



No More Homeless Pets Forum
August 1-5, 2005

Is That Really True?: Debunking Adoption Myths and Misconceptions

Do you question the validity of some of the advice or predictions you've heard? Is fear keeping your organization from allowing on-the-spot adoptions? Do you worry that raising adoption fees will keep the public away? Send in the "old wives' tales" that you've been wondering about. **Mike Arms** of the Helen Woodward Animal Center will debunk common misconceptions about when, where and how to do adoptions.

Related transcripts from previous forum weeks can be viewed at <http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/weeklyforum/forumarchives.cfm>.

Mike Arms has been a guest on the forum previously, at <http://www.bestfriends.com/archives/forums/holidayadoptions.html> and <http://www.bestfriends.com/archives/forums/customerservice.html>

Introduction from Mike Arms:

"That's the way we've always done it." These words make my blood boil! I've visited shelters across the country that continue to euthanize orphaned dogs and cats in the most inhumane ways imaginable because, "That's the way we've always done it."

I see the solution to this as two part. First, let's all work together and share information to bring everyone in our industry up to current standards. Second (and most important) let's do a better job of placing these animals in loving, lifelong homes! If we know the truth and can provide the information necessary we can help put puppy mills out of business and save more lives as we increase our adoptions.

During my more than 30 years as an animal welfare administrator I've never, even once, had anyone walk in to my shelter and ask, "Where do you keep the cheap dogs?" These families are looking for a new friend, a companion, a playmate. We worry about raising an adoption fee a few dollars to make sure we can cover the cost of vaccinations and spay/neuter before adoption. What we really need to concentrate on is matching the needs of the pets with the desires of the families.

I'm looking forward to your questions.

Mike Arms Bio:

Now an internationally acclaimed animal welfare advocate, Mike began his career in New York as district manager for the ASPCA from 1966 to 1976. He then joined North Shore Animal League as the organization's director of operations for over 20 years and oversaw 400,000 animal adoptions during his tenure.

The creator of the pet Adopt-a-Thon, Mike developed the North Shore Animal League's pet adoptions promotion from a local event to an international collaboration involving 2,200 shelters in 9 countries. The effort resulted in homes for thousands of orphaned animals in a 36-hour period.

After leaving North Shore, Mike spent 2 years as a consultant to animal welfare agencies throughout the United States to enhance their programs. Then, as president of the Helen Woodward Animal Center, he developed the Home 4 the Holidays adoption program that resulted in over 313,000 adoptions during the 2004 holiday season.

A resident of Solana Beach, California, Mike is married and has one daughter, three dogs, and five cats.

Just what makes a pet adoptable, anyway?

Question from Carla:

One myth we definitely seem to have in our community's adoption agencies, is which type of animal is a good candidate to be put up for adoption.

For example, one specific, giant-breed rescue won't take dogs over 5 yrs of age, afraid that they won't be good candidates for adoption if they pass over the rainbow bridge shortly after adoption.

Another county facility automatically puts down or transfers out any declawed cat, because of the greater likelihood that such cats will exhibit behavior problems such as litterbox avoidance or a propensity for biting.

Mike, can you please address the question of whether or not these concerns are viable? Are these appropriate responses when challenged with taking on an animal who might be less adoptable? Thank you for your insight!

Response from Mike Arms:

I have heard all of these stories in the past, and with each problem there is always a solution.

With animals that are over five years of age, there are also senior citizens that would be more than happy to adopt them. I understand that with some seniors, a large breed might not be attractive to them, but at the same time, I have seen many seniors in great shape that would be more than happy to adopt a large senior animal because they have a home with a fenced yard, and an older large breed is not as rambunctious as it was when it was young. Many times these are perfect matches if promoted and advertised properly.

In addition, we have many potential adopters in this country coming in and asking specifically for declawed felines. Although we don't permit any of our animals to be declawed, we will accept declawed cats for adoption. I strongly suggest to those facilities that are discriminating against declawed felines that they should start taking adopter requests for anyone seeking a previously declawed feline, and match it in the future with someone wishing to relinquish their declawed cat.

All of us who work in animal adoption facilities must use the business parts of our mind to help promote the animals in their best light. That is why we are in the positions that we are in. Be creative in your thought process. Promote adoptions of animals with handicaps.

Don't be afraid to advertise!

