

## FOSTERING A PET

If you are not familiar with the world of animal rescue, then you may not be familiar with the concept of “fostering” or temporarily caring for an animal in order to save its life and provide rehabilitation, medical care and socialization skills for it so that it will be more adoptable and suitable for what will hopefully be his new role as someone else’s pet or animal companion. I personally have never fostered a pet - there is no doubt in my mind that I do not have the personality or skills that would enable me to be a good foster parent. I am certain that I would have flunked the class in providing care for an animal on a temporary basis until it finds its permanent or “forever” home. Instead, I have chosen to save, rescue, rehabilitate and then adopt my animal companions knowing that I do not have the skill, stamina or fortitude to know and love an animal and then give it away (relinquish it) to someone else. In my opinion, it is a very special person, indeed, who has the knowledge of animals as well as the ability, compassion and selflessness required to care for a pet in need, to provide it with love and training, a temporary family life, and then ultimately “give” it away to someone who will share the rest of his or her life with it.

Without those generous, kind-hearted and compassionate people willing to foster an animal, many rescue or animal welfare organizations would find it virtually impossible to save and adopt out as many animals as they do. Often, an animal is simply too young, fragile or ill to make it on its own and requires someone to administer special care, training, food or medications until it becomes strong and independent enough to be designated as adoptable for a family which hasn’t the special skills money or patience to care for a puppy or kitten or older dog with special needs. Medium to large, adolescent untrained dogs are also excellent candidates for foster care. The foster parent takes on the role and responsibility of nursing an animal into health and overall well being and easing the transition from shelter to home. Also a part of the work of a foster parent is socialization and temperament evaluation. Generally, the foster parent(s) work in conjunction with a rescue group or animal welfare organization, which pay for any extensive medical care, surgery or treatment, required for the animal. However, frequently foster families donate the cost of food, toys and accessories and other expenses.

Often, foster homes provide a wonderful transition for dogs or cats that have been neglected, abandoned or abused and ended up at animal shelters with very little hope for a future home. Foster parents provide a stable and loving environment and help socialize and obedience train the animals in their temporary custody. They learn about the animals physical and emotional needs and can provide potential adopters with profiles of the animal’s personality and characteristics as well as whether they get along well with children, other pets, etc. In addition, the foster family must understand that there is no defined time limit to the time the animal will spend with them. No one can guarantee that an animal will be adopted within a certain time frame, even though one can be cautiously optimistic. I have known people who have fostered animals for a few weeks, months and even years until the “perfect” adopter comes along.

A foster volunteer ideally has some general experience with dogs and should be familiar with basic dog care and training. The foster has an opportunity to correct the behaviors or bad habits, which may be responsible for the animal being surrendered to a shelter. The responsibilities of a foster parent may include basic training: including housetraining (VERY important!), walking on a leash, learning to sit, stay, come, go down and obeying your commands. Other responsibilities may involve administering medical care (dispensing medication and providing an appropriate diet) and taking the dog to the vet,. Providing him with interaction, playtime and exercise are very important components to the dogs' emotional and physical development. Once the dog has been nursed back to health after he has been evaluated and trained and deemed adoptable, it is time to begin the search for the best possible home for the animal.

Fostering a dog or cat may seem like a difficult and challenging task. For many of us who love animals, it is a seemingly impossible mission. We simply become too attached to our new addition to let him go. However, the rewards of saving a life and finding it a loving home are indescribable. Everyone involved in the process truly benefits!