

Company Helps Rescued Iraq Dogs Transition

Bark Busters will assist in Operation Baghdad Pups by helping dogs from Iraq adjust to life in the U.S.

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Photos courtesy SPCA International Six dogs have been transported from Iraq into the homes of U.S. military personnel since Operation Baghdad Pups first launched in 2007. Thirty-five cases are pending with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals International, and a new partner has joined to help accomplish the rescue mission.

Bark Busters, an international dog training company, jumped on board a week ago and already helped two dogs adjust to their new environment. Both rescued dogs are shepherd mixes, says Liam Crowe, CEO and master dog behavioral therapist at Bark Busters.

“We want to help make sure the transition from a war zone to suburbia in the U.S. is as stress-free as possible,” Crowe says. “We are proud of the work that these service men and women have done overseas, and this is a small way we can partner.”

As part of the collaboration, Bark Busters dog trainers donate their services to the dogs and their caregivers to help them settle into new surroundings outside Iraq. The training company volunteered to assist SPCA International in the screening, handling, and training of dogs in the Operation Baghdad Pups program.

Every animal must have a committed home before being accepted in the program. In addition, the dogs must be befriended by a U.S. soldier. The interested soldier then initiates the process by contacting SPCA International, says spokeswoman Stephanie Scroggs.

She says they receive three to four new requests every week and are currently working on more than 35 active cases. Four missions have been completed, involving a total of six dogs and two cats.

The first animal to be rescued was a malnourished, flea-covered dog named Charlie. As members of an Army regiment took turns caring for the dog, they grew attached and were unwilling to leave him behind.

The average cost per dog rescue, Scroggs says, is \$4,000. The bulk of the money goes to cover the expense of getting the dog from Iraq to the airport. The organization covers all costs through donations.

“We ensure every dog has a clean bill of health,” she says. “All the animals are special to a soldier, and they become very attached to them.”

Bark Busters provides a welcome-home kit for the dogs and their caregivers. It contains training aids, tips on how to introduce the dog to pets already in the household, an overview on behaviors to expect in the first 24 to 48 hours, and contact information for a local specialist who will provide training and advice at no charge to help the dogs as they transition.

“This isn’t just about rescuing animals,” Scroggs says. “It’s really about supporting our troops, and they are absolutely passionate about getting them out.”

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