Question from Caryl:

I am working as a volunteer in one of the nonprofit shelters in Albuquerque. I am a New Zealander who has just settled here in the last few months. I am shocked at the high euthanasia rate in this city, second highest in the States. It's unacceptable to me that several hundreds of animals are killed weekly in New Mexico shelters. Most of these are healthy adoptable animals.

Can you tell me about the most successful adoption programs in your experience? I want to volunteer my time to see that more dogs and cats are adopted.

Response from Mike Arms:

There are many successful programs in the U.S. There are just too many to list. The most successful programs are the ones that market their animals professionally to the general public. The trouble with many organizations that have a high kill percentage is that they are not running themselves as a successful business.

I will give you a list of recommendations that could help this organization increase their adoptions, and if they are not interested in doing so, then I suggest you call other organizations in your area to find out what their adoption rate versus their incoming are so that you can volunteer your time where you feel your services are of most value.

The organization that you are currently talking about should send news releases out at least weekly talking about the good work they do or about a special rescue. And always show the most adoptable animals on TV. In addition, they should place an ad in the Yellow Pages under the "Pet Shop" listing because this is where people wanting to get a pet will look.

In reality, they need to get the message out to the general public that they have a large selection of wonderful animals to choose from. Any retailer wishing to get more footsteps into their store must advertise. Any adoption agency wishing to increase their adoptions must do the same.

Some rescues don't want a lot of traffic because they feel it will increase drop-offs and animals abandoned outside their shelter. True, if everyone knows about you the incidence of those tragedies occurring might even double--but your adoption rates might go up 5-10 times! In the end, the animals win.

Be persistent. I wish you great luck.

What are reasonable adoption fees?

Question from Patricia:

Our shelter is in a rural county with a population of 16,000 with low incomes and high unemployment. Our adoption fee (a flat \$45 across the board) barely covers the vet bill, when applicable, for s/n. Our humane society pays for the vaccinations, de-worming and rabies. Yes, we do worry about raising adoption fees and fear our vets will raise their fees if they think we're profiting from adoptions.

We are making great progress in spay/neuter for the public and having our community consider shelter adoption. We have very few adoption returns. Our county government thinks we must make money on the adoptions. We do take sponsorships (relinquishment fees) on adoptions from people who surrender pets or just want to help a certain pet. Few local adoptors buy a \$1 leash or dog food, ID tag, etc from us.

People do comment on our low fees compared to other shelters in our area.

Although our adoption fees may be a small amount, it is, understandably, quite an expense for our local audience. Any suggestions?

Response from Mike Arms:

Your question is formed on one of the major adoption myths of our country. A fact that we know is only 20% of the animals going into American households come from animal shelters. A majority of the American population still purchase their animals from the back yard breeders. Just look in the classified section of your local paper to see what your breeders are advertising and what they are selling the pets for. The price is well over the \$45 that you have for an adoption fee.

Animal shelters in this country for years have kept the fees to a minimum, but the message this is sending to the American public is that our animals are bargain basement animals. Keep in mind that the ones being sold from puppy mills and newspaper advertisements do not come already spayed or neutered,

whereas you have already paid those expenses. Together, by increasing our fees, we can let the public know our animals are a value.

We are the only industry, in some cases such as yours, that tells the American public that our 2005 models (puppies and kittens) are the same price as the 1999 models (adult dogs and cats). The Helen Woodward Animal Center, like many other organizations, has higher prices for our puppies and kittens, and variable prices for our adult animals. Our adoptions have quadrupled in five years with no hitch at all in raising the fees.

My strong suggestion is that you try higher and per-animal fees for 30 days, and I can almost guarantee the only effect you will have is an increase in revenue and no decrease in adoptions.

Is instant gratification such a bad thing?

Question from Mary:

Until recently we had never allowed on site, immediate adoptions. After attending an event sponsored in part by the ASPCA we have relaxed our standards for our small and medium sized dogs to allow on site, immediate adoptions. Are we making a mistake?????? We haven't been doing it long enough to be able to track successes and failures. Are there any statistics out there that support doing adoptions without the usual lengthy process (i.e., home check, vet check, reference check). We do have a lengthy application and do have follow up contact.

We would appreciate any feedback and advice on this issue. We would like to get more dogs into awesome homes. We are Great Dane rescue but also rescue other dogs from our local shelter.

