

Common Myths About Shelter Pets

There are many misconceptions about the quality of animals found in rescue shelters. The stigma that shelter pets have been stuck with for many years is that they are "damaged goods."



MYTH: Shelter pets are obviously not good pets, or else their original owners wouldn't have gotten rid of them.

If the main reason why a pet gets brought to rescue shelters was because they were a *bad* pet, there would be thousands of empty shelters across the country. Animals are brought to shelters for a large variety of reasons, some of which are...

- Their owners have passed away
- An irresponsible owner didn't get their pets spayed or neutered so they found themselves with a litter of babies that they could not keep or did not want
- The animal's owners were abusive or neglectful to the animal, so the authorities have removed the pet from the harmful environment
- An animal was obtained by someone who did not take into consideration all of the responsibility that caring for that pet would entail. A good example of this would be someone who adopts a pet in an apartment complex that does not allow animals and then is subsequently forced to get rid of the pet.

MYTH: Animals from abusive homes will never be good pets because they have been mistreated for so long

Most animals coming from abusive homes will typically make a full emotional recovery - with proper care and attention. In fact, many of them are so grateful to be rescued from their previous situation, they end up being more devoted and loyal than animals coming from non-abusive homes.

MYTH: You never know what you're getting with shelter pets

Although its true that the medical history and temperament of an animal adopted from a rescue shelter are not always able to be tracked down, it's really no different than an animal you might get from a pet store.

MYTH: All animals in rescue shelters are sickly or unhealthy

Once again, it certainly is possible that a pet adopted from a shelter may have medical problems, however the majority of the animals that are adopted from shelters are perfectly healthy, and just need a good home. If anything, you're more likely to get an honest answer about an animal's medical problems from a shelter volunteer - who is clearly there because they care deeply about the animals - as opposed to a pet store owner or breeder that is only in for the money. Additionally, animals in shelters are typically treated much better than animals in pet stores, which have often spent their short lives in cramped environments with little socializing and often, unsanitary conditions.

MYTH: Animals from shelters have trouble bonding to a new family.

Of course animals miss their families and their old routines. However, shelter animals often bond more strongly to a new family because of their experience of losing their previous one. They may have trouble being left alone at first so adopt when you can spend a few days at home. Schedule short excursions so your new pet will feel secure knowing that you will always come back. Dogs reunited with owners they have not seen in years can be overjoyed to see their old friends but still prefer to stay with the new family they have come to love.

MYTH: Older animals have trouble bonding to new people.

Age does not affect a pet's ability to bond with a new family. Social animals, such as dogs, cats, horses and birds form new relationships throughout their lives with other animals including people. A very elderly animal may take longer to adjust to physical aspects of a new home (such as stairs or a dog door) than a younger dog, however emotional attachment will not be hampered by a pet's age.

MYTH: Stray animals do not make good pets.

There is a difference between stray animals and "feral" animals. Most strays had a family but got lost or were put outside to fend for themselves. Many strays are found wearing collars but no ID tag. Strays that survive long enough to be rescued are usually more intelligent than the average pet. Most are so grateful for food and shelter they are happy to comply with house rules.

MYTH: Adopting a second-hand pet is taking on someone else's problem.

People give up pets for reasons as simple as "sheds hair" or "needs exercise." Since all dogs and cats shed and require exercise, these are not problem pets. People make mistakes when acquiring pets. Some people adopt a pet on impulse or are given a pet they do not want. They may become responsible for a loved one's pet after a family tragedy. When people give up a pet, guilt may cause them to hide the pet's worst behavior or exaggerate normal behavior to blame the pet for their unwillingness to meet the responsibility of caring for an animal. It is very difficult to evaluate a pet based on information from people who no longer want the pet.

MYTH: Animals from the shelter have frequently been abused or have behavior problems that indicate abuse.

Don't be fooled by an animal's shy or frightened behavior. Many animals cower and flinch when approached by strangers, especially tall or assertive people or excited children. This behavior is not an indication that the animal was abused. In fact, many animals that actually have been mistreated are outgoing and forgiving. Ask any animal control officer! Many young animals in shelters did not receive training or sufficient exercise. Some lack social skills. The best remedy for these pets is a new home.

