

# Rescuing A Dog From A Shelter

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*It's heartbreaking to see a dog in a shelter, it's worse to see one being returned. I'd love to help you to avoid this.*

There are few things in life that feel better than rescuing a dog from a shelter. Giving a second chance to a life that someone else may have given up on is a wonderful, rewarding and caring thing to do.

Rescuing a shelter dog has many upsides.

- Unlike adopting a puppy, you're not starting from zero. Puppies are completely untrained. Most rescue dogs have been house dogs in the past and possess *some* level of house manners and foundational skills. In many cases, shelter dogs have been fostered which, if done correctly, is helpful because the dog has been in a home environment as opposed to the isolation of a shelter.
- When you rescue a dog, vet fees are lower. Most shelter dogs have undergone physical exams, vaccinations, de-sexing, etc. When you purchase a puppy, you will also be purchasing all of the necessary future veterinary expenses.
- With a rescue dog, to a large extent, you'll already know the dog's personality. While a puppy might attract you because of how cute it is, unless the pooch is a pure breed, it's nearly impossible to determine many future characteristics, e.g., energy level. If you're looking for a dog that will spend quality couch time watching TV with you, you don't want to adopt a puppy who will grow up to be a highly active adult dog.
- Adopting a rescue pet for your family presents a wonderful opportunity to teach your children basic values of compassion and caring, and also about the value of second chances.



Because of these reasons and others, shelter dog adoption has become more popular than ever. According to the ASPCA, based on best estimates, between 10-20% of family dogs have been adopted through shelters.

Sadly, according to the same statistical study, 20% of dogs given up to shelters were also originally adopted from shelters. Why?

Many people entering into the adoption process do so without having the foundational knowledge required to select a dog who will be a solid, well behaved lifetime companion. Often, they rely on the shelter for guidance.

While shelters are usually managed by people who have the best of intentions, good intentions alone are not sufficient for guiding people through the adoption process.

A strong knowledge of temperament assessment is a critical factor in how the shelter goes about selecting the right dog to house at their facility.

Additionally, in order to avoid unwanted behaviors from developing, an equally strong knowledge of canine behavior and training is required to manage the dogs that do enter shelter life. This is not to say that a dog can't be rehabilitated (see: "Pepper: A success story" on this site) but unless you have the ability, time available and a love for training, the process can be overwhelming and in some cases, without positive results.

It's critical to ask the shelter what type of formal training programs they engage in with their dogs (a word of warning: If the shelter engages in old school punishment based training methods such as yanking leashes; using choke collars; using physical corrections; it's not a good sign. Email me for my article about the effects these training methods have on dogs); what FORMAL protocols all employees and volunteers follow while interacting with the dogs; what assessment was done (it's your right to ask for a copy of that assessment); and what documented history is on file with regard to the dog's behavior during its shelter stay.

Matching the right owner with the right dog is critical. Doing so requires that shelter employees have the ability to assess the training savvy and lifestyle of potential adopters and then match them with the appropriate dog.

Finally, the adoption process doesn't end when you leave the shelter with your new pooch in tow. The transition process from shelter life to home life can be a very difficult one for both the new owner and the dog. If the shelter doesn't offer to assist you in this process; doesn't offer written material; etc. you might want to rethink adopting from that shelter.

Unfortunately, many shelter volunteers and employees don't possess the knowledge to help you select the right dog and transition that dog smoothly into her/his new home.

### Types of Shelters

**Public shelters** are funded by taxpayers in a particular community, county or state. The goal of the public shelter is to keep dogs off the streets. They generally hold dogs for a short period of time, **up to ten days**, before euthanizing them. This period of time varies from shelter to shelter and is considered an *adoption eligible period* of time. Basically public shelters are temporary holding bins for dogs that have been lost and carry no ID. Additionally, public shelters house dogs who have been surrendered by owners for any number of reasons. Public shelters also acquire dogs that have been confiscated from their owners due to cruelty, neglect and other legal issues.

**Private shelters** place an emphasis on finding the dog a new home, without an end date. A private shelter is funded by private donations and is typically a "no kill" shelter, meaning the dog will either be adopted or live out its life at the shelter. These shelters give varying degrees of care to the dogs, feed and exercise them, provide medical attention, and house the dog until a family makes a decision to adopt the dog. These shelters acquire their dogs in various ways; owner surrender and rescue from kill shelters are two. Due to space limitations and restricted financial resources, private shelters can only house a limited number of dogs.

**Breed club rescue** is as you would expect a shelter (public and private) which houses specific types of pure bred dogs. These shelters tend to be knowledgeable about the specific breed. If it is your goal to adopt a specific breed, this is the place to start your search. Adoption fees are typically higher at breed specific shelters.

**Foster homes** are homes provided by individuals who work with various rescue groups to house dogs on a temporary basis while waiting to be adopted. Typically a foster dog comes to a home through a shelter because of space limitations at the shelter. In some cases, the dog simply needs to be removed from shelter life if he/she begins to exhibit signs of stress due to living within the confines and restrictions of shelter life. Fostering can result in the dog regaining emotional and physical stability. It can also result in the dog picking up unwanted behaviors if the caretaker is not experienced or knowledgeable regarding training. Finally, if the shelter is a kill shelter, often a dog is fostered to buy time while waiting for an adopter.

Your chances of finding your perfect dog and transitioning him/her in an effective manner will be greatly increased if you gain and apply the knowledge required to do so.

If you are thinking of rescuing a dog, and have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

