

SO, YOU WANT A RESCUE DOG ... ©

Vickie Kuhlmann, West Central Coordinator
American Lhasa Apso Club -- Rescue
www.ApsoRescueColorado.org – ApsoRescue@aol.com

First and foremost – **RESEARCH THE BREED** you are interested in to see if it is compatible with your lifestyle. Keep in mind the dog's exercise requirements, grooming needs, behavioral issues of the breed and that one is making a **lifetime** commitment when adopting a companion. They are not to be given away (or abandoned) when the owner's lifestyle changes, the dog isn't fun any more, grows old and/or requires extensive medical care, monitoring, etc.

A lifetime of care costs money and, in some cases, lots of money! Even with pet insurance, regular care can be expensive as it includes flea/tick/heartworm preventatives, vaccinations, dentals, and annual physicals (never mind any emergencies that may arise ... ka-ching, ka-ching). As the dog ages, the amount of money needed for medical care will increase and owners should be prepared for additional expenses as well. Grooming requirements should be considered (especially for the low-shedding, long-haired and/or double-coated breeds) since all dogs need baths, ear cleaning and/or nail clipping on a regular basis.

RESEARCH THE RESCUE – Keep in mind all rescues are not ethical and/or reputable. A 501(c)(3) designation means **only** that a particular rescue has filed the appropriate paperwork ... it does not mean that they adhere to the practices attributed to the management of an ethical rescue (and/or standards which may be set forth by a particular breed's parent AKC club). Ask for references – contact numbers for adoptive families and the rescue's vet – and use the following questions as a screening process:

- **What does the application process consist of and how do you determine if a dog is suitable for our family?** We require an e-application, vet/reference checks and, finally, a home check. This process allows us to assess whether or not a particular dog is a good match, taking into consideration the needs of the dog **and** the applicant. Our goal with each dog is to place him/her in the home where he/she will live out their life so screening and placement is paramount.
- **What pre-rescue screening is performed on the dog?** A sad fact of rescue is that not every dog can be saved. Owners surrendering dogs should be questioned as to behavior and health issues (even calling their vet and confirming this information); shelters should be questioned as to how/why the dog is there, what information was provided with the dog, as well as an in-person assessment. I'm not going to take in the dog that has separation anxiety so severe he chews through drywall or a dog that's bitten multiple times. I'm not equipped to handle this type of situation nor would I expect a pet owner to take on a problem of this magnitude.
- **What pre-adoption vetting is performed on the dog?** One should expect that: (1) the dog has undergone a rescue exam, (2) the dog be up-to-date on vaccinations, and (3) any medical needs have been addressed, i.e., spay/neuter, dental, clearing up an ear infection, etc. Our dogs are also microchipped before placement and you will receive information on registering the microchip with your name/address.
- **What pre-adoption training is undertaken?** Our fosters are not released from rescue without being reliably housetrained (or having a good handle on it, depending on the dog and

its circumstances), having behavioral issues addressed, and having undergone leash and crate training.