Response from Mike Arms:

Off-site adoptions has been practiced in many parts of this country for many years. It is no different than a lot of qualified adoption centers doing same-day adoptions from their facilities. Some places that want to do reference check calls will utilize cell phones when they are off site. I am a strong believer that if you have qualified staff screening potential adopters, they should be well suited in making the proper decisions.

I have worked with agencies that have done and continue to do off-site adoptions, and the adoption return rate is really not any different than those adoptions being done from a facility. We know that when people return an animal, it is for some reason that cannot be determined prior to adoption, i.e., the animal has behavioral issues that it has not shown at our facility, and does not show them in the new home until the animal feels most comfortable.

The more difficult we make things for people to adopt animals, the easier we make it for pet shops and back yard breeders to accept the money or the charge card and do an immediate sale. I need to emphasize that the people that do the adoptions, whether it be at a facility or off site, should be qualified screeners, and they should make the decision for what best suits the animal. It is common sense that if you were not going to let this family adopt at your facility, you would not let this family adopt off premises. But if you have the proper screening and you were going to let them adopt from your facility, then it is only logical that you would let them adopt off premises.

Every time we adopt an animal, educate the family, and place an already spayed or neutered animal in a household, we are stopping another puppy mill or pet shop sale of an unspayed or unneutered animal.

Latchkey kittens and puppies

Question from Becky:

Is it necessary when placing young kittens/puppies (between 9 and 16 weeks) to adopt them out in pairs, or adopt them out solo only if there is a person home during the day and night to socialize them?

Is it better to maintain such a policy for the social development of the babies at the risk of losing potential adopters to other shelters?

This practice often seems to place potential adopters in a difficult position if they only have the capacity to care for or were planning to adopt only one. I know you advocate trying to place them in pairs, but what if they're not interested in that? And what about if there's an adult cat at home already, or dog, does that change the answer?

Response from Mike Arms:

I am a strong believer in adopting out pairs for felines. Nine times out of 10 it works if in your feline display area you place feline pairs and give them twin names like Peanut Butter & Jelly, Peaches & Cream, Bonnie & Clyde, so that the perception will be that they belong together. Just by doing this, it helps in adopting out pairs. We do know that by adopting out two felines and letting them grow up together, it seems to avoid adoption returns because it works well.

You are right, they keep each other company and amused when the family is at the store or working. At the same time, there are folks that already have another feline at home and just wish to adopt one. If that be the case, I strongly suggest that you let them adopt that individual pet. Even in the cases that some folks just want one feline, I say let them have their way on this, as there are plenty of felines to go around. Maybe try for a kitten who might be likely to want to be the only cat...some people notice that calicos and tortoiseshells are more likely to thrive as 'only cats.' We just strongly suggest that the young felines go out in pairs, especially knowing that it works. Every organization is inundated with felines.

I do not hold the same beliefs in adopting out puppies in pairs. I have found, in many cases, the opposite to be true. In adopting puppies in pairs, many times one is returned because of behavioral problems. During the housebreaking process, if one puppy is disciplined for a mistake, the other puppy will feel that they are getting more attention, so they will break training.

In young canines, I always suggest to potential adopters that they adopt one puppy, train it properly, and then four months later, come and adopt another one. The only time I would ever make an exception to that rule is if the adopter can prove that they have successfully raised two puppies together, because it is not easy. Many times, if the adopter has an adult dog at home, the new puppy will learn good behavior from that adult dog. Hope this helps.

Black cats around Halloween

Question from Crystal:

What about policies of not adopting out solid black or pure white cats in the weeks before Halloween? Is there any real proof that "Satanists" or other cults adopt black cats only to sacrifice them? Isn't this sort of like not adopting cats during prime adoption (kitten) season around Independence Day because the new adopters might torture the cats by doing unmentionable stunts involving cats and firecrackers? Or maybe pets shouldn't be adopted in February, because they might accidentally get into a box of chocolates!

For what it's worth, I don't think anyone would pay \$60 or more just to adopt a cat to sacrifice. It seems that with proper screening and high enough adoption fees, this would weed out the weirdos as well as the people who allegedly want a black cat for a Halloween party decoration. And the last time there was a "Satanic sacrifice" scare in our area, the Satanists turned out to be hungry coyotes.

The only value I see to the folklore of Satanists-at-large, is that it encourages people to keep their cats indoors; hopefully that will spread to year-round!

