

"Most dogs belonging to homeless guardians are not abused or neglected; in fact, many of them have been rescued from abandonment by their present guardians," says Weise. "We need to keep an open mind and not judge the dogs we see on the streets. We need to get rid of preconceived notions about where dogs should live and recognize that not all dogs work well in homes. Many of the dogs we are in contact with, despite not living in a home, are with people twenty-four hours a day and are very happy and well-socialized," she explains.

Yet, despite being happy with their guardians, many of downtown's dogs are in need of medical care, including spaying and neutering, a procedure most homeless guardians do not consider when caring for their pets. Approaching guardians about spaying and neutering, however, can be difficult. "Most people are very mistrustful when we first approach them and think that we are trying to take their dog away from them," reports Weise. "But that's not what we're about."

Weise and Tuttelmondo have worked hard to create reputations



Previous page: Samuel and Teacup live together in an encampment under a freeway overpass in downtown Los Angeles. Samuel, who credits Teacup as giving him the courage to persevere, hopes to return to his home in New Mexico.

Above: Lori Weise has to make contact with the owners of this "junkyard dog," a potential rescue.

among the downtown population as people who can be trusted to help them with their dogs. Weise is fearless. She will walk into homeless

environments.

Not all dogs are right for adoption into a conventional family however; nor are all homeless pet guardians

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encampments of over 100 people backed up by nothing more than plastic bags of dog food and flyers announcing their spay/neuter program. And her determination is paying off. Over five years, Downtown Dog Rescue has been responsible for spaying or neutering hundreds of dogs, and has found adoptive homes for nearly 250 pets.

Downtown Dog Rescue's adoption program is different from many others in that it attempts to keep prior guardians and adoptive families in touch with each other. Weise lets pet guardians understand that they are "calling the shots," and that the difficult decision to have their dog adopted by another family is ultimately theirs.

Homeless pet guardians become as attached to their charges as any other animal guardian; and, even as they recognize that they may not be able to supply all of the care their pets need, separation can be heartbreaking.

Weise finds ways to enable homeless pet guardians who cannot keep their pets remain close to their dogs. She stays in touch with the adoptive families, collecting photographs and stories to bring back to the original guardians, and in a few instances has even managed to set up periodic visits. Adoptive families are pre-screened, including home visits to ensure there are appropriate facilities for pets, and the dogs themselves are carefully evaluated and given socialization training to help them acclimate to their new

Coco lives in the same homeless encampment as Samuel and Teacup. Coco's guardian remains anonymous, but does what she can to help the dog she loves.



willing to give up the dogs they love. Downtown Dog Rescue will arrange for foster care for dogs whose guardians simply need some time to get their resources together in order to care properly for their pets. "Whatever the dog needs, and whatever the guardian will let us do, we'll do it," declares Weise. "And we'll do everything we can to educate dog guardians so that they understand how to properly care for their dogs."

Benny Joseph, locally known as "the downtown dog man," has lived



Mercedes and Mama, one of the with the help of Downtown Dog living with 16 dogs until the org to be spayed or neutered, and a