

# Confessions of a Shelter Manager

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Most people know of only one reason why adopting an animal is better than buying one. You save a life. But the kind act of adopting comes as a trade-off against all of the qualities you're looking for in a pet. Right? Actually, wrong!

As the general manager of an animal shelter, I can tell you that shelter animals are typically healthier than animals bought in a pet shop. They are socialised, meaning you don't necessarily have to deal with any pre-existing behavioural issues. And in the UAE, it's highly likely you'll find the breed you want at only a fraction of the price sold in pet shops. So adopting a pet, not buying one, is actually much better for you too.

Given my profession, it may seem obvious that I have this viewpoint. But I, too – and here is my confession – have bought two Boxer dogs at a breeder. I did this eight years ago, before my time as a shelter manager, before I knew anything about the 'pet business', and a business it is.

Fortunately my breeder dogs did not come from a puppy mill, run by people who care a lot more about profit than animal welfare. As a rule, animals from these mills are unhealthy and unsocialised. Their parents are being overbred and sometimes even inbred. Breeders tend to economise on veterinary care and puppies and kittens do not learn how to deal with even the most

basic domestic situations, other dogs, cats and people, resulting in scared and stressed pets. These animals are admitted to our veterinary hospital more regularly than others.

One heartbreaking situation was when two pups were brought to me suffering from Parvo, a highly contagious virus that can result in death within days. Symptoms are lethargy, fever, vomiting and (bloody) diarrhoea. They were bought together in a pet shop, carrying the disease. The owner paid thousands of dirhams for their treatment. In the end only one of the pups made it.

I love my Boxer dogs dearly. However, if I had known then what I know now, I wouldn't have made the same choice. Since then, I did adopt a 'shelter dog'. Her name is Bambi. She is beautiful; just as beautiful as my Boxer dogs. Her vet bills are also less than a quarter of the Boxer vet bills. And she is an equally as affectionate, loyal and well-behaved companion.

You might be thinking, as I did eight years ago, that taking on a shelter dog or cat means taking on a dog or cat with behavioural issues. However, as long as you go to a good shelter, the staff will be very capable of matching you with a dog or cat that is right for you and your lifestyle. At RAK Animal Welfare Centre, the staff ensure all dogs and cats meet new people and other dogs and cats on a regular basis. Dogs also go through basic obedience training and all animals are fully vaccinated, microchipped and desexed. This results in confident, gentle, healthy and socialised pets. With each new experience my staff gets to know the dogs and cats better and better as well.

For prospective pet owners who have their minds set on a cat or dog of a particular breed, I urge you to look for one in a shelter first. In the UAE, pure breeds are extremely common in animal shelters. At the moment about one in five of the animals in my care are pure breeds. From what I understand, the same goes for other shelters like K9 and SCADS. An even more convenient way to look for the breed you want is to go on-



line for a database of dogs and cats looking for a home on [www.adopt-me.ae](http://www.adopt-me.ae).

You might have to wait a bit longer but eventually you will find the dog or cat of your choice. A shelter pet will give you just as much joy as a breeder pet. In my case even more. Not because I love her more but because she makes me feel really good as I know I have saved her.

I know that her life without me would have looked so different. Equally, my life without her wouldn't be the same.