Response from Mike Arms:

Thanks for the laugh this morning. I have heard this old wife's tale more than once in my career. You would think by now that pet adoption agencies would be professional enough to be able to screen potential adopters in evaluating a good home life.

To simply remove black or white cats from the adoption flow, or not allowing people to adopt black or white cats on the eve of Halloween because of whatever rumor mill just does not make sense. There are so many ways that you can do reference checks to learn about their previous pet history so that you can make good sound judgments (call their vet, for example). I do agree, however, that if the potential adopter flies in on a broom, you might want to seriously consider not adopting to that individual.

But joking aside, years ago when the movie Jaws came out, we found that some folks were adopting cats on eastern Long Island just to be used as shark bait. Did that mean that we needed to stop adopting out cats on Long Island, or did that mean that we just had to alert the facilities to do better screening of potential adopters?

We have come a long way since the dark ages, and being professional lifesavers, we are astute enough to screen properly to ensure the animal is getting the best, quality home possible.

So let's just eliminate one more old myth.

Really, though, how much should we be charging?

Questions from Jeannette & Linda:

Can Mike elaborate on how fees are determined instead of us just randomly deciding on an adoption fee, and isn't asking more for younger animals than older ones more on the order of pricing to sell rather than trying to recoup actual expenses? How do we make a distinction between our "adoption fees" and the "selling prices" of breeders?

What are your thoughts about sale prices? Like everyone else, we are swamped with kittens, but have felt that lowering our adoption fees even for a short time implied that our cats aren't worth the usual adoption fee. We've always given a twenty dollar reduction if two cats are adopted together, but another rescue nearby is having a buy one, get the second for half price sale. Is that type of promotion effective enough that should we jump in there with a "Slashing Prices" sale for cats, too?

Response from Mike Arms:

Adoption fees will vary according to the area in which you live, and it is very simple. Let's start with puppies and kittens. You can't recapture everything financially that is put into a puppy or kitten that you adopt. Most organizations in this country cry the blues about not having enough financial resources, but yet they never think about really the actual costs going into an animal. There are the vaccination expenses, the spay/neuter expenses, the payroll expenses to clean and care for an animal, the food budget, utilities, the manpower hours spent in screening potential adopters. So ultimately if you don't add these costs into your fees, you are just telling the public that your services do not have real value to them.

The way that I suggest you look at this is to open the classified section of your newspaper at home, see what they are selling puppies and kittens for, and maybe reduce that fee by 40%. So if you see the animal in the paper is going for \$200, then your fee should be \$120. Keep in mind, they are not placing these ads in the paper unless they know they can successfully sell the animals for those prices. Stop telling the public that your animals are bargain basement. This is the impression we have given to the American public for years, and that is why they think our animals are of very little value.

In addition, your question was about the price difference between younger animals and older animals. Again, you need to look at what the market will bear. It is not our fault that families will pay more for a Golden Retriever than they will for a Shepherd mix. Yet you have an obligation to your organization and to the animals. The animals are of value, and your organization needs revenue. This in no way compromises the quality of your adoptions. If the potential adopter is not qualified to have a pet, you would not let them have it regardless of how much money they are willing to give. By having variable pricing, we are just giving the animals the dignity that they deserve, and telling the American public that our animals are just as good if not better than they can get from a back yard breeder or puppy mill. And in most cases, they are spayed and neutered, and we are there to help you through your training process.

I really feel that for so many years, we in the animal welfare industry have been looked at as second-class citizens, and our animals as second-class pets. We need to stand up, be heard, be proud of what we do, and not sell ourselves short. Your question also refers to sale pricing of animals. I understand this during peak periods of the year when we are inundated with pets. If reducing pricing during this time helps increase the reduction of inventory in our facilities, we should go for it. I can't express enough that if you are a good organization with good screening, the cost will not change the quality of your adoption. It is the American way of life when car dealers or retail stores are overstocked, they run sales. The American public has been conditioned to that.

I feel the lives in our hands are much more important than material items. If we can create an adoption frenzy, have people come to us to get a pet rather than to back yard breeders and puppy mills, then we have an obligation to do so. What we have been doing in this country regarding pet adoption fees and standards for the past 100 years has not worked. We need to change, and we need to change the public's perception of our animals and the work that we do.

Thank you for asking such great questions.