- ***Where are the dogs are housed, how they are cared for, where can I see them, etc.?***
With our particular rescue, one can meet the foster dog/home after the application has been processed and one has been approved. The reason for this protocol: there is no point in wasting your time (or ours) if the dog you're applying for isn't a good fit with your family – and we won't have an idea if the dog will be a good match until we've processed your application. All our rescues are fostered in-home and loved/cared for in exactly the same manner as our own family pets.
- ***How many dogs have been returned to a particular rescue and for what reason(s)?***
Dogs should not be placed on a first come/first served basis ... they should be placed with the family most appropriate for the dog and his/her particular needs/requirements. We want the dog to be happy and we want **you** to be happy with the dog. Many of our dogs have had multiple homes prior to landing in rescue – and with each subsequent home comes the risk of picking up undesirable behaviors and issues. Inquire as to whether none have been returned because they are still with their adoptive families ... or whether it's the rescue's policy to not allow returns. In other words, how successful have they been with screening and placement?
- ***How long are rescues kept with foster families before being released for adoption?***
I'm aware of rescues that intake large amounts of dogs and, as a result, aren't particularly careful about placement because of the numbers involved. Our dogs are not released for adoption until all medical and behavioral issues have been addressed. Therefore, we do not take in more dogs than we can properly care and provide for ... this includes medical care, grooming, training and one-on-one socialization, as well as being able to provide a structured, loving environment. My minimum, self-mandated foster period is 4-6 weeks as a dog's true nature/behavior often doesn't come out until they've had a chance to settle in and feel comfortable – which means I get to see the “real” dog. Our dogs stay in foster care until an appropriate home can be found, however long that might take.
- ***What is the rescue's spay/neuter policy and pre-adoption healthcare protocols, if any?***
A reputable rescue does **not** place animals intact. Placing an animal with only a certificate to have a spay or neuter performed is not a reliable means of birth control. None of our fosters leave rescue intact and puppies are held until they are old enough to be altered; every dog undergoes an intake rescue exam with our vet shortly after entering rescue.
- ***What kind of follow-up does the rescue perform after adoption?*** We contact the adoptive families at regular intervals after the adoption to see if all is well, if there are any issues that need to be addressed, etc. The families also know they can call me regarding literally anything that might arise in all areas of dog care including: medical, grooming tips/tricks, behavioral, vaccinations protocols, food/supplement recommendations, allergy issues, etc., etc. ... for as long as they need.
- ***What are my options if the adopted dog is not working out?*** Our contract states you must return the dog to us. If returned within four weeks of the adoption date, we will refund the adoption fee.
- ***What are my options if I can no longer keep the adopted dog, i.e., divorce, moving, death, etc.?*** While we would hope that an owner would do everything possible to keep their companion, we recognize some circumstances are beyond one's control. Our contract states you must return the dog to us if you can no longer care for the dog, for whatever

reason. In the event of the death of the owner, we will work with extended family should they wish to keep the dog (depending on circumstances, this may include an application and a homecheck).

- ***What kind of issues can I expect with a particular dog?*** A rescue should be able to provide a detailed written biography on the dog, as well as a health history, even if just from day one in rescue. In addition to an extensive behavioral bio on the dog, we provide an adoption packet which includes a photo(s), specific medical documentation (vaccine and treatment records, microchip registration), as well as various articles on training and breed information. The foster is also sent to its new home with a small supply of dog food, a favorite toy, a matching leash/collar and any medications it may be taking.
- ***Is the rescue available for consultation after the adoption?*** Your adopted dog **will** have an adjustment period coming into the new home. It may lose its house training, be very shy, submissively urinate, not sleep quietly through the night, come with thunderstorm phobias, have separation anxiety, etc. The rescue should be available to help you work through any issues that arise (and be able to tell you what to expect of the dog). I am available by phone, email and will do in-home consultations if necessary to address an adopted dog's issues. There are no perfect dogs and rescue dogs are no exception ... they will have some baggage which you, as the new owner, will have to deal with. Keep in mind the more information you have on the dog as provided by the foster home, the better equipped you are to integrate the rescue into your home.
- ***What is the adoption fee and how is it used by the rescue?*** A rescue may schedule fees in a number of ways – the age of the dog, the amount of medical treatment required for a particular dog, or a flat fee for all dogs regardless of age and/or care. We set our fees using the age/treatment combination, but generally our fees run anywhere from \$275 to \$475 (fees may also vary depending on where you are located). Funds are deposited to a dedicated non-profit rescue checking account and are used exclusively for medical treatment. An initial rescue exam – including bringing vaccinations up to date, a heartworm test, beginning a heartworm preventative, and implanting a microchip – runs anywhere from \$150 to \$200. Any unused adoption fees are kept in the rescue account and used for medical care as the need arises (neuter/spay, dentals, ear/eye issues, bladder infections, emergencies, etc.). Some dogs need only minimal care while others require extensive treatment well in excess of the adoption fee. Any unused portion of an adoption fee is used to help the next dog that needs care (we must keep a balance in the account in order to provide medical care as each dog enters rescue). Food, treats, supplements, toys, bedding, cleaning supplies, etc., are generally provided out-of-pocket by the foster home. In our group, we are all unpaid volunteers and working rescue is truly a labor of love, reflecting a deep passion for the breed.
- ***What is the rescue coordinator's experience with the breed?*** Your breed-specific rescuer should have extensive working knowledge with a particular breed, having owned and/or rescued them for a number of years. They should be a wealth of information regarding diseases affecting the breed as well as behavior/training issues and be able to provide web-based links, printed handouts or/or references for research. They may also be a member of the national breed club rescue organization, the national breed club, and be active in the breed in areas other than rescue.
- ***What if I decide in the middle of the adoption process that this isn't really for me?*** By all means, let your rescue contact know!! It is far better to admit that you've given it further thought than to wait until after the adoption has been completed and have the poor dog go

