



Maddie's Fund

Dog & Cat Foster Care in the United States – 2020 Survey Report

(Results compared to 2018 results)



Background

The objective of this survey was to evaluate the utilization of foster care and support for foster care programs by animal welfare organizations in the United States. Maddie's Fund first conducted this survey in 2018; this survey allows us to roughly compare changes in foster care since the first survey.

The survey provides information about fostering patterns compared to 2018. The surveys rely upon information shared by staff at animal welfare organizations. While some shelters responded to both surveys, some only responded to one or the other, so our data may not represent a highly accurate comparison between 2018 and 2020. Additionally, the wording of a few of the questions or answer choices were changed slightly and could have impacted the results. **This data must NOT be shared without prior permission from Maddie's Fund.**

Methods

During February 2021, an online survey collected detailed information about:

- Shelters' intakes and policies
- Pets sent to foster care
- Foster caregivers and their selection process
- Opinions about foster care

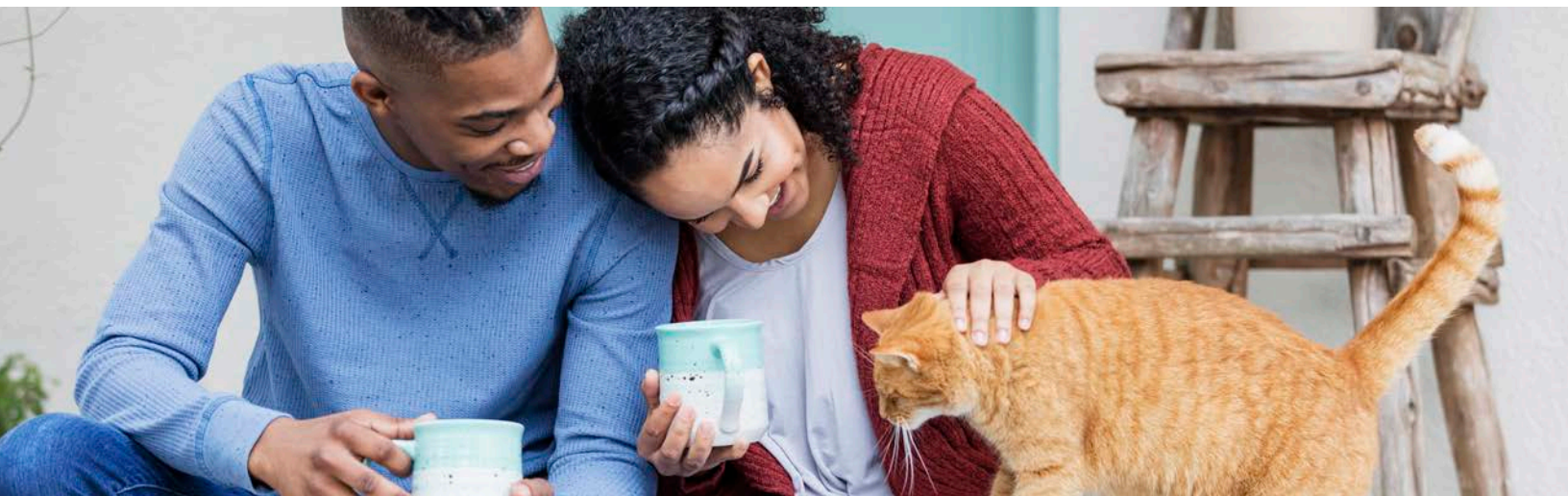
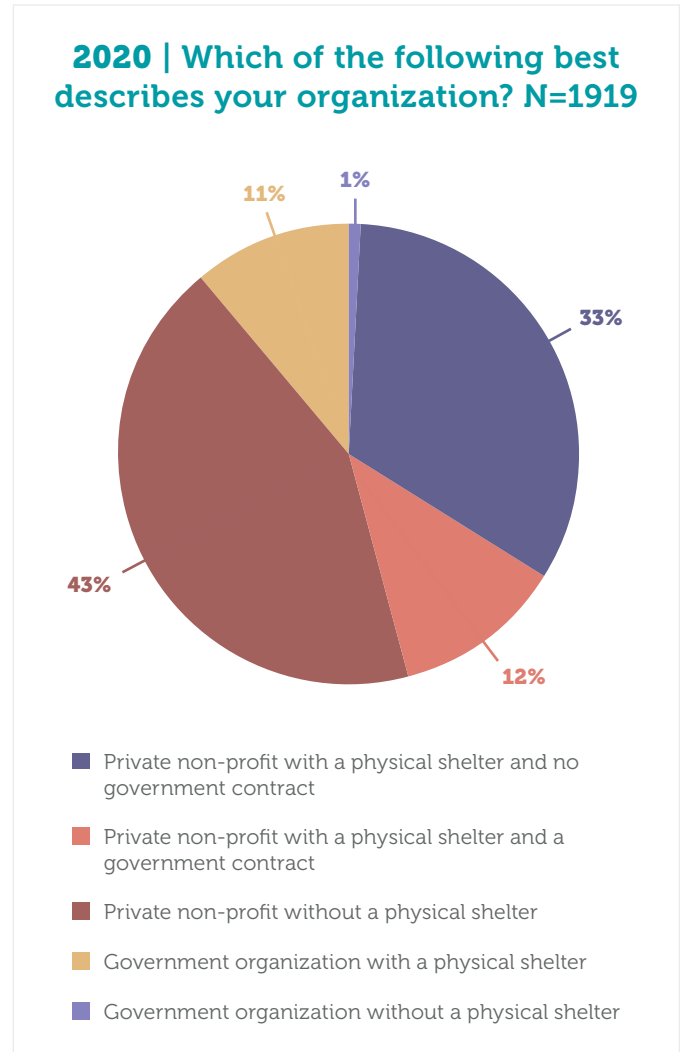