Reliable adoption screening

Questions from Dominique, Jorg, Sheila & Monica:

...I had the pleasure of attending one of your workshops - business and marketing used the way it should be: to benefit the homeless animals and the organization! How refreshing in our "industry." Anyway, I think many would be interested in getting your views on:

"No home is good enough for Fluffy or Max" - how to deal with overprotection, from multiple visit requirements (having people come back, i.e. not being able to adopt "on the spot") to lengthy application and/or application process. This goes for from foster home adoptions as well as from adoption facilities. Also, are there any figures or statistics that indicate the effectiveness (or not) of home visits?

How much reference checking, including thoughts on using database information to check on residence ownership for a specific address?

...As a small organization of volunteers we would like to know what makes staff qualified for screening and what in your experience is proper screening. What is the best model, a gut feeling or a comprehensive questionnaire, or both? What is the key to good screening?

...What would you say is the most common reason an animal is "returned" after it is adopted or for failed adoptions in general? What questions are the most important to ask? How do you suggest the interview process be conducted? There are some folks on our board of directors that think we make too big of a deal over the "sit down" interview process and that the right information can be gotten from casual chatting with the potential adopters. Your input please!

Thanks for everything!

Response from Mike Arms:

I guess you are trying to make me work today; like I don't have enough to do already! Kidding aside, these are great questions, and I will try to answer each one.

Let's look at some of the facts. Your statement about overprotection is one of the major obstacles we need to conquer. The syndrome is sometimes referred to as loving them too much. Some shelter workers feel that an animal cannot be loved or protected as well as they do it, and they turn down adopter after adopter until that particular animal is adopted by staff, or euthanized because of time restraints. Some folks I have seen turn down potential adopters because they felt they had the power to do so, and it becomes more of a power play than rationale in qualifying a good home.

I particularly pay attention to potential adoption counselors that only go by what is black and white. In many of those cases, I have anonymously filled out an adoption application without putting a name to it,

to question whether the animal could go to that home or not. In most cases, the adoption was denied without further questioning, and the adopter they were turning down was myself, stating reasons that I am not home enough, I don't have time to care for a pet properly, etc., not really looking to my pet history or ascertaining if I could bring a pet to work, just because it did not fit in their box.

I am not saying that we should be putting our animals in the wrong hands, but the more difficult we make it for people to adopt, the more we encourage sales from back yard breeders and puppy mills. Staff need to be trained properly on customer service, how to screen properly, getting more involved in potential adopters' past experience history, and how to make potential adopters feel comfortable so you may educate them properly as to what makes a good pet owner.

I do not know of any national statistics on the effectiveness of home visits. I am a very logical person and understand that people can show you their home, but you will never know what goes on inside that home post-adoption. Most of the information about the home and environment can be found in reference checks. Most reference check information can be received by calling a neighbor and veterinarian.

The question referring to proper training for screening, and feelings vs. comprehensive questionnaire, I believe it is a combination of feelings along with the questionnaire. The questionnaire will give you the basic background to the individual seeking to adopt, but talking to the individual and watching their reactions to the pet will help you in making your decision. Is the family being gentle with the pet, rough with the pet, are they allowing their children to roughhouse with the pet, or are they teaching the children gentleness and care? All of these things need to be watched during the introduction period to the pet. This will help you in determining the lifestyle of that family.

Your last paragraph, in reference to how long or short an interview should be, nothing is set in stone. A lot has to do with the potential adopter, what questions were answered in the gray zone, and how long it takes to get a satisfactory answer. All of us are doing the best we can hopefully to ensure the animal is going into a quality home. We do the best we can, but it will never be perfect. I don't try to overburden potential adopters. I try to educate them.

The most common reason for adoption return is behavioral problems. When you review the statistics for adoption returns, the largest percentage are adult animals. We know when families adopt adult animals from us, we can only give them the information that we received from the previous owner. Or in some cases, if it is a stray, we do not know how the animal will behave in the new home surroundings. Adult dog adoptions, prior to the person bonding with the animal, if the animal shows aggressive tendencies or is destructive in the new home, that animal will be returned within 72 hours. Young animals, on the other hand, will be returned within the next 6 to 12 months, most times because of inadequate, improper training. We should always try to work as much as we can with potential adopters through their first 90 days post-adoption with training tips. This will help minimize that category.

I hope this answers your questions, and if you would like to go into more detail on these items, I would be happy to discuss them with you at anytime. Keep up the great work.

