

Animal Shelters Match Pets to Senior Citizens

By Comfort for Critters

Being involved with Comfort for Critters necessarily exposes me to a vast network of other non-profits, working to improve the lives of companion animals. I'm often impressed and humbled by their work, and I try to shine a light in their direction, just as often as possible.

One such group is PAWS, located in Lynnwood Washington, just north of Seattle. Their program, "Seniors for Seniors" is a great solution to a problem which many shelters face. The kittens and puppies steal hearts at shelters...older pets are often either less interesting or worse, suspect.

When I adopted my dog, just shy of her sixth birthday, I had a few people ask, "don't you worry there's something wrong with her, and that's why she was abandoned?" I'd wonder to myself, just what could a dog do to earn being left behind, in an abandoned house, with a bowl of water and pile of food? Her life was not even worth a quick call to the local animal shelter, who would have taken her in? No, I was certain there was something terribly wrong, but it was with her first family, not with her. I've spoken with many rescue groups that would stand firmly with me on the issue. Pets which wind up in shelters are almost always there as the result of a person's mistake, not their own.

So when older pets find themselves in shelters, it's typically more difficult to find them families. That's where the PAWS program comes in. They place dogs and cats, over the age of seven or so, with senior citizens interested in adopting. They also drastically reduce the adoption rate, knowing that seniors are often living on a fixed income. They match each pet to the lifestyle and living situation of the new family.

There is countless research on the benefits of companion animals, especially for the elderly. Companionship, an increase in exercise, and the feeling of being needed are just the start of a long list. Most of all though is the unconditional love which companion animals bring, on a daily basis, to the lives they touch. One of my favorite sayings is, "those who say you can't buy love, have never paid an adoption fee." So true.

These senior pets also benefit from a quieter home and lifestyle. These homes are brimming with affection and are not judgmental of an afternoon nap (or two). While the shelters do near-heroic work in my estimation, nothing replaces your own home. Matching seniors with senior pets is a clear win-win.

I hope to spread the word a bit on this simple idea, since so many other shelters across the county could do the same. If you help at a shelter, work at a shelter or have adopted from your local shelter please consider suggesting this idea. You can refer them to www.PAWS.org (look under "Adopt") for more information. "Critters" comfort us, including seniors, in so many ways...this is one way you can help return that comfort to some older critters who may need it most of all.

www.ComfortForCritters.org

