

This excerpt has been edited for length and clarity.

Unfortunately, a greater number of older dogs (and cats) are being surrendered for adoption. Typically we estimate that PAWS will intake 12 senior dogs each year. Because our newly implemented in-house spay/neuter clinic decreased the time from intake to adoption by about a week (because we can spay/neuter almost immediately upon intake), PAWS' dog intake numbers are up 70% over last year (228 in 2019 versus 134 in 2018) and dog adoptions are up 59% over last year (213 in 2019 versus 134 in 2018). This has allowed us to take in 67% more senior dogs in 2019 (from an estimated 12 senior dogs to 20 senior dogs in 2019).

As we know, older animals are harder to place even though most are healthy at the time of adoption. The difficulty is that would-be owners don't want to take on both adoption expenses and added expenses that may come soon with older animals. Thanks to the generosity of Grey Muzzle, PAWS started the Senior Pension Plan, which covers all adoption fees and basic annual medical costs of exams, blood work and shots in perpetuity for all senior dogs who are adopted. Thus, the Senior Pension Plan eliminates a large portion of expenses making these animals far more affordable and enabling families to obtain wonderful pets.

PAWS had 20 senior dogs adopted in 2019 and 14 senior dogs adopted in 2018 (2 of whom passed due to illnesses associated with old age) totaling 32 seniors in 2019 and 2018. 42% came from Animal Control, 48% came from Owner Surrender, and 9% came from NYC Animal Control, which is a high-kill center, euthanizing for behavioral and medical reasons. We anticipate having 12 senior dogs who need loving homes in 2020, making 44 total Senior Pension Plan dogs (20 +12 +12) who have an average age of 10.25 years. The senior pension program is a very generous program that allows our senior dogs to live out their last years in a loving home.

We have galvanized our foster to adopt program as well, utilizing our foster homes more quickly to reduce length of stay at the shelter to an average of 21 days for our senior dogs, (compared with average length of stay of 29.7 days for all dogs) so the seniors can come back for their wellness exams at their leisure and then get adopted.

Medical cost is the biggest deterrent to senior dog adoption. Many senior dogs are well trained, housebroken and excellent with people. Senior dogs come with experience, a desire to love people and bond and with a sense of loss that they want to have filled by their new families. By eliminating basic medical costs and providing medical aid needed to make a dog adoptable, the Grey Muzzle Pension Program will help senior dogs be favorably viewed as more adoptable by eliminating the annual basic medical costs.

Since the Grey Muzzle Senior Pension Plan started, we have successfully found homes and treated approximately 33 senior dogs per year.