

PART ONE: How it Started

By Tammy Ven Dange, CEO of RSPCA ACT ©

It was 2 September 2015, and I can still remember it like it was yesterday. It was on that day that RSPCA ACT rescued a solitary sheep in need of a serious haircut after a member of the public informed our inspectors about his woolly plight. It took us a few days to find him, and five staff members (plus the finder) to get him back to the Shelter.

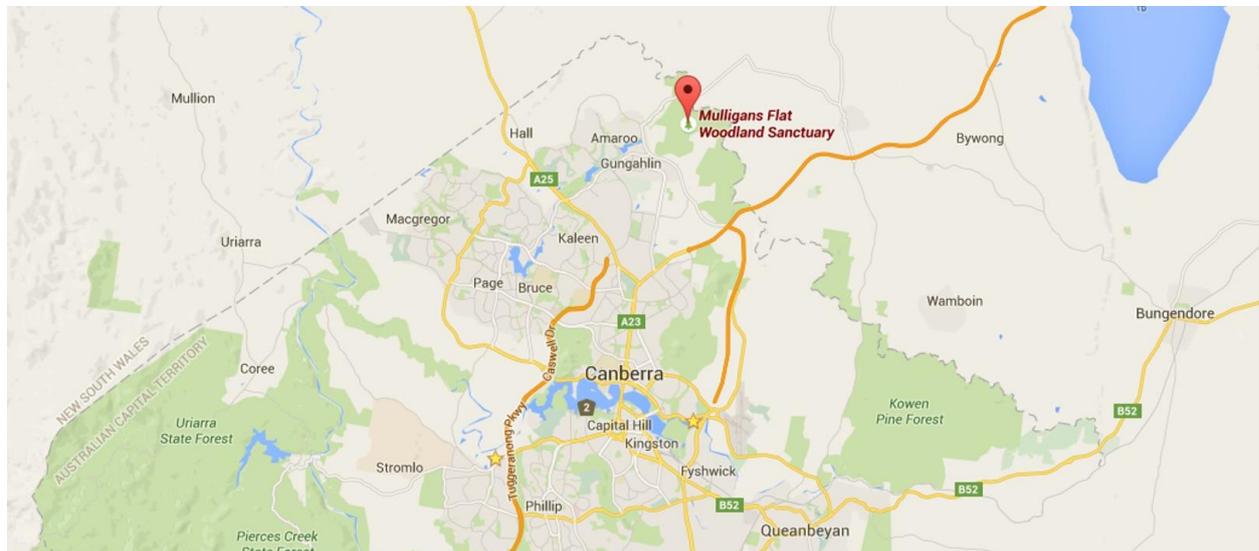
This story unfolded via social media, and within just a few hours 'Chris the Sheep' became a household name across the world.

The story is not quite that simple though. Despite the journalists' best efforts, there is still quite a bit of the story that has yet to be told to the public, and we believe that the missing parts are just as important to share due to the fact that he almost died from his ordeal.

As such, this is the rest of the story of "Chris the Sheep."

No one is really sure how this particular sheep managed to become so overgrown with wool without detection. He didn't have an ear tag (though he did have an ear marking), and given that he was found so close to the New South Wales / Australian Capital Territory border, he could have come from a number of places. If he was lost, it happened at least five or six years before meaning that most owners would have given up by now with the belief that he died from the elements or was attacked by another animal.

Regardless of where he came from, Chris was found living in an area known as Mulligans Flat which is a nature reserve on the northern outskirts of Canberra.



There appeared to have been multiple sightings of Chris during the months leading to his rescue. There may have been sightings even earlier, but were unknown to us. However, no one could pinpoint his location as he was still quite mobile at that stage, making the rescue mission way too resource intensive.

That changed in August 2015. Sue Dowling frequently hiked the area with her fitness clients, and she noticed that, unusually, Chris was staying in the same area. With her concern for his welfare, she called RSPCA ACT Inspectors at the end of that month.

Our Inspectors promptly sent an email to the rest of the staff to see if anyone had time to hike to the area to locate Chris and report back on his well-being. Specifically, the email said that the sheep was “apparently in a bad way.”

One staff member offered to go on a scouting mission on their day off but was unfortunately unsuccessful. Instead, they located a dead dog that had recently passed away and was still bleeding. A message was sent back to the shelter and a team was dispatched to help retrieve the dog’s body and any other evidence for a post-mortem in case there was suspicious evidence of abuse.

With no luck finding the sheep, our Inspectors phoned Sue and asked if she would be able to help us locate him. An appointment was scheduled for Wednesday, 2 September.

At the weekly “All Hands” meeting, our Senior Inspector informed the rest of the team that some staff members had volunteered to go out and try to rescue the sheep later that morning. While we rescue animals all the time, we don’t often deal with livestock in our mostly suburban and urban environment. However, this would be the second sheep rescue in a number of months. Thinking no more of it, I watched as the team prepared for their mission.

Catching a sheep in open land can be quite difficult depending on its speed so the team knew that they’d have to work together as a group. Squeezing into the cab of the Inspector vehicle, they headed to Mulligans Flat on the north side of Canberra near Bonner.

Eventually, they arrived at the entry to the Reserve where they met with Sue, our concerned fitness instructor. The vehicle gate was locked, and the team knew that it would be some time before the Parks & Recreation Ranger would be able to unlock it. Concerned for the sheep’s welfare the team made the decision to leave the cars and continue on foot. They hiked into the area using the stairway over the gate and started their search.

The dirt trail was well worn but leading straight up a long hill. Carrying several bundles of rope, a veterinarian toolbox and a stretcher, it proved to be a strenuous exercise for many of our staff members. Would our team find the sheep this time?



If you want to read on, fill out your details and we will send you the full untold story of Chris the Sheep. [Sign up now!](#)