

Kiara's Voice a story behind unregulated dog daycare centers

During the past years in my country, Colombia, specifically in the capital city, Bogotá, where I live, daycare centers for dogs have become very popular. Many people do not have the time to take care of their dogs because they have to work, go to school, travel, etc, so they send their dogs to daycare. The problem is that for these establishments there are no regulations, and no clear rules for these places to meet the right conditions and offer an optimal service. Some of these daycare centers just simply open their doors without adequate security, sanitation, and others to assure the welfare of dogs in their establishment.

To be frank, When I first heard that daycare centers were opening in my city I thought it was a great thing, and that it would provide great help for dog owners. The idea of having the possibility of people taking care of your dog while you go to work or on a trip sounds awesome, unfortunately these centers have become more a problem than a help. I have a dog and whenever I go on a trip with my family she is the one I worry about because not all places accept dogs so it is not a possibility to take your dog always with you. Luckily many places are dog-friendly, some people have a family member or close friend that offers himself to take care of their dog which gives another solution for were to leave your dog, However not all people have a family member that can take care of their dog or not always that family member is available, which leads them to the great-sounding option of a daycare center where you can leave your dog for hours, days, weeks or a school type option where the dog stays during the day and returns home at night. Do not get me wrong, the problem is not the existence of these establishments, they could for sure provide a great service but only with the correct regulations.

Six months ago I was checking my Dog's Instagram account. Yes! You read right, my dog has an Instagram profile. When I started looking at stories and Dm's, I saw many people sharing

that a Bernese mountain dog was missing, so I did what I usually do when dogs are missing. I put in my dog's Instagram story the bulletin of Kiara, the dog missing. Quickly I found out that Kiara went missing in her daycare center. Apparently, two workers took Kiara and other dogs to a hike in the mountains, near the center. The area was not an unknown one to Kiara because she had done the same hike several times. The workers did not give a clear account of the events but said they lost sight of her. The inconsistencies in the version of the events and the insouciance and lack of willingness to provide information and help of the owners of the place, results in a big suspicion that something else happened to Kiara. To this day what happened to Kiara has not been clarified. She is still missing and her owner's words in one of the interviews he gave to the famous newspaper in Colombia *Semana* are heartbreaking to read. He said, "I don't want to reconcile, I don't want money, I don't want another dog. I want them to tell me the truth and where she is"(Semana.com, 1). The authorities told the owner to reconcile, giving him the absurd option of letting the establishment give him a new dog. What kind of a solution is that? There are still people that do not understand how important and valuable dogs become in a family. There are not just pets, they are family members just like any other. It is just like telling someone whose mom, sibling, dad, or cousin is missing you would give him another one just like him.

There are plenty of ways Kiara could be suffering. If she is in the streets she could be injured, dehydrated, and malnourished among other possible health problems. If she is kidnapped, who knows what treatment her captives are giving her? She is probably also suffering emotionally because as East Animal Hospital explains, dogs are capable of feeling fear, sadness, anxiety, love, joy, and other emotions (eastvalleyanimal.com, 1), which means that Kiara feels the same fear, sadness, and anxiety that a human would feel if he were taking away from his family or lost without knowing where he is. Because of the long time that she

has been missing, there is of course the awful possibility of her not even being alive, but hope is still present.

Kiara's owner, Camilo, has moved heaven and earth to find her. On his Instagram account (@camilojm6) he has been asking for help from people to share Kiara's story, lots of people including me have shared it, and there have been others who have helped Camilo go and organize with him search days, also influencers and animalists have helped him. He has searched for her with drones and people that know the area where Kiara supposedly went missing. He is also offering a 6 million Colombian pesos reward for anyone that may have knowledge or information about Kiara's whereabouts, but none of his efforts have been worth it there is not a single clue about Kiara.

After Kiara's case became so known there have been intentions to promote laws for the regulation of these establishments the "Ley Kiara" has been promoted in Congress by Camilo and other people. The regulation of these establishments is not only necessary to prevent other dogs to disappear in strange conditions, because even with the best security and attention that workers of a daycare center give, accidents could still happen and a dog could surely get lost, but because of the poor normative that government has in these establishments, people that do not love dogs and do not respect animals take advantage of the lack of regulations to open these daycare centers for the sole purpose of making money regardless of the damage their negligence could cause to dogs and their families. Only in the small municipality in which Kiara's daycare center is located "authorities identified 76 daycare centers of which 60 percent are informal"(Semana.com, 1). The fact that in a small area, they could find so many of these daycare centers that each day receive dogs in their facilities that probably do not have the appropriate conditions shows that there is a big issue

in not having these establishments adequately regulated to prevent situations like Kiara's to take place.

Dog owners have to try their best by their means to assure the security of their dogs in these establishments. Of course, promoting laws in government for regulation needs to be done, but that is going to take time because sadly in my country the government is not very efficient. Meanwhile, we cannot let irresponsible people hurt our best friend and favorite family member. If it is necessary to leave your dog in a daycare center, check every aspect of the center, ask to know who are the people that will be taking care of your dog, what study or experience they have with dogs, communicate constantly with the center and ask for videos and pictures of your dog, and do not just trust them because the place looks nice, always remember that not all people value animal life as much as they should.

I hope that my essay in some way helps Kiara return home. Sharing her story in a contest about giving animals a voice seems to me a perfect opportunity to help and give Kiara a voice, also I think that sharing her story could help people be more alert anywhere around the world where similar situations could be occurring in any kind of establishment offering services for dogs. During the past months Kiara is constantly present in my thoughts, whenever I go out for a walk with my dog and I see a Bernese mountain I think of her, I do not know her, neither I know her owner, but I have a dog and if she were to be missing I for sure would be immensely thankful for all the help others could give me. I am not sure how this could be a significant help, but the possibility of Kiara returning home makes it worth it.

References

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