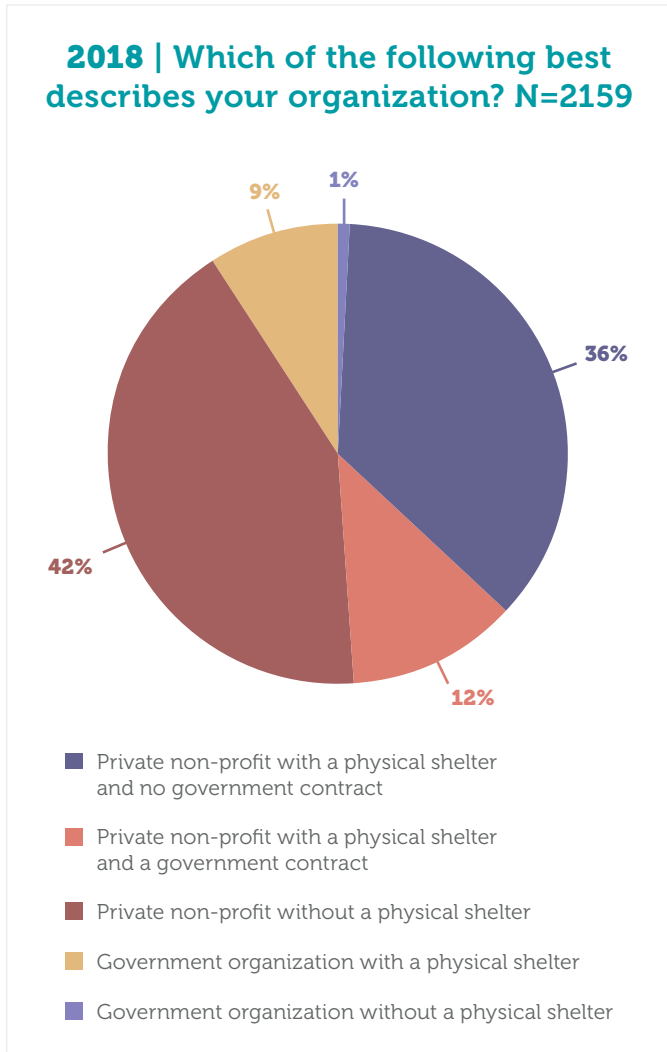
The survey was sent to a convenience sample and distributed via the email lists of Maddie's Fund, ASPCA, The Association for Animal Welfare Advancement, Adopt-a-Pet.com, Best Friends Animal Society, HeartsSpeak, Michelson Found Animals Foundation and PetcoLove Foundation. Responses were collected in Survey Monkey, and duplicate responses from the same organization were removed from the sample. When duplications occurred, first priority was given to completed responses, second priority was given respondents with a "foster coordinator" title as well as titles with higher seniority than foster coordinators. If titles were similar in seniority, then a random respondent was selected. After duplicate responses were removed, 1,919 organizations responded to the survey. Descriptive statistics were generated, and data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 25.

Results

The goal of the study was to gain a better understanding of the utilization of foster care amongst animal welfare organizations and to roughly assess changes between 2018 and 2020. Although all organizations with foster programs were encouraged to respond to the survey, this report primarily focuses on brick-and-mortar shelters.

