



## **THINKING ABOUT FOSTERING A HOMELESS ANIMAL?**

**Foster care is a VERY important component of the “No Kill Equation,” a proven national model preventing the needless deaths of thousands of animals in public shelters.**

**Dogs, cats and even other animals that can be cared for in a private home are spared the trauma and risk factors associated with a shelter, especially when it is not a No-Kill Shelter.**

**Here you will find answers to frequently asked questions that people have about fostering, points you might want to consider and also questions to ask a shelter or rescue organization when you are selecting one (or more) to become involved with.**

### **Q: What exactly is foster care?**

**A:** Fosters provide in-home temporary, day to day care that meets the pet’s physical, social and emotional needs. Most rescue organizations have ALL the animals in their care staying with foster families. Sometimes the animals they have come from the County shelter. Shelters, particularly our County shelter Pima Animal Care Center (PACC) utilizes foster homes to better meet the needs of animals whose lives are at risk in the shelter.

There are a variety of situations that you might consider:

**Short-Term Foster-** These foster families generally have the pet up to a month. The pet might be in foster care already and in need of another temporary placement but will returned to their original foster home. Or, a puppy/kitten may be too small to be spayed or neutered (a requirement for adoption) and need just a few weeks to be “adoption ready” and returned to the shelter for adoption or go to adoption events for rescue organizations.

**Long-Term Foster-** These foster families commit to pets of all ages until he/she is adopted. It may be days/weeks or it can be several months.

**Medical Foster-** Many dogs and cats that come into the shelter or stay for a period of time in the shelter will have known medical issues when they enter foster care. The foster family is responsible for transporting the pet to the vet and for administering any prescribed medications/care in accordance with veterinary instructions. It is more likely long term care as the pet needs to be brought to a healthy condition before being available for adoption.

**Nursing mothers/babies-** The shelter is not a healthy environment or place for puppies or kittens. Foster homes are needed to provide a safe and warm place for the family. Typically the foster will care for the entire family until the babies are old enough to be adopted and the mother and babies are all adopted.

**Bottle feeders/orphans-** People bring litters of newborn or very young kittens and puppies to shelters. They don't always come with a mother. The shelter may not have another lactating mother who can nurse the babies. Sometimes a mother is not able to care for her babies. In these situations, fosters are needed to bottle feed the babies which is an around the clock commitment. Of course the foster typically raises the babies until they are old enough to be adopted. This is the most time consuming type of foster care, but also extremely rewarding.

**Mature/Seniors** – These animals are probably healthy but sometimes may have age related conditions. It may take a little longer to adopt out an older pet, though they are typically less rambunctious than the younger set.

**Hospice Care** – Hospice care is providing love and care for an animal that is incurably and terminally ill but not suffering. Some have inoperable cancer or may be a senior who is not a good candidate for needed medical interventions but still able to enjoy the comforts of your home. Hospice offers a peaceful death outside of a shelter, where the pet is comfortable until it is time.

**Q: Why should I foster?**

**A:** Your participation will save lives! By choosing to be a foster to a dog or cat, a person can save two lives! The animal directly being fostered is saved and so is the animal who is able to fill the vacancy created or the space that was not taken in the shelter.

**Q: What are the expectations of a foster home?**

**A:** To provide a safe environment for the animal and care for their physical, social, and emotional needs. When fostering for a rescue organization, the foster typically assists the organization in promoting the pet for adoption by taking photos and writing a description based on the personality of the animal that is then published by the rescue organization. The rescue organizations often require the foster to take or arrange for the pet to go to adoption events and vet appointments. When fostering for the County shelter, Pima Animal Care Center, the medical appointments are at the shelter and the animal is typically returned to the shelter when it is "adoption ready." Fosters communicate the pet's general progress to the shelter or rescue group on a routine basis. Some animals may need assistance with behavioral training and/or socialization (becoming comfortable with other animals and/or people) and some fosters 'specialize' in a particular area of fostering, developing expertise in particular breeds, medical conditions or behavioral issues.

**Q: How long does the animal stay in foster care?**

**A:** Fostering is temporary, and may last a few days/weeks to several months. Many factors can play a role in determining the length of the fostering and adoptions process. Factors include age, health, breed, time of year and a specific rescue groups' promotion techniques.

**Q: What will fostering cost me?**

**A:** Shelters and rescue organizations are the pet's owner and sponsor. They rely largely on donations from the community, and many are a 501c(3) tax exempt charities. The expenses they cover will vary. Most cover all medical care, many will cover behavioral training and most also assist with food and other pet care supplies (leash, collar, bowls, crates) when needed. For the most part, gas/mileage is not a reimbursable expense. If the foster will need assistance, it is best to ask the shelter or rescue what support is available before the pet arrives and before stocking up! The foster home's expenses may be tax-deductible, consult your tax professional.