through yet another upheaval. Your rescue contact will thank you for your honesty and taking the time to fully consider the commitment of bringing a dog into your life.

- **What happens if I get turned down?** Please do not take it personally ... with our rescue it generally means the dog being considered for placement is not a good candidate for your lifestyle, activity level or family situation (rescued dogs in our breed tend to have “child issues”). Ask your rescue contact if you can be placed on their waiting list, if they have suggestions for another breed that may be better suited to your circumstances, or if there are other rescues in the area they would recommend.

One man’s trash ... is another man’s treasure. Dogs entering rescue generally fall into three categories ... owner turn in (OTIs), shelter pulls (the rescue goes to the shelter and removes the dog) and strays (surrenders by folks who have found a dog). Because they are in rescue does not mean they are “defective” or that “something is wrong with them.” Without fail, my owner-surrendered fosters have landed in rescue because the owners didn’t take the time to properly socialize them, supervise them with children, or address behavioral and/or medical issues. Each has gone on to a permanent home where they are well-behaved and beloved family members. Basically, gems in the rough – they just needed a little attention and polish to shine. This is why it is so important to connect with a rescue that carefully screens dogs for behavioral/medical problems.

If one has a particular breed in mind, **do** seek out a breed-specific rescue as these folks are generally more experienced with the issues and temperaments of a certain breed. Contact the AKC parent breed club to see if they have a national rescue organization and/or coordinators in your area. Ask if the parent breed club has guidelines which they recommend to be followed for operation of a rescue within that breed.

Keep in mind that the rescue dog noted as a certain breed may not match the standard breed description. In other words, you most likely are not getting a dog that’s been bred to standard.

A rescuer experienced with a particular breed should be able to provide referrals to ethical, responsible breeders who breed to standard with health/temperament being a priority. These breeders will be utilizing the most current genetic testing and recommended breed-specific exams (CERF, BAER, von Willebrand, renal dysplasia, heart scans, etc., etc.) to ensure parents are not passing on genetic diseases to offspring. In other words, just having a vet state the dog is healthy to be bred is **not** sufficient. Ethical, responsible breeders will also be involved with the breed in other venues other than just breeding, i.e., exhibiting dogs in conformation, entering working trials, performance events, member of the local show club, member of the national club, etc. A rescuer should know the difference between “pure bred” and “well bred” and what constitutes an ethical, responsible breeder (miller vs. backyard breeder [a/k/a BYB] vs. hobby breeder) ... and an informed adopter should as well. Additionally, a rescuer should be able to provide information on the various registries, including those that have cropped up in an effort to circumvent the AKC’s recent DNA requirements. These questionable registries include: APRI, CKC (Continental Kennel Club), ACR, ACA, DRI, UKCI, APR, UABR, WWCK, WKC, ARU, NKC, CRCS.

A reputable rescue generally does **not** operate from a storefront. **The hallmarks of a reputable rescue are neutering/spaying dogs before placement – no exceptions, regardless of the age of the dog – and screening potential adopters carefully.** A rescue is not in the business of making money. Purchasing from a store front typically does not entail undergoing a screening process. How do you know you’re getting the dog that best suits your lifestyle/circumstances if the only “requirement” is funding?