Organization Profiles

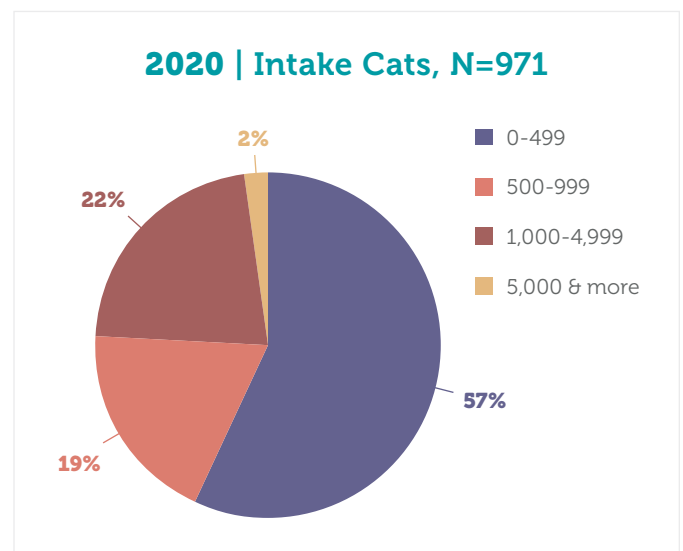
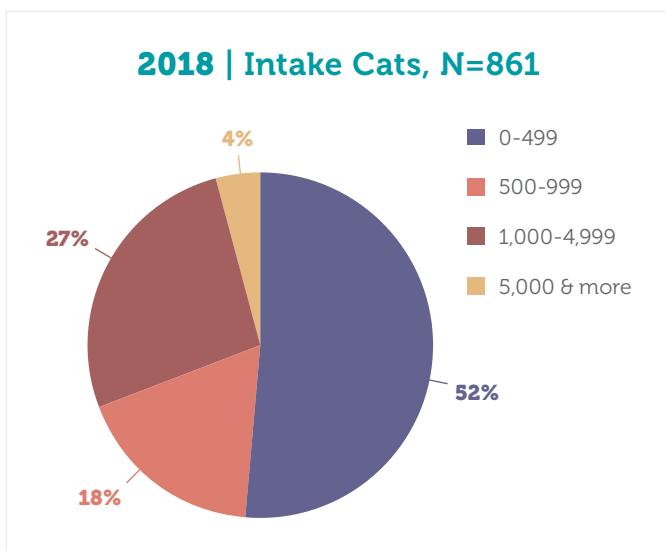
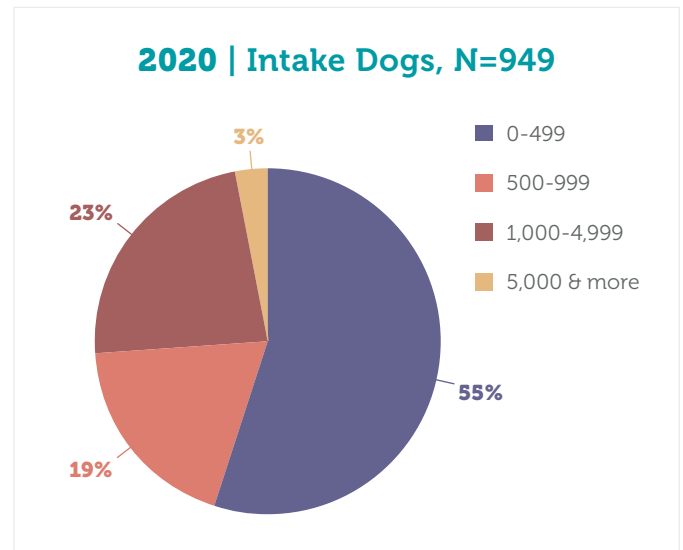
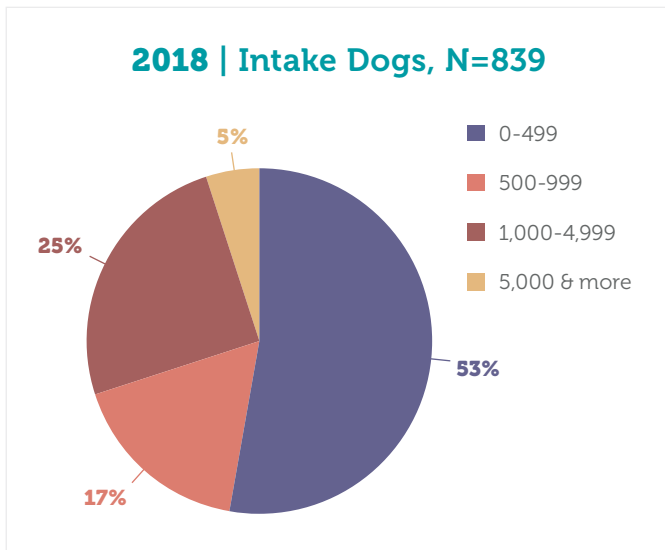
Organizations were distributed very similarly in 2018 and 2020 related to organization type and the presence of a physical shelter.



