

## Commitment for Life

by Shontel Moulton

According to the [ASPCA](#), each year approximately 6.5 million pets end up in shelters across the United States. Some of these animals are strays, some have been rescued from abusive or neglectful situations, but many are surrendered by owners who cannot care for them due to financial stressors, behavioral problems, or other unforeseen circumstances. Owning a pet is a commitment, yet many people adopt with little thought. It can be hard to walk away when faced with the soulful eyes of a lonely animal, but before you bring him or her home, consider what it means to be a responsible pet owner.

Dogs and cats are, by far, the most popular companion animals in the United States. Dogs live an average of 10-12 years and, depending on the breed, some can live 16 years or more. Cats are even more long-lived, with most indoor cats averaging 15-18 years. Before you bring one home, the first question you need to answer is “am I willing to commit to this animal for the next 18 years?” The American Veterinary Medical Association, provides a [comprehensive list](#) of things to consider before bringing a pet home. Responsible pet ownership is more than keeping your companion fed. It means spaying/neutering in accordance with your veterinarian’s recommendations; keeping up to date on vaccinations; microchipping as required by local laws; licensing fees; behavioral training as necessary; proper socialization; arranging for care when you are not/cannot be home; time; and more.

There are times when even the most responsible of pet owners faces difficulties. Perhaps it appears as an unexpected injury or illness for owner or pet. Perhaps it comes in the form of financial or legal difficulties. In these cases, responsible ownership means reaching out for help. That help may come in the form of financial assistance, or even temporary foster care. Harley’s

Hope Foundation was created for just such circumstances. The “successes” page is full of stories of owners who faced difficulties but did everything they could to help their furry friend. In many cases, Harley’s Hope was able to help them bridge the financial gap and get the care needed to keep loved companions at home. Responsible pet ownership is not just about being prepared before you bring a pet home, or getting the right vaccines, training, and supplies. It is being willing to reach out and do what is best for your pet even when life makes it difficult to do so.