

Shelter Owners Help Rescue Dogs Get Adopted

Training helps rescue dogs get adopted.

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Micky, a Golden Retriever mix, learned the hard way: First impressions make a lifetime of difference. The playful 85-pounder went wild the second his cage door swung open to meet visitors who'd considered adopting him. He leaped and knocked them over, mouthing their forearms for attention.

His behavior turned away many people, but the dog didn't know any better. "When Micky first arrived, he was bouncing off walls," said Tammy Kirkpatrick, associate director of the special adoptions service at the North Shore Animal League in Port Washington, N.Y. "We re-channeled his hyperness into constructive playing like fetching and leaving tennis balls. We also taught him how to sit on command."

After two months of training, Micky became a gentleman. When visitors approached his cage, he sat regally on command. His good manners earned him a home with a young couple seeking a playful but obedient dog.

While unruly behavior is the No. 1 reason owners surrender dogs to shelters, many find new homes after shelter staffs, intent on making them more desirable pets, train and socialize them. Former biters, house wreckers, three-legged dogs, old dogs and fat dogs now enjoy happy and healthy lives in caring homes. Animal shelters place more dogs now than a decade ago, experts say. Shelters euthanized 17 million dogs and cats in 1987 and 5 million in 1997, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Humane Society of the United States.

Top shelters have discovered ways to close this gap. Shelters: Train dogs in obedience and correct behavior Sponsor creative educational outreach programs to attract dog-loving members of the community Pre-screen applicants, checking references and ensuring dogs are permitted in their homes, particularly rentals and condos