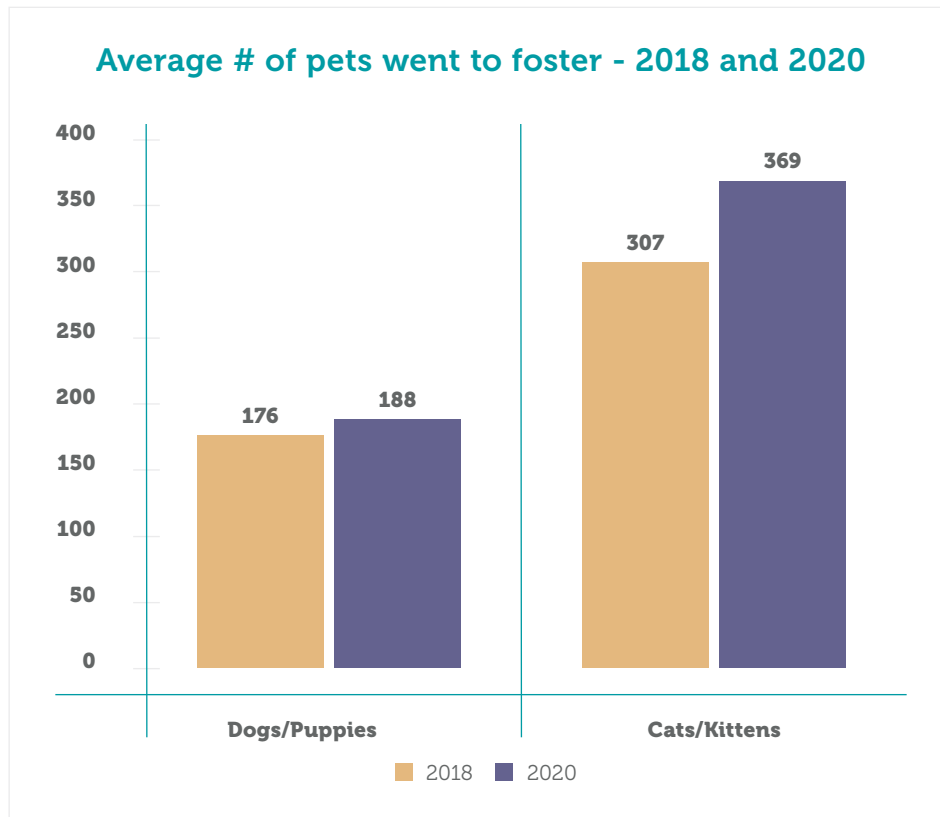
Foster Care at Organizations with Physical Shelters

For the rest of this report, the data was filtered to include organizations with physical shelters only. Organizations without physical buildings are extensively utilizing foster homes to care for their pets, and their work is valued. For this report, a focus has been placed on foster care at organizations with brick-and-mortar shelters, as their utilization of foster care is less than that of organizations without physical shelters. In addition, efficient operation of foster programs could improve the functioning of the organization through effective space utilization, staff time redistribution, cost savings, shorter length of stay for the animals and improved outcomes.

Comparing the 2018 and 2020 surveys, results were very similar in terms of their intake distributions, with 2020 respondents having slightly smaller organizations. In both years, the sample was skewed towards organizations with smaller intake numbers that accepted less than 1,000 animals.



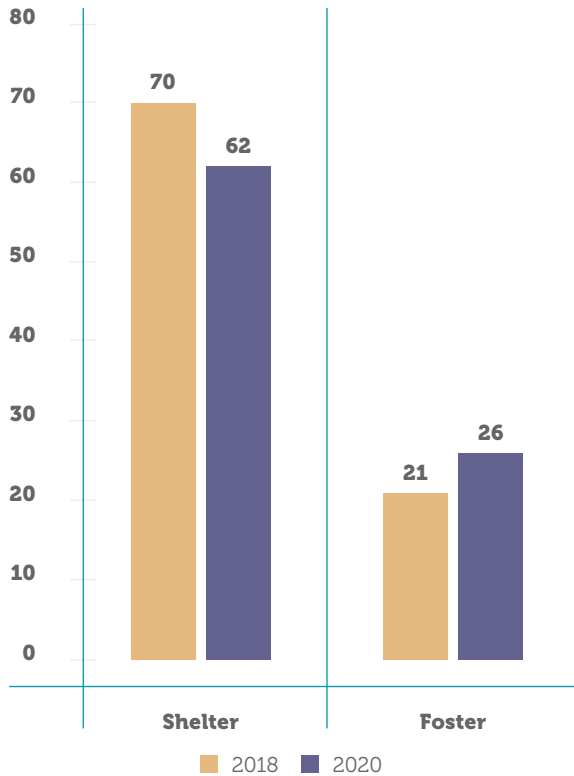
Overall, the average number of pets who went to foster care from organizations with physical shelters was higher in 2020 versus 2018. There was a 20% increase for cats and a 7% increase for dogs. The median in 2020 was 40 dogs and 125 cats; the median in 2018 was 45 dogs and 100 cats. The numbers showed a similar trend when comparing the average number of pets in foster versus shelter during a typical summer month.