Where to draw the line as far as 'easy placements'

Questions from Beth and other members:

In the past our facility has refused to adopt cats if they were not going to be "strictly indoor cats." This is problematic on several fronts:

We take in cats that were previously outdoor or indoor/outdoor cats and they do not adjust well to being indoors all the time and they are frequently returned.

Our adult cat adoption rate has dropped with the arrival of the "spring kittens."

Several of our staff and board members have indoor/outdoor cats themselves.

Are we being a bit hypocritical and unrealistic with this indoor only standard?

Also, we know that education is the BEST way to keep people from declawing cats. When people come in to adopt and they say they are going to declaw, then we spend time explaining why we do not allow that. Sometimes we educate them and they respond, "Oh, ok I won't do it then," but we know darn well we have not convinced them. Is it ok then to say, "we think you are going to declaw, so you can not adopt from us?"

The same goes for ear cropping in certain breeds of dogs. I know a couple who adopted a Great Dane puppy from a rescue, then paid to have her ears sliced in half and bound up to stick up on top of her head! I know that dog, a purebred puppy, could easily have found a different home that wouldn't have mutilated her like that!

Response from Mike Arms:

These questions were very interesting, and I collaborated with my Director of Operations, Rita Truderung for a combined response.

It is not hypocritical to want the best for the animals placed in your care. You decide what you want for their futures, and it is OK to want them to be kept safely indoors, with their claws and ears, and away from the potential harms that face them outside. Times have changed with a greater number of vehicles and predators outdoors that can threaten the safety of an animal. If a particular cat is having trouble adjusting to indoors-only, maybe the owner must design an enclosure to keep their pet safe while allowing them to enjoy the outdoors? You know, years ago there were many arguments about allowing dogs to roam free and how we must not squash their free spirits. But for their own safety, we eventually mandated that they come inside and be kept on leashes/collars. Do we love our felines any less? At our facility, we do require our felines to go to Indoor-only homes.

As to the difficulty adopting out adult cats during kitten season - there are a few things you can try. You can let owners know before they bring in their pet for relinquishment that if they can keep the animal or make arrangements for their pet to stay somewhere else until kitten season is over, that it will be much easier on their pet. By waiting those few months, their adult cat will have a much higher chance of adoption and will not have to spend long months waiting in a kennel. A few other ideas include moving the kittens to the back of your facility, so all potential adopters see the adults first. This will give them the chance to fall in love with an adult cat before ever seeing the babies. Also, with Moms and litters, you can require that one of the babies goes home with Mom in a pair.

We also value education and ask our potential adopters in their interview about their opinions on declawing or cropping. We will spend as much time as needed to get comfortable with their answers and continue to provide education until we believe they understand and agree. In cases where it is apparent they are lying and will declaw (or crop), we will decline the adoption as well as note their name in our files for future use. In general, we treat each family as an individual case and try to work with them as much as possible to make a good placement for our animals. We counsel on many options either within our facility (if we have an already-declawed feline) or by giving them a list of other local shelters. However, there are certain requirements which we cannot and will not overlook.

Thank you for the question!

How do we take the time to get to know the pet?

Question from Sue:

Regarding adult animals up for adoption, how important is it to spend the time to get to know their personalities so that they will succeed in a home, or is turnover (high volume adoptions with a lot of animals going to new homes in a short time period) a more important issue?

Response from Mike Arms:

Great question! Unfortunately, there is no simple answer.

Many times an adult dog will act differently in a shelter environment than it will in a home environment. Hopefully you can use a combination of items to help the animal with proper placement. The staff that are handling adult animals we hope are qualified to determine if the animal is showing any type of behavioral issues with adults, children or food possession, that we can help modify before the dog gets placed.

In addition, we need to review all of the previous owner comments (provided the dog is not a stray to begin with), so we can help in matching the right pet with the right owner. I know many shelters in the country must make room for new arrivals as quickly as possible, unfortunately, sometimes, through means of euthanasia. In those cases they have very little time to assess the animal. If millions of 'surplus' animals are having their lives ended every year, then millions of adoptions need to take place in that same, short year. Alongside millions of at-risk-to-reproduce animals being spayed/neuter, of course.

In a perfect world, we all would love to be able to properly assess the animal in the amount of time needed for this so we can best match up the animal with its new living conditions. That should be our ultimate goal.

