

Some Common Misconceptions About Breed Rescues

By Lillith Toney

No matter what breed you are involved in, if you do rescue, you know people have a lot of opinions of what rescue is, what we do, and how we do it. This page is for those who are looking to adopt a dog from a rescue group, to clear up some of these misconceptions.

Misconception #1: Rescue groups are desperate to find homes for dogs, and don't care who gets them as long as they are gone.

Fact: Rescue groups are usually very careful about placing the right dog in the right home. Some dogs have special needs, such as being an only dog, or being in a home with no children. We spend many hours talking with potential adopters, getting to know their situations. We visit their homes to make sure it is the best environment for the particular dog to be in. In general, we take the same steps a good breeder would to ensure that the match we finally make is a good one. We are only human, however, and we do make mistakes. But we always try to do what is in the dog's best interest.

Misconception #2: Rescue groups always have puppies available. I will have no trouble getting a very young dog, because they will have one right there.

Fact: Only occasionally do most rescues have young pups available. The majority of dogs we rescue are between the ages of one and three years. When considering adopting a rescue dog, you *must* be flexible in your expectations. There is no way for any one group to have the *exact* dog that everyone is looking for. If you are dead set on having a puppy, I would suggest finding a good breeder rather than going with rescue.

Misconception #3: "You have to come pick up this dog NOW, or s/he is going to the pound!"

Fact: I really wish every rescue group had enough volunteers to rush anywhere in the state at a moments notice! In truth, however, there are very few people involved with rescue. For very popular breeds, there may be three or four "hard core" rescuers (those involved in rescue on a daily or weekly basis) and a handful of others who get involved on occasion, to transport or foster dogs as they come in. For less popular breeds, there may be only three or four people in the entire state who are involved. Most people in rescue work at least part time as well. If you are turning your dog over to a rescue group, you *must* have some patience while the details of the transfer are worked out.

Misconception #4: Rescue people are just out to make money. If they were really interested in helping find these dogs homes, they would just give them away rather than charge a fee.

Fact: While some rescue groups get a bit of financial support from a national club (either the breed's club or a national rescue for that breed), almost all money that is spent on the care of the dogs in rescue comes right out of our own pockets. Some come to us with treatable illnesses such as heart or intestinal worms. Some have never been given the proper vaccines or vet care. Many come to us unaltered (not spayed or neutered). We give each and every dog vet care, to ensure that they are reasonably healthy when they are adopted. We feed them nutritious foods and give them vitamins, and any medicines that they need (such as Heartgard, to prevent heartworms). It would be nice if all of these things came to us for free, but they do not. Some rescues have made arrangements with vets to have the dogs treated for a reduced fee, and occasionally, national pet store chains will donate food to rescue groups. The adoption fee that is charged is only to help cover these costs. Believe me, we put out much more than we get back! We are not in rescue for profit. We do this because we love the breeds we are associated with, and because we would rather take the financial loss than see one of our breed suffer in an unhappy home, or be killed in a shelter because no one came to adopt them.

Misconception #5: The breed rescue people will take my dog if it is vicious or has bitten people and rehabilitate him/her for me.

Fact: It would be nice if we in rescue had a magic wand to wave and make every dog non-aggressive. Unfortunately, no such wand exists, and sometimes, bad genes and poor training/socialization combine to create an unpredictable dog who is vicious. If you have such a dog, the best thing to do is put him or her down. Certainly, not all dogs that bite once are vicious. One must look at the circumstances surrounding a bite or act of aggression. But if this is an on going behavior, there may be no other solution. I would urge you to speak to your vet, or consult an animal behaviorist before taking this step. Nothing is more sad than euthanize a beloved family pet, especially if there is something that can be done to correct the aggression.

Misconception #6: *The breed rescue people will take my old, dying dog and care for him/her in their final days or The rescue group will pay for my dog's spay/neuter, cancer surgery, etc.*

Fact: Breed rescue is not a free clinic for dogs. We barely get by as it is. Vet care is part of pet ownership, just as pediatric care is part of parenting. If your dog is old and suffering, please, end that suffering. Yes, it is hard to do, but you have to look at the quality of the dog's life. If s/he can no longer get around on their own, they are not enjoying their life.

Misconception #7: *Breed rescue will give anyone a pair of intact dogs to start their own kennel, so they can breed puppies and sell them.*

Fact: As unbelievable as this is, many people think we will do this. The truth is, we aim to REDUCE the number of dogs who wind up in shelters, unloved and unwanted, not to help boost those numbers. No ethical rescue person will adopt out a dog who is intact, PERIOD. It totally defeats the purpose of rescue.

Misconception #8: *Breed rescue groups scale fences in the dead of night to take dogs out of abusive homes, kick in doors and raid puppy mills.*

Fact: We do none of this generally, though I have heard stories of people taking a neighbor's abused dog then denying ever seeing it. But this is what most people think of when they see/hear the word "rescue". When we say "rescue", it is generally in reference to "rescuing" the dog from a shelter, rather than see it be put to sleep when no one adopts or claims them. Some groups will not take owner turn ins at all, opting to take dogs out of shelters only. As for puppy mills, if there is a raid on a mill (organized by the police or USDA, who license the mills), they will sometimes contact the local rescue groups to aid in caring for the dogs that are seized.

Misconception #9: *These are the people who have dogs that sniff in rubble or avalanches to find bodies or trapped people or These are the people who train dogs to help the disabled.*

Fact: Nope, not us. The first is Search and Rescue, the second is Service Dogs. However, many of the dogs that are trained to work in both of the above groups are taken from shelters. So in that sense, I suppose they really are rescue dogs.

Misconception #10: *Breed rescue groups are against breeding altogether, and have nothing to do with those who breed dogs.*

Fact: Actually, many people involved with rescue are breeders themselves. What we are against is irresponsible breeders who don't know what they are doing. Breeding is not something to be taken lightly. It is not something one just "does", out of curiosity, to "teach the kids about nature" or to make some extra pocket money. When done correctly, breeding is not profitable, and is done ONLY to improve the overall quality of the breed. There are many people out there who breed simply to satiate the demands of the "pet" market, which ends up weakening the genetic pool of the given breed. This is what most rescuers are against, because we do not want to see anything happen that will diminish the quality of the dogs we love so much.

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