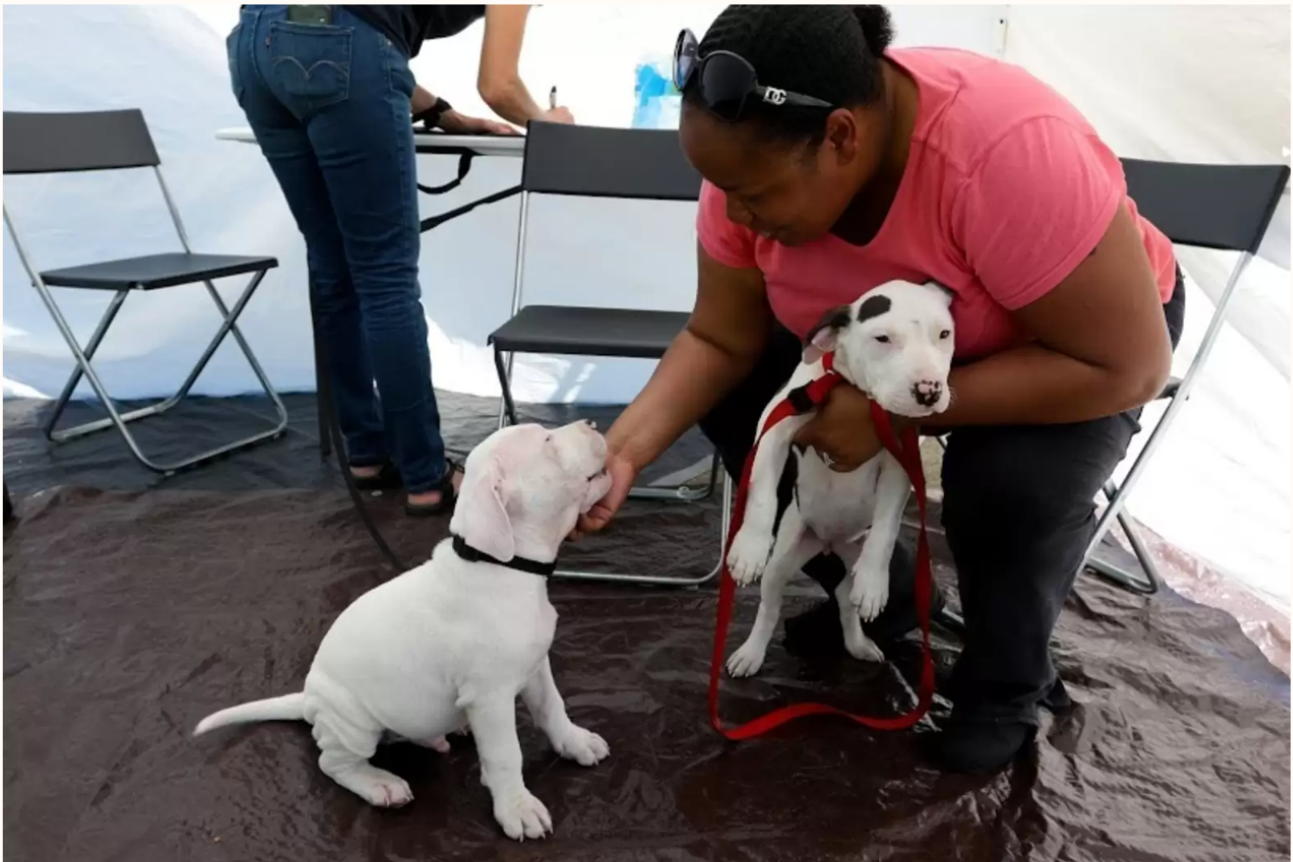


Daily Dodo • Pit Bulls

# People Are Unfairly Forced To Leave Their Dogs At Shelters. Now There's Help.

By [Leslie Smith](#)

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<P> DANIEL BECK </P>

Veronica lives in a friend's garage.

She's determined to keep her family together, but money is tight, and affordable rentals are excruciatingly hard to come by in the San Francisco Bay Area. With two blocky-headed dogs in the equation, finding housing becomes nearly impossible. To make the search easier, she could surrender her pets to the city shelter – a notion, at this point, she can't bear to think about. But in a month, when her friend moves out and space in the garage is no longer available, Veronica, who is not pictured in this story and asked to be identified by her first name, may be forced to confront the unthinkable.

"The displacement of families and squeeze on renters has just wreaked havoc on shelter intake numbers," says Donna Reynolds, founder of rescue and advocacy organization for pit bull type dogs [BADRAP](#), out of Oakland, California. "The housing shortage also impacts the number of adopters – renters – who can open their home to a sheltered dog, so it sabotages potential shelter adoptions as well."

Reynolds says that this year alone BADRAP has already helped over 450 families, including Veronica's, through their [Keep 'Em Home](#) program, created expressly to address the current crisis. Support takes various forms, including providing free services like veterinary care, spay/neuter surgeries, and training and behavior counseling to help dogs put their best paw forward when meeting potential landlords. It can also mean temporary housing assistance – boarding dogs, paying for hotel rooms and matching homeless clients with willing landlords.



"We see the Keep 'Em Home project as a bit of a life raft in a sea of bad funk," Reynolds explains. "Committed pet owners don't have to face heartbreaking situations alone."

Owner support programs, now gaining recognition as an effective strategy in curbing shelter intake, are not without their critics. Even among some in the animal welfare community, there's an attitude that "if you can't afford pets, you shouldn't have them."





"While we work to help families navigate contemporary obstacles to keeping their dogs, we're also challenged to educate the wider community so they understand why shelters are so full," says Reynolds. "Many people's ideas are filtered through misconceptions and stereotypes about the dogs and, especially, their owners. Misidentifying the problems leads to ineffective solutions, and that hurts us all by wasting time and resources that could be put to work."

Certainly there are those for whom owner support programs would not make a difference – people who simply no longer want their pets. Veronica isn't one of them. So she's relentlessly working – and seeking help from the right sources – to find housing that can accommodate her family and her budget. If there comes a time when she's forced to give up her dogs, it won't be for lack of trying or because she didn't care. She will have done everything she knew how to do. And then some.



CHRIS ARSON PHOTOGRAPHY