

A Gentle Guide To Giving A Hero A Home

ADOPTION GUIDE BOOK

For First Time Adopters

Apollo- German Shepherd

A photograph of three dogs in a fenced outdoor area. In the foreground, a light-colored dog with a chain collar looks towards the camera. Behind it, a smaller tan dog is visible. To the left, a black and tan dog is on a leash, looking towards the camera with its mouth open. The background features a chain-link fence, some greenery, and a building.

INTRODUCTION

Retired K9s have spent years serving with loyalty and dedication. Now, they deserve a peaceful home where they can rest, feel safe, and simply be a dog.

Adopting a retired working dog is deeply rewarding, but it comes with unique responsibilities. From health changes and behavioral adjustments to emotional bonding and long-term care, understanding their needs is key to helping them transition smoothly into retirement.

This guide will walk you through what to expect and how to prepare — so you can give them the love, patience, and stability they deserve in this new chapter of their life.

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Health and Age Related Issues

Many K9s eventually retire after years of loyal service, protecting us, and keeping communities safe. As they grow older, some may experience health or age-related changes such as:



Decreased stamina or energy



Hearing problems



Vision loss



Anxiety

Health and Age Related Issues

These changes can affect how they respond to their surroundings. Which is why patience, understanding, and proper care are so important during their retirement years. **But here's how you can help!**



Gentle Exercises (short walks/light plays)



Play mentally stimulating tasks (puzzle toys or obedience refreshers)



Consistency in routine



Regular Vet visits

Jai Ho - German Shepherd

Adjustment to Home Life

After spending much of their life following routines and working closely with people, adjusting to home life can take a little time. **They may need patience as they learn how to relax, play, and simply be a dog.** A quiet, loving home with gentle routines will help them feel safe and supported as they settle in. Here's what you can expect:



Used to structure, routine, and purpose.



Some dogs need help learning how to simply be a pet.



May take time to relax after retirement.



Clear gentle house rules are important.

Adjustment to Home Life

With kindness, consistency, and affection, they'll slowly gain confidence and discover the joys of a peaceful life beyond work.



Behavior at home may differ from service training.



Positive guidance helps them adjust smoothly.



May have limited experience with other pets.



Slow and gradual introductions work best.



Patience helps build comfort and confidence.

Emotional Bonding and Past Experiences

Some retired K9s may bond quickly, while others need more time to feel safe. **Trust grows with patience, respect for their boundaries, and allowing affection on their terms.** As they settle in, they often become deeply loyal, relaxed, and loving companions. **With understanding and support, they can heal and thrive in their new chapter.**



Strong bonds from years of working together.



May take time to build trust with a new family.



Patience and consistency help form a new bond.

Arian - Half Aspin & Labrador

Emotional Bonding and Past Experiences

These changes can affect how they respond to their surroundings. Which is why patience, understanding, and proper care are so important during their retirement years. But here's how you can help!



Some dogs may carry stress from past experiences



Loud noises or certain environments can be triggering



A calm and understanding home helps them feel safe

Physical Activity and Exercise Needs

Retired K9s need regular exercise and mental stimulation, adjusted for age, health, or injuries. Gentle walks, swimming, and indoor games help keep them strong without overexertion. Mentally stimulating activities, like scent games or practicing old commands, keep their minds sharp.



Needs may vary by age and health.



Some enjoy gentle walks and gentle play.



Others may need more regular exercise.

Physical Activity and Exercise Needs

Balancing activity with rest helps them stay healthy, happy, and comfortable in their new home.



Mental engagement is still important in retirement.



Training games, puzzle toys, and brain challenges keep them happy and sharp.

Cost of Care

Retired K9s need regular vet visits, medications, a senior-friendly diet, and preventive care. Some may require lab tests, physical therapy, or emergency care, which can add to costs. Planning for routine and unexpected medical needs ensures they get the best care.



Older dogs may need more frequent or specialized veterinary care.



Include costs for medications, treatments, and routine check-ups.



Some plans may not cover older pets.

Cost of Care

While expenses can be higher, their loyalty, and companionship make it deeply rewarding



Factor in potential emergency medical costs.