**Q: What are kennel cough and kitty colds, also known as URI?**

**A:** Almost every dog or cat that spends an extended period of time in a shelter setting will at some point be exposed to illness. Common terms are kennel cough in dogs and kitty colds in cats. Symptoms of Upper Respiratory Infections (URI) may include coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge. In serious cases decreased appetite and dehydration can occur. Animals most at risk are the very young, the old and any with weakened or already compromised immune systems. This is the equivalent to a common cold or cough in humans. In most cases, URI can be successfully treated with a round of antibiotics and result with no lasting long term effects.

**Q: Is it contagious to my own pets?**

**A:** Yes, URI is an airborne illness and similar to a cold in humans. It is contagious, but if your pets are healthy, current on their vaccinations, and not overly stressed they should be able to fight off any illness. Those most at risk are mother dogs or cats and their newborns, any animal of advanced age and those with current long term health issues. General practices of keeping foster pets quarantined in a separate room or area of the house, avoiding taking the animal out to common areas, hand sanitizing etc. are good measures to avoid passing anything on to your own pets.

**Q: What if I don't feel comfortable fostering a sick, injured or behaviorally challenged animal?**

**A:** Don't worry; there is always a role for foster parents. Healthy, underage or underweight dogs or cats need foster parents too! Rescue organization have ALL their animals in foster care so ask for an animal that currently needs no medical treatment.

**Q: What can I expect from my foster dog or cat, will they be housebroken or litter box trained?**

**A:** Because every animal is different, it is best to expect to start with the basic aspects of socialization, training and housebreaking or litter box habits. Some dogs and cats will learn faster than others, time and patience will be required on your part. Rescue organizations have experienced leaders and can offer advice on resources to help support housebreaking and litter box training, etc. Crate training is one technique that can be employed to prevent unwanted damage to a foster parent's home. Routines and healthy diet can also prevent unwanted accidents.

**Q: Will I get training to be a foster home?**

**A:** Rescue groups and shelters have other very experienced people who can support their fosters. Standards of practice for training and support will vary among organizations.

**Q: What if my foster dog or cat is a bad match?**

**A:** It is important to be realistic about your experience, preferences, and expectations at the beginning of the fostering process. Attempt to learn as much about the specific animal you plan to foster ahead of time. There will be an adjustment period for all fosters and organizations will try to assist foster parents through this process with practical advice and resources. Mismatch can sometimes happen. Take into consideration your family members' ages, routines, and general home environment.

If need be, the organization will find another foster home. Be prepared to work with your rescue organization to help find a new foster situation and expect they may ask that the dog or cat is cared for until another foster home can be found.

**Q: What if I have a vacation planned, or a personal emergency and cannot care for the animal for a short or long period?**

**A:** Good planning can avoid this situation in most cases, but we know that sometimes "life" happens and unanticipated situations may arise. The organizations can be expected to find another, short-term foster home when required. The foster would be expected to give ample notice, when possible, and the foster can help in the process of finding a replacement as well. When fostering for a shelter, in the worst case scenario the animal can be returned to the shelter.

**Q: What if I want to adopt my foster dog or cat?**

**A:** Congratulations! Adoption fees will depend on your specific organization's foster to adopt policies.

## **THINGS TO CONSIDER**

Before starting the application process think about:

- Type of foster animal(s) that will fit in your home.
- What pets do you have at this time and what animals do they/will they get along with?
- Do you have space/ability to separate the animals if necessary?
- Does everyone in the family agree with the idea?
- If you have children, consider their ages and whether the type/size animal will be manageable around the children and if the children will be gentle and appropriate and/or able to leave the animal alone, if necessary.
- Do you have the time to be available to be with the help, help with training and socializing (being around other animals and other people) if needed, and take them to vet appointments and possibly adoption events or arrange for transportation to adoption events?

THEN, consider: Many fosters who “sit on the fence” for a long time before actually opening up their home and later wish they had done so sooner. It’s a remarkable fulfilling journey and a way of helping an animal on its own journey to better life, and thanks to you, just to having a life!

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK A SHELTER OR RESCUE ORGANIZATION**

- What are your requirements of a foster home?
- What is the average length of stay for an animal in your foster care program?
- Which of my expenses are covered?
- If my foster needs to be altered, when, in general should I expect the appointment to be scheduled?
- Are donations/expenses from a foster tax deductible? (also consult a tax professional.)
- Do you offer training or mentoring of any kind?
- What happens if I go on vacation or have to leave town?
- How many, what types of animals do they rescue/place each year?

- Can I be available for other shelter/rescue groups if I sign up with your group but don't currently have an animal?
- Can I be available to take an animal from another rescue group if I am fostering one of your animals?
- Do you do adoption home checks to help ensure our fosters are going to a good home?
- If one of my fosters is adopted and the adopter returns the pet, would I be given first choice to foster that pet again?
- For rescue organizations, when/where/how often are the adoption events?
- Do I need to transport/arrange transportation to adoption events?
- Do I have to stay with the pet at the event?
- Where is the veterinary clinic that the pet will need to go to?

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