

Title: Ideas for Adopt-A-Shelter-Dog Month: October 1-31, 2010

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October is Adopt-A-Shelter-Dog Month. Every year at this time, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) makes an extra effort to raise awareness about the plight of dogs languishing in animal shelters throughout America. Without an outpouring of compassion from pet lovers everywhere, many of these innocent animals will almost certainly die.

Several of the animals sheltered in animal facilities throughout the Inland Valley are there due to serious abuse or neglect. Others are there because their previous owner fell ill or passed away. Recently, due to the housing crisis in this area, shelters have carried the additional burden of housing animals placed in their care due to an increase in foreclosed homes and evictions. Owners who would never dream of otherwise separating from a pet have had to do exactly that in order take advantage of housing for the rest of the family in cases where a pet is not welcome at a new location. This is a heartbreaking decision for families, particularly when a beloved pet is placed in a shelter that euthanizes animals that are not quickly adopted so that they may make room for new pets coming into the shelter.

While October is Adopt-A-Shelter-Dog Month and the ASPCA would love for everyone reading this to find it in their hearts to offer a dog a new home, the organization also knows that opening the doors to a new pet just isn't feasible for everyone. There are, however, other things that can be done to assist animals in need, as well as help the overburdened shelters doing their absolute best to help these lonely pets find a new family.

The following is a brief list of alternatives to adopting a pet this October:

Volunteer at a local adoption fair. Periodically, shelters will host public adoption events. On-site volunteers are always appreciated, as are volunteers who are willing to work behind the scenes to help animals find new homes.

Use your social media power for good. Advertising costs money and with most shelters having limited funds it is just not possible to advertise the adoption needs of pets on the scale that shelters would like. Therefore, why not volunteer to help your local shelter circulate photos and adoption information via Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites? Consider, perhaps, even producing a short video clip featuring animals available for adoption and circulating it on YouTube. Word travels fast on the web and if your shelter isn't already using these methods, volunteer to establish a few social media accounts for them and help them learn how to maximize the mileage they can get from this form of advertising.

Host a fundraiser on behalf of your local shelter. Speaking of limited funds, why not host a car wash, a bake sale or other community fundraising event on behalf of your local shelter? Events like these not only raise needed funds, but they also operate as a reminder to the

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community that there are animals in serious need of costly medical attention, toys, food and, yes, homes.

Volunteer to provide a temporary foster home for displaced pets. This can be a huge responsibility, but can also literally save the lives of the animals you open your doors to. Shelters don't kill animals because they're cruel, but they are forced to do so simply because they don't have the space to contain them. Loving, safe households are desperately needed to provide a temporary haven for these innocent creatures until a permanent home can be found.

Tell a friend! While you may not be able to adopt a pet, chances are that you know someone who can. You may even know someone who is considering buying a new pet. While some may search for a particular breed, remind them of the issue with overcrowding at local animal shelters and encourage them to begin their search there. Since there is an influx of animals entering shelters due to the housing crisis, many are surprised to find expensive, perfectly healthy pure breeds in shelters. So, the next time you hear someone considering a new pet, volunteer to help them with a shelter search first.

Encourage pet owners to spay or neuter their animal. Pet overcrowding at shelters because of abuse, neglect and abandonment is just part of the problem. Unwanted litters and stray dogs are even more prone to find their way into a shelter simply because they were born. In an effort to avoid this, talk to every pet owner you know and find out if their animal has been spayed or neutered. Explain to them the importance of doing so and even offer to help them find an affordable spay or neutering program in their city if necessary.

Dogs, cats and other animals forced to live in shelters do not know the uncertainty they face. Those with a heart for animals, however, do know what is at the end of the line for these loving pets if an adoption is not possible. Therefore, it is up to all of us to do what we can to make sure that sheltered animals are met with a happy ending.

More information on ways to help raise awareness during Adopt-A-Shelter-Dog month is available on the ASPCA's website. There, visitors can also access a list of shelters throughout the United States, including any available no-kill shelters, for those faced with the difficult decision of having to part with a pet.