Extra training may be needed for behavior adjustments.



Helps them adjust to their home life and other pets.

Chika - Belgina Malanois

Understanding Their Triggers

Retired service dogs have spent years responding quickly to high-pressure situations. **Because of this, certain sounds, places, scents, or movements may still activate their “work mode” or bring back stressful memories from their time in service.**

These reactions are not signs of a “bad” dog but signs of a dog who was trained to be alert, protective, and responsive. **With patience, consistency, and compassionate guidance, most triggers can be managed safely and gradually reduced over time.**

This section will help you understand common triggers, why they happen, **and how you can gently support your retired K9 as they learn that they are safe, loved, and no longer on duty.**

Loud Noises

According to one of the PDEA dog trainers many service dogs were exposed to loud, stressful noises like sirens, alarms, or gunfire during service, which can make them more sensitive to these sounds. As a result they may become more:



Alert or protective



Show stress by hiding



Barking loudly or aggressively



Whining

Loud Noises

Here's how you can help them so you:



Consistency in routine



Gentle Exercises (short walks/light plays)



Regular Vet visits



Play mentally stimulating tasks (puzzle toys or obedience refreshers)



Buddy - Black Golden Retriever

Public Spaces /Familiar Locations

Service dogs often worked in specific places like malls or train stations, linking them to work. As a result, visiting these places may trigger a “work mode,” making them alert, attentive, or looking for tasks instead of relaxing.



Familiar places can make them alert or task-focused



Keep their minds active with new tricks or commands



Start with low sound levels and increase slowly.



Offer mental or physical activities to reduce stress.



Allow them to hide or step away if needed.

People/Appearances

They were trained to respond to certain people or clothing linked to bite-sleeve training. As a result, They may be more alert, protective, or even aggressive around those triggers.



Keep enough space from people or appearances that trigger them



Let them approach at their own pace



Reward calm behavior with treats, praise, or cues like “look at me”



Short sits, snacks, or gentle reassurance help them feel safe



Over time, they learn these situations are safe and can relax

Scent

They were trained to detect scents like drugs, gunpowder, or specific people. As a result, They may sniff people, alert their owner, or sometimes show aggression if they detect something.



Scents from past work can make them alert, focused, or anxious



Keep your reactions consistent and gentle



Avoid forcing them near the trigger if they seem tense

Scent

It's important to practice these things in order to make sure you and your furbaby can navigate through your day-to-day basis



Consistent post-retirement training helps unlearn old habits and build relaxed behaviors



Slowly and gently introduce scents to show they no longer signal work



Daily structure, enrichment, and gentle training help them stay calm

Brownie - Aspin (Previous food panel dog)

Contact/Aggression

Trained to protect, sudden aggression or physical contact toward their handler can trigger a reaction. As a result, They may become highly alert or aggressive to defend their owner.



Some dogs need help learning how to simply be a pet.



Used to structure, routine, and purpose.



Clear gentle house rules are important.



May take time to relax after retirement.

Feeding Guide

Dietary management for retired service dogs is crucial for their health. Because they are older or have special health needs, feeding needs to be scientifically planned, and focus on changes before and after eating. The first step to ensure they have a proper dietary plan is to talk to their vets and their previous handlers, to make sure of what food they typically eat and what they can or cannot eat.

Choosing the right dog food

Select a diet appropriate for retired dogs' age and health needs. This includes high-quality food with clear protein sources and joint-support ingredients (like glucosamine), as well as formulas that are low in fat and salt to prevent strain on the heart and kidneys

Menggay the German shepherd and Lotto the Belgian Malinois

Make a feeding plan

A photograph of three dogs sitting on a grassy lawn. On the left, a light-colored dog with a brown collar stands and looks towards the right. In the center, a tan dog with a brown collar sits and looks towards the right. On the right, a dark-colored dog with a brown collar sits and looks towards the left. A person's hand is visible on the far right, holding a small object. In the background, there is a chain-link fence, trees, and a building.

Establish a consistent feeding schedule with fixed times and measured portions adjusted to the dog's weight and activity level. Regularly weigh the dog to monitor body condition and adjust meals as needed.

