



## Senior Pets Make Great Companions for Seniors!

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, but older pets are often either less interesting or worse, suspect.

When older pets end up 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 price, 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 much 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 having your own home.

Many other shelters, around the country, have similar programs. I encourage everyone to check with their local shelter and if they don't have this program...suggest it! You may also want to inquire if there's a special way you can help out their older residents (like with a nice, soft blanket!).

In my home state of Illinois, the Champaign County Humane Society offers a program to match senior citizens with senior pets. It's also called "Seniors for Seniors" and it allows a senior citizen to adopt a cat or dog, who is ten years or older with no adoption fee. This organization sees the huge benefit of this match-up. All the pets also go home with basic vaccinations, a microchip, a parasitic check and a general physical exam...so they are off to a good start with their new companion. They go a step further, making these pets eligible for a free health examination with a participating veterinarian right in the area.

The Michigan Animal Rescue League in Pontiac, also runs a program that places senior cats with senior citizens. Once the animal is placed in their new home, the MARL continues to pay for the pet's medical needs, including exams and vaccinations. They even have volunteers who will help transport the cat to and from vet appointments!

I hope to spread the word a bit on this simple idea, which to me is an obvious "win-win"! We all know that our companion animals comfort us in so many ways. This idea provides a chance to provide comfort to the older "critters" in the shelters, which (I suspect) may need the most comfort of all.

