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Because Someone Has To

Nagham Bedawi, 42, doesn't like being called an activist. She calls it performative, not out of criticism, but because she doesn't see her work as activism. "I do what I'm supposed to," she says, bending down to pet a rescued Saluki, its ribs faintly visible beneath a new coat of fur. But what she calls "supposed to" is a life most people wouldn't take on. And for that, she's become one of the most persistent and outspoken figures about animal welfare in Qatar, or maybe ever.

Originally from Tulkarem, Palestine, Bedawi spent several years as a consultant for a government entity in the UAE before making the decision to move to Qatar in 2021. She now works in another office by day but chooses to spend her weekends at FurKids, an open sanctuary she founded for abandoned and abused animals along Al Mazroua road.

The air smells clean, tainted by the sun as volunteers move between yards, washing bowls and refilling water, with dogs following closely behind. What might appear to be a humble shelter now is, in reality, the outcome of a long and draining legal battle and endless controversy that left Bedawi determined to create something better.

Her online presence grew in October 2024, when she openly criticized another rescue shelter in Doha for neglect and mistreatment. In the weeks that followed, former employees privately shared weeks' worth of footage with journalists that appeared to show the extremely abusive and unsafe conditions within the shelter. The material was never released due to legal restrictions, but it reinforced the concerns Bedawi had long worked to expose.

This legal fight dragged on for months. Bedawi defended herself through various court hearings and appeals, winning each one. The shelter's owner had filed a defamation lawsuit demanding 300,000 QAR, which Bedawi concluded was meant to silence her. But she refused to back down. "The case took so much money," she says. "At some point, I realized I'd rather spend it helping the animals than wasting it on lawyers."

Bringing her time in court to an end, Bedawi focused on rebuilding the trust lost within the rescue community. She built FurKids into one of only two spaces in the country where visitors can volunteer, foster, or sponsor rescued animals directly. "I wanted to build

something transparent,” she says, explaining that people should be enabled to see what rescue really looks like, not just hear about it online. Today, you can clearly see the ways in which the sanctuary reflects her beliefs that real rescue work depends on love, consistency and trust.

The facility, like most independent organizations in Qatar, relies solely on donations and small sponsorships. A handful of local supporters help Bedawi in covering the expenses for food, medicine, and maintenance costs, but much of the work depends on personal contributions and volunteers. With only one other major organization, the Qatar Animal Welfare Society (QAWS), operating in a similar manner, financial stability remains a constant obstacle for those involved in rescue work.

Her efforts extend beyond the confinement of *just FurKids*. For years, Bedawi has pushed for stronger protection of animals in Qatar, where cases of abuse or neglect rarely face consequences. “There aren’t any real laws to protect them,” she says. “There are guidelines, but nothing with real force behind it. Until there’s proper legislation and stronger applications, people will keep getting away with it.” Despite her court victory, the shelter she spoke out against continues to operate. Bedawi doesn’t dwell on it, but mentions it’s a reminder that real change requires persistence.

On many weekends, FurKids comes alive long before the morning heat sets in. The sanctuary has since grown steadily, becoming a trusted space for the rescue community. Bedawi starts the day early, feeding and caring for the dogs before tending to the newest arrivals. She gives them the nurture they’ve long lacked.

Many dogs arrive severely frightened and underweight, often found wandering near construction sites or abandoned in the middle of God knows where. While some are injured or dehydrated, others are left tied to fences of polluted factories with no food or water. But with the right care, they can begin to recover. For pets once withdrawn and anxious, they can now bark at passing cars without the fear of being run over. “You see them come back to life,” Bedawi says. “They remember what safety feels like.”

As the evening comes, and the noise starts to fade, Bedawi walks through her sanctuary, her shoes brushing against the green grass as a few dogs circle her legs. She stops to refill a bowl, untangle a leash, check on an unhealed wound, but it’s safe to say that every corner bears her warmth and loving touch. The small details that make it all work. It is slow, consistent work, but she has never been one to see it as a burden.

“People always ask why I keep doing this,” she says. “Because someone has to. That’s the only reason I need.”