Menggay, Lotto, and Baron

Special dietary needs

Retired dogs may have specific health issues. For example:

- Joint health: Supplement with fish oil or omega-3 fatty acids under vet guidance.
- Digestive sensitivity: Switch to hypoallergenic or easily digestible food if vomiting or diarrhea occurs.
- Dental problems: Use soft or wet food for dogs with fragile teeth

Precautions for Homemade Food

If preparing homemade meals, ensure they are nutritionally balanced. Avoid harmful human foods (like chocolate, grapes, onions). Consult a veterinarian or pet nutritionist to confirm that the diet meets the dog's needs.

Shadow - German Shepherd

Snacks & Rewards

A black and tan dog, likely a Labrador and Shepherd mix, is standing in a grassy area. The dog has its mouth open, showing its tongue, and is looking directly at the camera. In the background, there is a chain-link fence and a teal-colored bench. The overall scene is outdoors, possibly in a park or a training area.

Offer snacks in moderation to support mental stimulation.

Kathy - Labrador & Shepherd Mix

Adoption Requirements For Retired Service Dogs

Eligibility of the Dog

The retired service dog must have reached the retirement age of eight (8) years and has been officially declared unfit for active duty or has failed to meet the required training standards based on proper evaluation.

Acceptance of Condition

The adopter agrees to accept the retired service dog in its current physical condition at the time of adoption. The Agency's K9 Unit shall not be held responsible for any medical conditions that are not diagnosed prior to, during, or after the adoption process.

Proper Care & Welfare

The adopter must ensure the provision of:

- Adequate food and clean water
- Regular exercise and enrichment
- Safe and comfortable shelter
- Necessary veterinary care, including preventive medications
- Proper training, as needed

Restrictions on Use

The adopter shall not use the retired service dog for:

- Illegal activities
- Police or security-related functions
- Private business purposes
- Substance detection (whether public or private)

The adopter also agrees not to sell, transfer, or give the dog to any person or entity intending to use the dog for the purposes stated above.

Assumption of Responsibility



The adopter assumes full responsibility and all risks associated with the ownership of the retired service dog. The Agency's K9 Unit shall not be held criminally or civilly liable for any incidents involving the adopted dog.

Compliance with Animal Welfare Laws

A close-up photograph of a tan and black dog, possibly a pit bull mix, sitting in front of a chain-link fence. The dog has its tongue hanging out and is looking directly at the camera. The background shows a concrete wall and some greenery behind the fence.

The adopter agrees to comply with all responsibilities under Section 7 of the Animal Welfare Act of 1998, as amended, and acknowledges liabilities under Section 9 in cases of cruelty, maltreatment, or neglect.

Lagalag - Aspin

Monitoring and Reporting



The adopter agrees to:

- Undergo annual monitoring and scheduled home visits
- Provide monthly updates regarding the dog's condition
- Respond to inquiries via provided contact details

These will be conducted by authorized representatives of the Agency.

King - Aspin

Final Message

They've spent years being on duty: always alert, always ready, always putting others first.

Now, they're learning something new: how to rest, how to feel safe, and how to just be a dog.

And maybe... that life starts with you.

Whether you're ready to adopt or still figuring things out, that's okay. This journey doesn't require perfection: **just patience, understanding, and a genuine heart.**

If you're ready, you can reach out to adoption centers and take that first step.

If not, you can always learn more, prepare, and come back when the time feels right.

Either way, you're already part of their second chance.

Second Leash Life
don't let a hero go without a home

Contact Information

PDEA K9 Units

(For retired detection
and enforcement dogs)

Inquiries: pdeak9adoption@gmail.com

Hotlines:

- (02) 8927-9702
- (02) 8928-4060
- (02) 8928-6358
- (02) 8928-5292

Website: www.pdea.gov

FB Page: PDEA Top Stories

Hound Haven Philippines

(A shelter that helps rehome retired
Military Working Dogs (MWDs) and
Contract Working Dogs (CWDs)
along with other rescues.)

Inquiries: contact@houndhavenph.org

Website: <https://houndhavenph.org/>

FB Page: Houndhaven