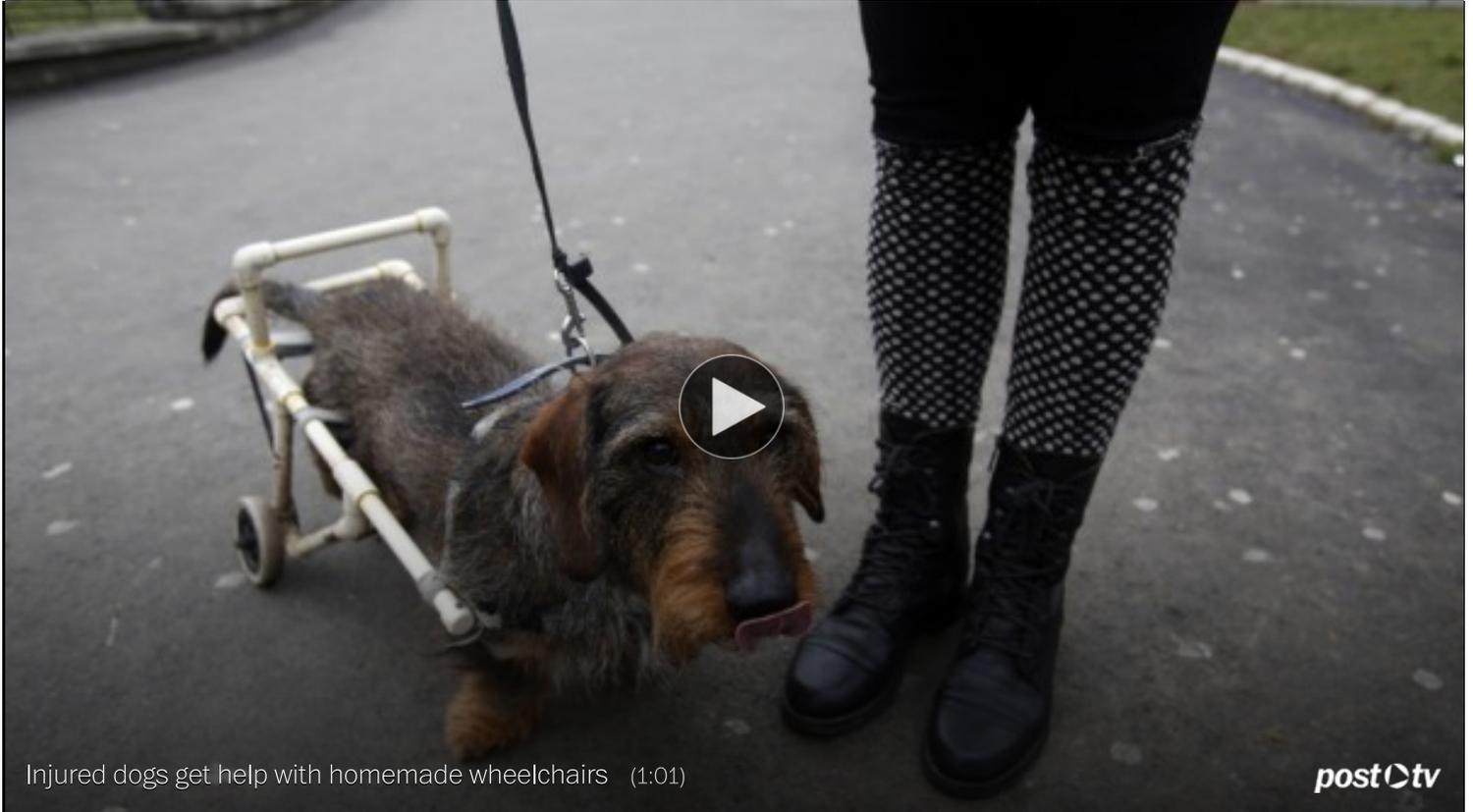


Inspired Life

Motivated by his dog's paralysis, Serbian man makes wheelchairs for disabled canines



By Jovana Gec March 9



When his dog Mica suffered a spinal injury, Dragan Dimitrijevic made her a wheelchair, using small wheels, plastic pipes and old belts. It worked: the foxy-looking mongrel was back in the park in no time, other dogs barking and sniffing inquisitively at the strange construction dangling along.

Though homemade from used parts, word of Mica's wheelchair spread swiftly among dog lovers in not-so-animal-friendly Serbia. Other pet owners with similar problems started calling, and Dimitrijevic was soon taking orders.

In more than three years, the computer programmer from Belgrade has made around 80 wheelchairs for invalid dogs and cats, developing a small business with happy customers all over Serbia and other Balkan countries.

"I have a soft spot for dogs," Dimitrijevic told The Associated Press. "A wheelchair is not a cure, but it enables them to run, sniff, do all the things other dogs normally do."

For many in the impoverished Balkans — a region with low record both in care both for the disabled and animal welfare — Dimitrijevic's wheelchair is the only way to deal with pet disability. There are no other local producers, while obtaining a pet wheelchair from EU countries costs many times more.

In Serbia, authorities have been unable to cope with the problem of tens of thousands of stray dogs, so injured animals are often simply put down.

Milce Cankovic Kadejevic was first told to euthanize her wire-haired dachshund Bak who squashed a spinal disk four years ago. Then she heard about Dimitrijevic.

“This wheelchair has allowed Bak to live normally, to run and play,” Cankovic Kadijevic said. “He doesn’t even know he has a problem!”

Veterinarian Dragan Bacic explained wheelchair for pets also helps the animals exercise and prevents additional injuries when they go outside.

Dimitrijevic said each wheelchair is made in consultation with the veterinarians, adapted individually to fit a particular pet and the nature of its injuries. While the first wheelchair took three days to make, nowadays it is a one-day routine, he said.

But, Dimitrijevic insisted, seeing photos or a video of a joyful animal able to run again, is as rewarding as ever.

“There is nothing like a dog rushing toward its friends or owner,” he said. “So happy!”

Jovana Gec wrote this article for The Associated Press

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