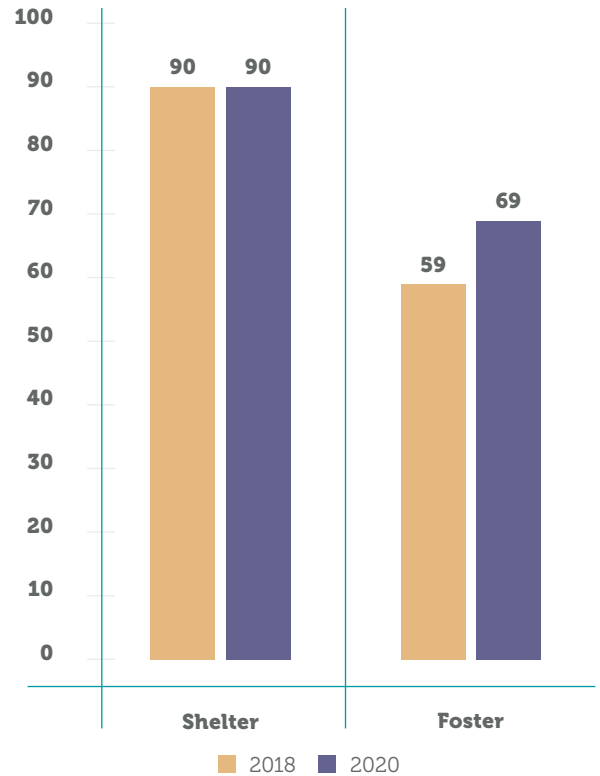
The average number of pets that organizations placed in foster care during a typical summer month increased from 2018 to 2020 for cats and dogs. The increase was higher for dogs and puppies (27% increase versus 17% for cats and kittens). With regard to the population in the shelter, there was an 11% decrease in the average number of dogs in the shelter during a typical summer month. For cats, the average in-shelter population stayed unchanged from 2018 to 2020.



Average # of dogs/puppies in foster vs shelter in a typical summer month



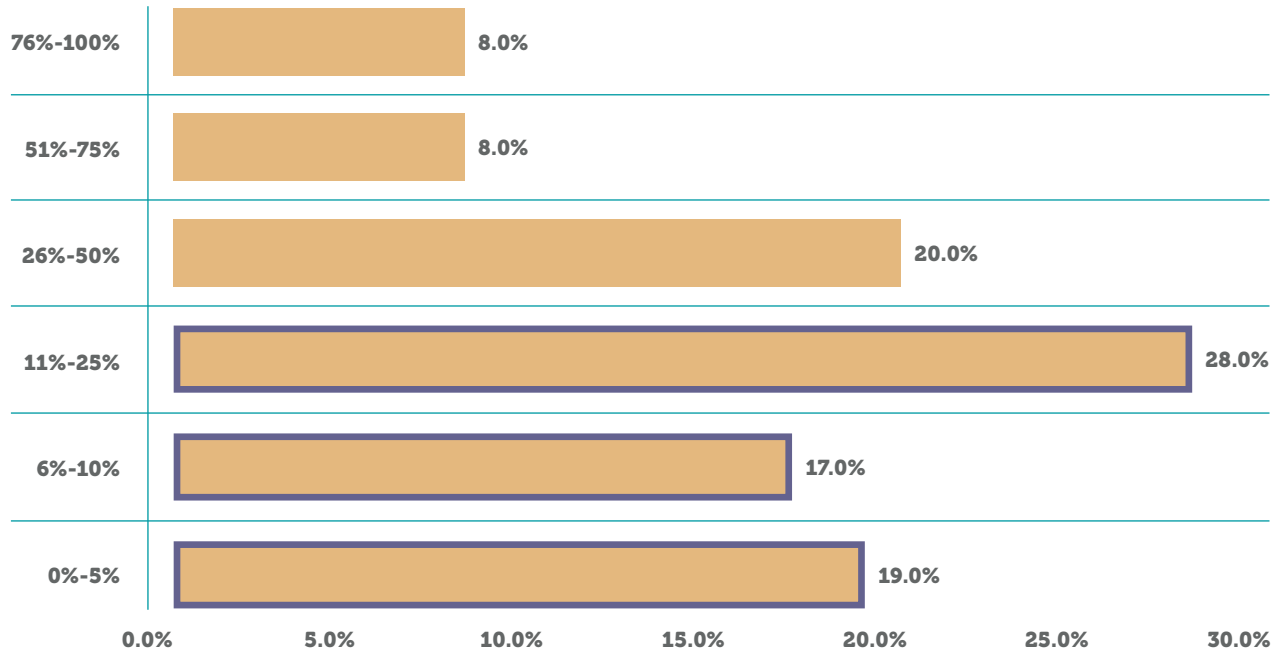
Average # of cats/kittens in foster vs shelter in a typical summer month



