them de-wormed, spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and get them anything else they

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need to be healthy and fit again. I live in a canyon where many people drop off their unwanted dogs to die of starvation. I have picked up dogs with both types of mange, lime disease, broken legs, dislocated limbs and huge open wounds. One of my main purposes when I started the shelter was to end dog suffering. All dog suffering, not just one. I know I cannot save all dogs, but I will help as many as I possibly can, plucking them off the street, one by one. However, a month into my project I found that was impossible by only doing what I was doing then. The root of the problem was overpopulation, dogs being able to breed every which way. And then it hit me! A free spaying and neutering campaign! I had wanted to do one, but didn't know where to start, so I went to talk to one of my fellow shelter owners from Fundacion Luca. He was ecstatic to hear my proposal. He gave me the outmost support and placed unlimited resources at my disposal. It was a bit overwhelming, being a 15 year old girl and all, but it was an amazing experience. Fundacion Luca left me in charge of the organization, and in return I was granted 50 free spaying and neutering operations, 2 highly trained vets, 6 weeks, and unlimited posters and fliers. I felt like a true activist as I trekked up the dirt slopes leading to the small houses teetering on their edges. These areas are crawling with domestic dogs, cats, horses, chickens, and many other animals. I talked to all of my neighbors and explained the benefits of spaying and neutering their pets. All the while, I had a speech memorized because I repeated myself so many times. Most of the people

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were very open to the idea but some needed convincing. I am pleased to say that all the operations were filled and many people came to me at a later date to get info about spaying and neutering and adopting.

After this hectic, but fun time, I decided I needed help. I decided to start a volunteer program. I now have people of all ages come out and help me bathe, train and transport dogs. I also have people play with the dogs, clean cages and help me take them on walks when we go out on field trips to promote the shelter. And of course I do not miss the chance of educating the general public about adopting, spaying and neutering, the importance of dog tags, animal cruelty and other issues, especially my younger volunteers. Actually, a big part of my shelter is education. I love to inform people about issues that are important to me. I have posters up at my school about my dog shelter and even gave a presentation about Huaperros and sustainable travel at my school for the 9th graders. I have written many essays and papers for my school newspaper, my school magazine, and I would never miss a chance for an English school essay to include the topics I feel most strongly about. I was even asked to appear on a radio show to talk about dog adoption! On special occasions, I bring in my dogs to school for a show day and talk to kids about adopting while promoting my shelter. I also had an inauguration the year I opened my dog shelter and invited all my teachers and whomever else wanted to come. I got a great response from everyone. I had many teachers and

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students attend my event and had 7 dogs adopted out that day. It was amazing!

This year I was asked to prepare a video about my dog shelter for the IMMUNS (international model UN simulation) program at my school to be presented for all of the delegates from other countries as well as my own. I am very excited for the year to come and am determined to help more dogs than ever before.