

Becoming a Foster Home

How you can save a life by giving a temporary home to a shelter animal.

► **By Faith Maloney**

Being a foster home is not easy. Taking animals into your own home, loving them, and then letting them go requires a very particular kind of ability.

Fostering isn't for everyone, but for Chaz and Jean Blackmore it's the only way to go. They decided that, along with their own dogs Jasper and Cody, they would provide a temporary home to one foster dog at a time.

"The dogs do everything with us," says Chaz. "They go jogging with us and they go for car trips. In the case of Tika, a black lab mix, she went with us on our honeymoon. She got to meet moose, deer, and mountain goats, and she found her new family while we were in Aspen. Her new people were vacationing there at the same time as us. They really connected with Tika, so when we got home, we arranged for her permanent adoption.

Every day, thousands of dogs just like Tika don't ever make it into a new home simply because there is no room in shelters and humane societies to take them all. Foster homes offer a vital alternative to this sad situation.

Barbara Conrad of Salt Lake City has been a foster mom to hundreds of cats and dogs over the years. She volunteers her services for the Humane Society of Utah. This year, Best Friends honored her as Person of the Year at our awards ceremony here in our home state of Utah.

Barbara, a modest woman, shrugs off her achievements, pointing out that there are many other people like her who enable precious lives to be saved.

"Fostering is very important to each animal, but especially to cats," said Barbara. "They get so depressed in a shelter, and consequently often get really sick. They seem to be more sensitive than dogs. And their anxiety, known as "cage depression," can make things worse for them because they then don't look good to potential adopters.

"Being able to have them spend time in a foster home before going up for permanent adoption can mean the difference between life and death for a lot of cats."

In California, Linda and her husband Mike provide a foster home for animals from their local rescue group. In three years, they've placed about 150 animals.

“When they're adopted, he pouts for days. Then he's delighted when the next foster arrives and we go through it all again!”



Chaz and Jean at home with their foster pals

But, however good the new homes, there's always a potential problem when you're fostering an animal. In Linda and Mike's case, Mike falls in love with them all and never wants to let them go!

"With every animal that comes through the door, he begs me to keep it and add it to our own brood. If it's with us for longer than two weeks, he gets really upset when I find it a home. He pouts for days, even when I tell him how happy our own cats are when the interloper is finally gone. Then he's delighted when the next foster arrives and we go through it all again!"

While many people can't let go, others are reluctant to foster in the first place, thinking that it is somehow unfair to take in a dog or cat, establish a bond, and then allow the animal to be adopted out into another home. Isn't that a second abandonment?

I used to feel like that myself. But once I saw how being in a foster home helped a dog or cat find a quality permanent placement, I changed my mind. Taking a stray or frightened animal and showing him or her that people can be kind, that food is available, and that there is a warm place to sleep, creates a marvelous bridge to a new home. And those of us who provide foster space know that there is never a shortage of animals that need this preparation time before finding their own people.

Letting them go isn't easy. Often, a foster home turns into a permanent home. This is why all rescue, shelter, and humane societies are always on the hunt for new foster homes.

Are you ready to give fostering a try? Then contact your local humane society or rescue group and talk to them about it. Maybe there will be some training involved, some papers to sign, and then it's back home with a new temporary family member.

If we are going to make a difference in the number of animals killed each year because there is not enough space to house them, then becoming a foster parent is a priority. It is important, valuable work and, best of all, it saves lives. 🐾

You can download the Best Friends manual about foster care from the No More Homeless Pets section of the Best Friends Web site at www.bestfriends.org. Or write to Best Friends for a copy. (Please send a large self-addressed, stamped envelope.)