

Turn Your Heart Toward the Furry Friends Most in Need

Are you ready to save a life? That's exactly what you do when you turn your heart toward the estimated 3.3 to 4.5 million dogs waiting in shelters to find a home. Forget the fancy breeders and pet shops. Rescue a pup that is truly in need and open the door to unimaginable unconditional love.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- October is Adopt a Shelter Dog Month, a time to turn your heart toward the estimated 3.3 to 4.5 million dogs waiting to find a home
- At U.S. animal shelters in 2023, while 56.7% of dogs that came in were adopted, 8.5% were euthanized and 7.4% are still waiting
- Animal shelter volunteers get to know the dogs in their care, so they'll be able to recommend the right dog for your lifestyle
- Many who have rescued a pup in need soon realize that they're the ones who have been "rescued" — such is the power of adding a loyal companion offering unconditional love into your life
- If you're not ready to adopt, consider fostering; most animal shelters are in need of foster families to care for animals while they wait to be adopted

October is Adopt a Shelter Dog Month, a time to turn your heart toward the estimated 3.3 to 4.5 million dogs waiting to find a home.¹ Celebrated by the American Humane Society, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and more, this important occasion has been on the books since at least 1981.²

Why choose a dog from an animal shelter? The No. 1 reason is to save a life. Even if you adopt from a no-kill shelter, bringing home a dog opens up space for another precious life to move in — one that may otherwise not get the chance.

History of the First Animal Shelter

Adopt a Shelter Dog Month wouldn't be possible without the beginning of animal shelters — and they have a very interesting history. In 1869, 30 women who were animal rights activists, led by Caroline Earl White, formed the Women's Humane Society in Philadelphia.³

Initially, the humane society focused on advocating for carriage horses on city streets, which were often treated poorly. Many weren't provided with medical care or even clean water.

"Horses were considered beasts of burden for industrial purposes at the time," National Today explained. "After success in advocating for more humane treatment of horses, the women turned their attention later that year to smaller domestic animals when they opened a shelter where lost dogs could be found and reclaimed by their owners or placed in new homes."⁴

As their mission progressed, they started an education program to raise awareness about humane treatment of animals and, in 1909, even opened a dispensary where dogs could receive veterinary care.

There are now more than 3,500 animal shelters in the U.S.,⁵ and the first, which was named The Women's Branch of the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, is still operating outside of Philadelphia today, under the name "Women's Animal Center."⁶

Adopt a Dog to Save a Life

If you're ready to add a dog (or cat) to your family, your perfect companion can be found at an animal shelter near you. At U.S. animal shelters in 2023, while 56.7% of dogs that came in were adopted, 8.5% were euthanized and 7.4% are still waiting.⁷

Sadly, however, more dogs are entering U.S. animal shelters than are leaving, according to Shelter Animals Count, which collects and shares animal shelter data. From Q1 2021 to Q1 2023, the rate of euthanasia at shelters nearly doubled, rising from 5.6% to 10%.

And in 2022, 4% more animals came into animal shelters than left them. In a news release, Stephanie Filer, executive director of Shelter Animals Count, explained that many are operating in crisis mode:⁸

"We have been holding onto too many animals since the beginning of 2021. This means that shelters are now in their third year of having too many animals in care and not enough adoptions, especially for dogs. Increasing dog outcomes is the most urgent need to get the sheltering system out of crisis mode."

6 Top Reasons to Choose a Shelter Dog as a Pet

Many who have rescued a pup in need soon realize that they're the ones who have been "rescued" — such is the power of adding a loyal companion offering unconditional love into your life. And there are many reasons why shelter dogs make the best pets of all.

1. **You can find all shapes and sizes** — It's not a good idea to **choose your dog based on looks alone**. But if you're set on finding a small dog or a large one, or a dog with a certain coat color, age, gender or breed mix, you'll find it all at your local shelter.
2. **Mature pups make great companions** — While there are plenty of puppies at the pound, adult and senior dogs tend to be even more plentiful. This is good news, as it means you can bypass those sleepless nights and houstraining woes by adopting a mature dog who already knows the ropes.
3. **Mutts are one-of-a-kind** — You may find a purebred pup at your local shelter — and certainly at a breed-specific rescue — but you'll definitely find your pick of **mixed-breed dogs**. Mutts often have wonderful temperaments, with a mix of attributes, and unmatched cuteness. After all, every mutt is unique.
4. **You may be able to do a test drive** — Some animal shelters allow you to "borrow" a dog for a night or weekend to make sure he's a good fit for your family. In case it doesn't work out, you can bring him back after

this brief "vacation," but hopefully you'll have found the perfect match.

5. **You'll get an expert recommendation** — Animal shelter volunteers get to know the dogs in their care, so they'll be able to recommend the right dog for your lifestyle. Be honest about what you're looking for in a pet — lap dog? Hiking companion? A friend for your dog at home? — and carefully consider their advice.
6. **You'll only pay a nominal fee** — Most shelters only charge a small fee to adopt a dog, much less than you'll pay to a breeder or pet store. While the most expensive part of pet ownership — the ongoing care — is yet to come, it does help save a few dollars in the meantime. Plus, you'll be helping to support an organization that's committed to saving more pets in need.

How to Get Involved This Adopt a Shelter Dog Month

One of the best ways to get involved is to adopt a dog from a shelter near you. However, if you're not ready to adopt, consider fostering. Most animal shelters are in need of foster families to care for animals while they wait to be adopted, so you'll be helping to save lives just the same.

You can also help by donating your time or resources to animal shelters in your area. Every little bit helps. As Filer explained, "The crisis shelters are facing does not originate within the shelters. Shelters need help now more than ever. This is a community problem that requires a community solution."⁹

Sources and References

^{1,2,3,4,6} [NationalToday.com](#)

⁵ [World Animal Foundation January 21, 2023](#)

⁷ [Shelter Animals Count, Q2 Analysis, January-June 2021, 2022, 2023](#)

^{8,9} [Shelter Animals Count May 23, 2023](#)