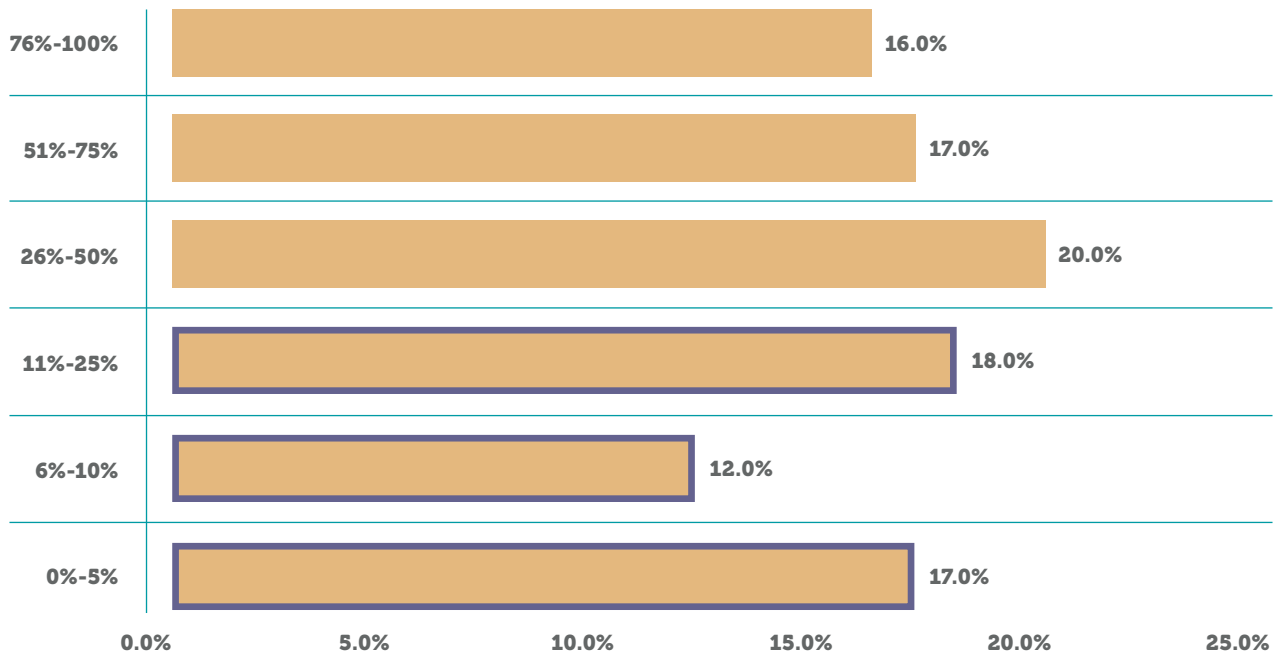
In 2018, we asked respondents, “What percentage of pets admitted to the shelter for adoption were housed (for one day or more) in foster care during 2018?” The wording of the question was changed in 2020 to allow for measurement of pandemic-related changes that might impact the number of pets placed in foster homes. The new 2020 questions used the following wording: 1. What percentage of the dogs and/or cats your organization had in custody were in foster care on April 30, 2020? (For example, calculate the number of pets in foster care divided by the total number of pets in your organization’s custody); 2. What percentage of the dogs and/or cats your organization has in custody are in foster care right now?

