

Choosing a Horse Rescue

With all the options available, it's important you find an equine rescue group that's right for you.

By Katie Olean

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There's a lot to consider when choosing the perfect equine addition to your family. If you've done the research and have decided that adopting a rescue horse is right for you, congratulations! Now you must determine how to choose a reputable organization to adopt through.

Lydia Gray, medical director and staff veterinarian for SmartPak and formerly the executive director of the Hooved Animal Humane Society, was named to the American Association of Equine Practitioners Equine Welfare Committee and has participated in the Unwanted Horse Coalition. She says when it comes to choosing a good rescue organization, you should think about several things first. What the organization does and how it conducts its business will play a big role in the horse you want.

First, recognize that there are many different types of rescue organizations. Terms such as rehabilitation, retirement, re-homing, shelter and humane society are all ways organizations describe what they do.

"Some rescues accept horses--and mules and donkeys--as well as other large or farm animals such as cows, pigs, sheep, goats, llamas and other species," Gray says. "A few accept all kinds of animals, including dogs, cats, birds and even exotics."

Another variable is where the animal comes from. "Some organizations only accept animals that are impounded by law from their owner," Gray says. "Others only accept owner surrenders. Some do both. Still others purchase animals from neglectful owners, auctions, killer buyers or directly from the slaughterhouse."

Organizations can also differ by the goal and placement of their rescue. "Some rescue groups are the final resting place for an animal, meaning the animal never leaves, but is retired there for life," Gray says. "Most organizations adopt out animals or re-home them. Those that do not have property rely on foster homes to care for animals until a new permanent home can be found."

Aside from the type of rescue, you'll want to make sure the organization is upstanding and ethical. If you don't, Gray lists several possible consequences. "Your animal may not have been obtained legally and you may be involved in the financial or legal problems of the organization," she says. Also, "you may be supporting an organization that is part of the problem and not part of the solution, such as hoarding and collecting."

To safeguard against this, Gray names several criteria to look for when choosing your equine rescue group. These include:

- 501(c)(3) status
- A reputation for ethical conduct
- Sound financial and management practices
- An acting board of directors
- Thorough investigation of the organization's annual report

Also important to look for are:

- How long the organization has been around (three-five years is a good benchmark)
- All required licenses and permits
- A working relationship with local or state authorities and local veterinarians
- Friendly and responsive staff
- Not overcrowded (it has realistic intake and outbound policies)
- A mission and/or vision statement and a strategic plan
- The animals and people that live and work there, respectively, are happy
- An explanation for any thin, sick or lame horses
- Own rather than rent or lease property

Once you know what you're looking for and you've got the proper criteria in hand, it's time to hit the road. If you find an organization you're interested in, Gray suggests doing some research. "Talk to as many people at the organization as you can: employees, volunteers, board of directors, previous adopters and donors. Ask around at the local feed store or where you buy shavings and other supplies," she says. "Attend events held by the organization, read its print and electronic literature and contact both its veterinarian and an outside veterinarian for a reference." Last but not least she suggests, "Google it!"

If everything checks out, you'll be on your way to bringing home a treasured new companion that is worth all the effort.

[See a list of 501\(c\)\(3\) rescue organizations >>](#)

Once you've adopted your horse—whether off the track or from a rescue—you may find these articles helpful:

[Starting Over Part 1: Teach Aids For Riding, Not Racing >>](#)

[Starting Over Part 2: Reclaiming The Mind >>](#)

[A Change of Pace>>](#)

[Getting a Rescued Horse to Trust You>>](#)