Member Comments

Comments about reliable adoption screening:

Comment from Barbara:

Perhaps there is one other thing that may help, although I am sure the average person wanting to adopt an animal are not animal abusers. One way to rule out that remote possibility is a nationwide list of people who have been guilty of that crime in the past, available at www.pet-abuse.com (<http://www.bestfriends.com/archives/forums/020705abuse.html>).

Comment from Sue:

We do screen heavily at Twin Tiers Rescue, including a home visit, to help us ensure that it is the best home for the particular dog. Not every home suits every dog; and some homes suit no dog, in my opinion. We will not adopt to homes where there are outside only dogs or unaltered cats/dogs.

Is the home visit a stumbling block? Yes, it is sometimes and we do lose potentially good adoptive homes due to the lag time. Yet one time (and that is literally the truth--once) we did not do a home visit, just went by meeting and interviewing the person and some photos of their home and later found out she was a collector and had 20+ dogs. This situation was NOT revealed by the neighbor and personal references and the woman had an excellent vet reference but if we had done a home visit prior, we would've seen the signs. That made us really become fanatical about the home visit. We are in the rescue business to find the BEST home for each dog in our care and believe screening is the way to do it. Quality, not quantity is our goal in adoptive homes.

Comment from Mickey:

We check vet reference, personal reference and history with previous pets, which works really well for us. I do not keep folks without fenced yards from adopting. I have so many that have been adopted to apartment dwellers, who are just the best. In fact, sometimes better than a dog with a fenced yard, because they get one-on-one walks every day, instead of just being 'let out.'

Comment from Lou on adoption fees:

And something else that wasn't mentioned: if someone can't afford \$100 or so to adopt a dog, they probably can't afford the dog. Dogs, unfortunately, cost money to keep healthy - heartworm preventative, regular vet visits, etc.

We've been through this and rescue has been greatly chastised for trying to make a profit. Well, of course, we don't make a profit. The money we get for adoptions goes--besides to rabies, spay/neuter and other shots--to heartworm treatment and extraordinary vet expenses. We had one vet bill just

yesterday that cost \$800, and the pup died. It would be nice if there were a way to subsidize low income folks owning dogs, but in Houston, anyway, there is not one.

Comment from Beth about what makes a pet adoptable:

From my experience at the shelter, we have many Shepherds, Huskies, and other large dogs living to be 12 and older. One of our Huskies must be about 15 by now. The no-kill shelter I work with treats the animals with the utmost care and love, and the dogs all have many visitors and walkers.

Educating the public about older dog adoptions is very important. People just don't realize. Of course, if puppy mills were stopped, everyone would begin to see the value in the pet they already have. That would cut down on this, "Out with the old, in with the new," mentality we witness when people give up--or have put down--a senior pet for some bogus reason, then run out and purchase a purebred puppy in their old friend's place.

There are so many excellent points about adopting an older dog, such as no housebreaking, good manners, and they are so grateful to have another home and, they are very loving, and the list goes on.

I just don't believe the majority of people realize the emotional capacity an animal has, and the bond that develops. There is a very sad story entitled, "How Could You" which is a story about giving up an older pet (downloadable at <http://www.crean.com/jimwillis/hcy.html>). One of the most heartwrenching I have ever read. I believe this should be given to every person who is looking to adopt a pet, or brings a pet to a shelter. I believe a TV program must be done on the truth about purchasing pets, and subsequently giving them up, so the public may begin to understand what a tragic situation this is causing in our world. Thanks for your time.

Closing comments from forum moderator:

Thank you to the many members who sent in questions and comments for this week's forum! Can't get enough of the adoption guru? There's more at <http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/pdf/secrets.pdf>!

Transcripts from this and all other forum weeks are archived for easy reference, and are made available to all at <http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/weeklyforum/forumarchives.cfm>. Meanwhile, those of you who joined the forum midweek can view the complete transcripts right away at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NMHP/>.

Frequently, members contact us asking for permission to share the information posted through this forum. **The answer is always yes.** We just ask that the source is acknowledged (No More Homeless Pets online forum, hosted by Best Friends Animal Society) and that the web page for the forum is provided (<http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/weeklyforum/>). That way they know where to go to find out more!

As always, thank you for being part of the forum, and for everything you do for the animals!

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Kindness to animals builds a better world for all of us.