

12 Reasons to Give a Senior Dog a Chance to Live

Just when these dogs need care and companionship the most, they are surrendered to shelters. Worse, potential adopters mostly pass them by, leaving them to live the rest of their lives in a cage or be euthanized to make room for others. Here are 12 reasons why you should give one a chance.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Many older dogs are relinquished to shelters at a time in their lives when they need human companionship most; often they live out the remainder of their lives there
- Many prospective adopters pass older pets by for a variety of reasons
- Adopting a senior dog typically has many advantages for pet parents looking for an animal companion who is already housetrained, perhaps obedience trained, socialized and easy to be around
- Sherri Franklin of Muttville Senior Dog Rescue has recognized a need to create a safe harbor and a hopeful future for senior dogs who find themselves suddenly homeless

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Animal shelters across the country house dogs of all shapes, sizes, breeds, and ages, but sadly, older animals are often among the last to find forever homes.

Many senior dogs in shelters have spent their entire existence as part of a family, but at a time in their lives when they most need human care and companionship, they're surrendered to a shelter for any number of reasons, including ill health, incontinence, or another condition of old age.

In other cases, the **owner passes away** and surviving family members can't or don't want to care for the dog left behind. The reasons potential adopters often steer clear of older dogs include:

- They're not as cute as puppies
- They may have, or may develop serious, expensive health problems
- They don't seem as perky or playful as younger animals
- The prospective pet parent has recently lost a dog and can't bear the thought of losing another companion to old age within a few years

Many older pets live out the remainder of their lives in shelters or are euthanized to make room for more adoptable animals. This is a heartbreaking end to the life of a once much-loved pet. If you're thinking of adopting an animal companion, an older dog might be just the furry friend you need, so I encourage you to keep an open mind.

Why a Senior Dog May Be the Perfect Pet for You

1. **You can pick your perfect dog** — If you're looking for a short-haired dog, for example, or one with no history of health problems, you can search until you find an older pet with exactly those qualities. If you happen to have a cat and are looking for a feline-friendly dog, you can ask to see older dogs who lived with cats in their former homes.
2. **You can adopt a purebred senior** — If you really love a certain breed of dog, chances are there's a breed rescue organization that can point you in the direction of older purebred pets in need of homes.
3. **Seeing is believing** — A senior dog holds no surprises as to how big he might get, what color his adult coat will be, or whether his hips will be healthy. A senior pet comes to you with his own history, which makes his future somewhat more predictable than that of a puppy.
4. **Senior dogs have manners** — Unlike puppies, many adult dogs have spent years living with a family and being socialized to life with humans. They may have received obedience training and respond to commands like sit, stay, and down. Many are housetrained and it takes a matter of hours or a day or two to help them learn the potty protocol in their new home.
5. **You can teach an old dog new tricks** — Adult dogs can focus on the task at hand. If your adopted older pet needs to learn a few things in her new life with you, not to worry. Enroll her in an obedience class, contact a trainer, or go the do-it-yourself route. Older dogs are typically more attentive than puppies, and more eager to please their humans.
6. **Senior dogs respect your belongings** — Older adoptive pets are years beyond the search-and-destroy puppy phase. You don't need to worry about finding your favorite pair of shoes or a table leg chewed beyond recognition.
7. **Older dogs are easy to kick back with** — Senior dogs have all the basics down and aren't full of wild energy they need to burn off. Because you're not constantly chasing around or cleaning up after your older pet, you have more time to spend having adventures or just relaxing together.
8. **Senior dogs and senior citizens make a great team** — Many elderly people find the calm presence of an older canine companion very comforting. They appreciate having a housemate who is also getting up there in age, doesn't mind hearing the same stories again and again, and is content to move through life at a slower speed.
9. **Adopted senior dogs are forever grateful** — Somehow, older pets seem to know you gave them a home when no one else would. Many new pet parents form a close bond very quickly with their senior dog, because the pet shows them a level of attention and devotion that is unique to older adopted animals.
10. **A senior dog is a relatively short-term commitment** — The fact is, a senior dog isn't an 8 to 20-year responsibility like a younger pet is. This can be a serious consideration for an elderly person or someone who doesn't know what their living situation might be in a few years.
11. **We're heading into the season of giving** — Many people are looking for opportunities to be charitable this time of year, and I can't think of a better way to give back than to help one less animal spend the holiday season in a shelter. Pets shouldn't be given as gifts, unless your gifting yourself.
12. **You can be a hero to a deserving older dog** — Almost without exception, people who adopt older animals feel a special sense of pride and purpose in opening their heart to a hard-to-place dog. Doing a good thing really does make you feel good!

A Very Special Senior Dog Rescue

In 2007, Sherri Franklin opened **Muttville Senior Dog Rescue** in San Francisco. Since then, the organization has saved thousands of senior dogs and found them homes.

Some of the dogs at Muttville come from loving homes and have never known anything else, while others have lived their entire lives in the backyard. All need lots of love, and fortunately, according to Franklin, there are adopters looking for well-loved dogs, and others looking for the saddest, worst-case scenario, so there's plenty of love to go around no matter a dog's background.

The Muttville shelter is a home-like environment. There are no kennels. Most new dogs take from 24 to 48 hours to warm up to their surroundings. Some come in ready to hide or run from anything that moves, but 48 hours later, they're crawling into someone's lap.

Muttville's minimum age for dogs is 7. Franklin picked that age because in her **experience volunteering at shelters**, dogs 7 and older are the ones who are passed by. Every dog who comes to Muttville gets veterinary care to give them the best quality of life possible.

For terminally ill dogs there's Muttville's "Fospice," a hospice and foster care program that pairs the dogs with foster homes and covers the cost of palliative care. Franklin was initially worried that she wouldn't have many foster families signing up to care for dogs who are dying, but as it turns out, the caregivers in her Fospice program feel it's a rewarding experience to offer an animal a happy final chapter.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Sherri not long ago to talk about her passion for older dogs and her unique approach to finding forever homes for them.

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