The portion of the three charts below outlined in purple, representing organizations that placed 25% or less of their animals in foster care, demonstrates that a smaller percentage of pets were placed in foster care in 2018 than in early COVID-19 (April 2020) and later COVID-19 (February 2021) periods. In 2018, only 36% of organizations placed more than 25% of their population in foster care, versus 53% on April 30, 2020 and 42 % in February 2021. This data indicates that while there was a significant increase in pets in foster homes in April 2020, the numbers have since dropped but still show an increase compared to those of 2018.

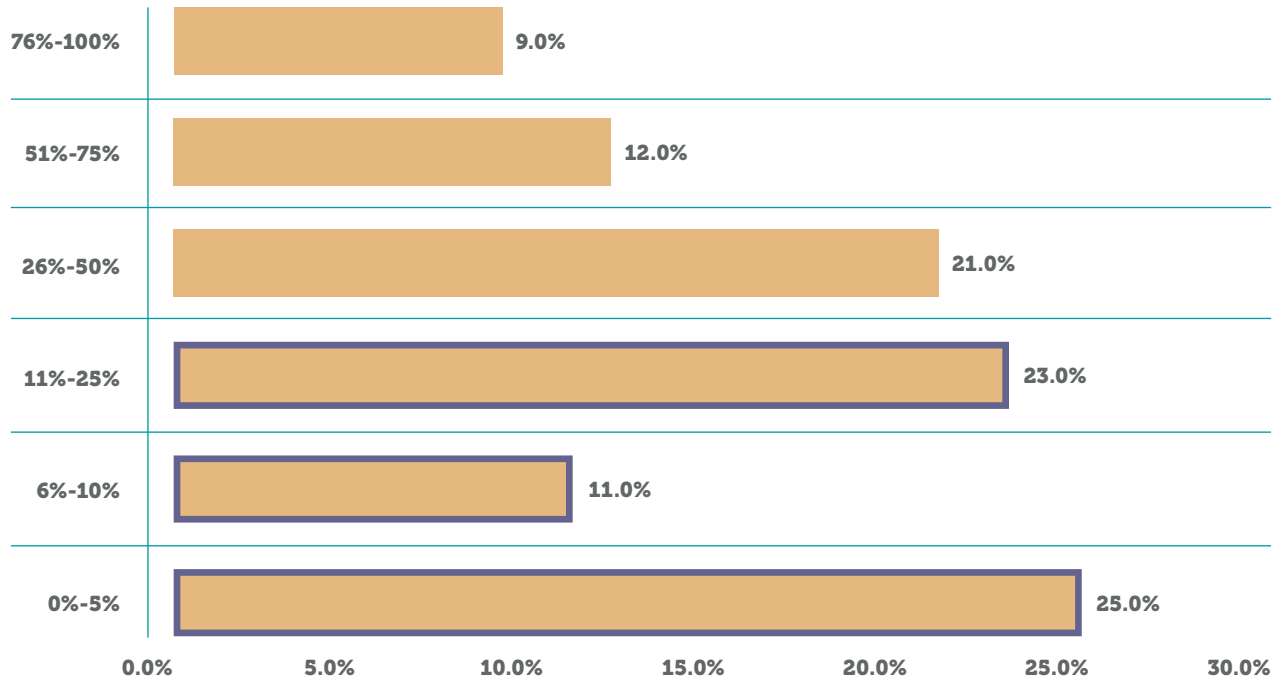
Percentage of pets admitted to shelters for adoption that were housed in foster care during 2018, N=688



Percentage of pets that your shelter had in custody were housed in foster care on April 30, 2020. N=854



Percentage of pets that your shelter has in custody and are housed in foster care right now (February 2021). N=847



In terms of numbers of active foster caregivers, in 2018 each organization had an average of 24 (SD=52) active fosters for dogs and 33 active fosters (SD=65) for cats. However, the data was not normally distributed; the organizations had a median of 5 dog fosters and 10 cat fosters. In the 2020 survey, we asked to indicate a total number of active foster caregivers for all types of animals and did not separate out dogs vs. cats. The number of active foster caregivers increased drastically from 2018 to 2020. The average number of active foster caregivers for cats and dogs combined in 2018 was 57 and average total in 2020 was 119 (SD=321), which was an increase of 108%. The combined median for cats and dogs in 2018 was 15, compared to 25 in 2020, an increase of 66%. While this data isn't an exact comparison because of the question changes, the increase in average and median is large enough to confidently say that there was a positive shift in the number of foster caregivers.

