

Abandoned is a classification we circle on our shelter intake forms far too often. Think about it – the overwhelming majority of strayed pets brought to us by citizens and Animal Control Officers are not ‘wild’ and didn’t just appear out of thin air. Some owner, somewhere, at one time, either actively procured that pet for themselves or took it on as a gift or found it and kept it. But no matter, these pets had some owner who fed them, let them stay, and were perhaps even a part of the family.

So while pets can and do run away or get lost, why is it that so very few are ever reclaimed by their owners? Sure, we take in pets that are starved, filthy, sick and may very well deserve a better home than the one they had. But we also receive a lot of pets in perfect health, well groomed, clean, new collars (hardly ever any rabies/ID tag or microchip), and yet no owner ever seems to be looking for far too many of these pets.

If we only look at the ‘Adult Stray Dogs’ brought to us in 2017, 27% of those were reclaimed by their owners. That left approximately 700 adult dogs with us that no one ever came for – 700 adult dogs we had to then do our best to find new homes for. Sadly when we look at puppies (under six months old), the reclaim rate dropped to 5% which indicates what we know to be true – far too many people take unwanted litters of puppies out and simply dump them to fend for themselves (580 last year). How many more litters of puppies are abandoned like this only to die by starvation, dehydration, cars, wildlife.... simply heartbreaking to think about.

Where cats are concerned the news is absolutely abysmal. Of the 311 ‘Adult Stray Cats’ brought to us in 2017 only 17 or 5.5% were reclaimed by their owner. And of the 886 “Stray Kittens” brought in 2017, their reclaim was only .67%. That left 1174 “Stray” cats & kittens for us to care for and try to find homes for. Now with cats, many of these are feral (meaning no owner) and we understand that. Cats are also exceedingly challenging as they can be gone for weeks or months before returning home, but still we all jump up and down whenever we can get a cat back to its family!

And don’t forget that those strays are not the only pets we are dealing with as we took in over 1400 dogs and cats surrendered by their owners! Pretty daunting numbers no matter how you look at this!

Our dogs and cats depend on us for their care and well-being which is why abandoning a dog or cat is not only morally wrong, but punishable as a Class A Misdemeanor as Cruelty to Animals under the Alabama Code Section 13A-11-240(b). This code states: “the word “cruel” as used in this article shall mean: Every act, omission, or neglect, **including abandonment**, where unnecessary or unjustifiable pain or suffering, **including abandonment**, is caused or where unnecessary pain or suffering is allowed to continue.”

No matter how upset we may be at the people who dump these pets or never seem to look for their own pet, we highly commend all the people who take them in, pick them up off the side of road, take the sick and injured to veterinarians, try to find the owners and do all they can to help these scared and bewildered pets who wanted so little in return for their loyalty.

If you have any questions about surrendering a pet or if you have found a stray or believe an animal to have been abandoned please call us at 334-567-3377 or email hselco@bellsouth.net for guidance. Our first wish for any lost pet is to find its way back home and we will always work diligently to help strayed pets go safely back home with their owner.