

6 Reasons Why Shelter Pets Aren't Free



by Julianne Pierce
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As a volunteer with a private animal shelter in New York City, I've worked with many prospective dog and cat adopters over the past ten years. Applicants are often surprised to learn that most shelters and rescue groups charge an adoption fee, sometimes several hundred dollars, to take an animal home. After all, many of these animals are abandoned or unwanted, so shouldn't rescue groups be giving pets away for free?

There are actually a number of reasons why shelters and rescue groups charge a fee, from operating costs to medical expenses. Keep in mind that stray cats and dogs may have been living in sub-standard conditions with no access to veterinary care. When you break down the costs of caring for an animal, an *adoption fee can actually save you money*. Typical expenses for an animal living in a shelter include:

1. Spay/Neuter Surgery

As a measure of population control, pets are usually spayed or neutered before being adopted into homes. While private veterinary hospitals may charge more, the ASPCA estimates this surgical procedure to cost around \$200.

2. Vaccinations

Many states have laws requiring pets to be vaccinated and rescue groups traditionally absorb these costs. Most dogs are given a rabies shot, a distemper/parvo vaccine and a bordetella booster. Cats usually receive a rabies shot and a distemper/respiratory vaccination. The vaccines for dogs total around \$80 and for cats about \$60 at a typical low-cost clinic.

3. Medical Tests

Pets are routinely tested for parasites, heartworm, and feline leukemia/FIV (for cats). Some animals will need treatments for fleas, ticks, or ear mites. These preventative measures can easily add on an additional \$150 in medical costs.

4. Microchips

Most rescue groups now pay to have a microchip implanted in the pets they adopt out. While it might sound like something out of a sci-fi novel, microchips have been shown to be quite helpful in cases of lost pets, particularly following storms or other natural disasters. Each chip has a unique ID number that is linked to a database with the family's contact information. Petfinder reports the average cost for a pet microchip is around \$45.

5. Food

To feed a cat or dog can cost between \$5 and \$20 per week, depending on the type of food and the size of the pet. Multiply that by the number of animals in a shelter, and that's a pretty hefty grocery bill!

6. Supplies

Toys, blankets, litter boxes, and poop bags can add up, especially when caring for hundreds of animals at a time. The ASPCA estimates the cost of supplies at over \$200 per animal, per year. That's a lot of squeaky toys!

It's All Worth It

In addition, consider the money needed to maintain the facility and keep it clean, to provide staff to care for the animals and of course to keep the lights on inside the shelter.

It might sound cheaper to scout for a "Free Puppies" ad in the paper, but when you add up all the expenses that go into caring for an animal, an adoption fee ends up looking like a pretty good deal. And the best part is, you've helped to save a life!

Information provided at: <http://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/why-shelter-pets-arent-free/>



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