Despite an increase in the number of foster caregivers and animals placed into foster care, less shelters reported having a foster care program in 2020. In 2018, 875

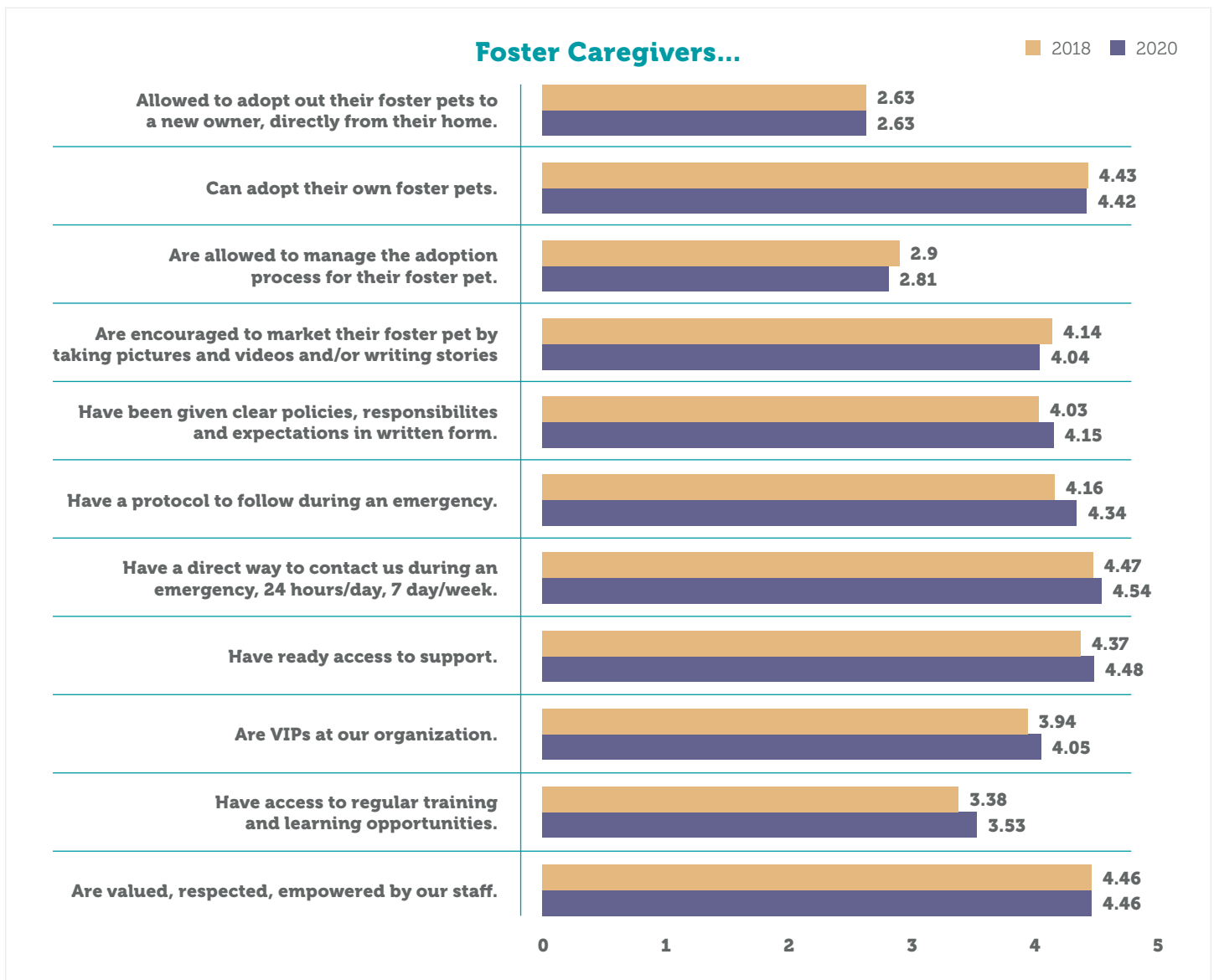
(88.2%) of the 991 physical shelters reported having a foster program where homeless cats and/or dogs stay in volunteers' homes for a day or longer. In 2020, 858 (78.7%) of the 1,090 organizations with physical shelters reported having a foster program.

The 9.5% decrease could be because the surveys' samples did not include all of the same organizations. "Difficult to find fosters" was the main reason for not having a foster program in both 2018 and 2020 surveys. Of 232 organizations in 2020 that no longer had a foster program, 19 (8%) specified they had a program but discontinued it due to problems. Unfortunately, we didn't ask whether this happened during the last two years.

There was virtually no change from 2018 to 2020 regarding how many people at the organization are allowed to place animals in foster care. In 2020, 56% of organizations stated that only "a few staff members" are allowed to place pets in foster care. A similar trend was observed in 2018, when 58% of organizations stated that "only a few staff members" were allowed to do so.

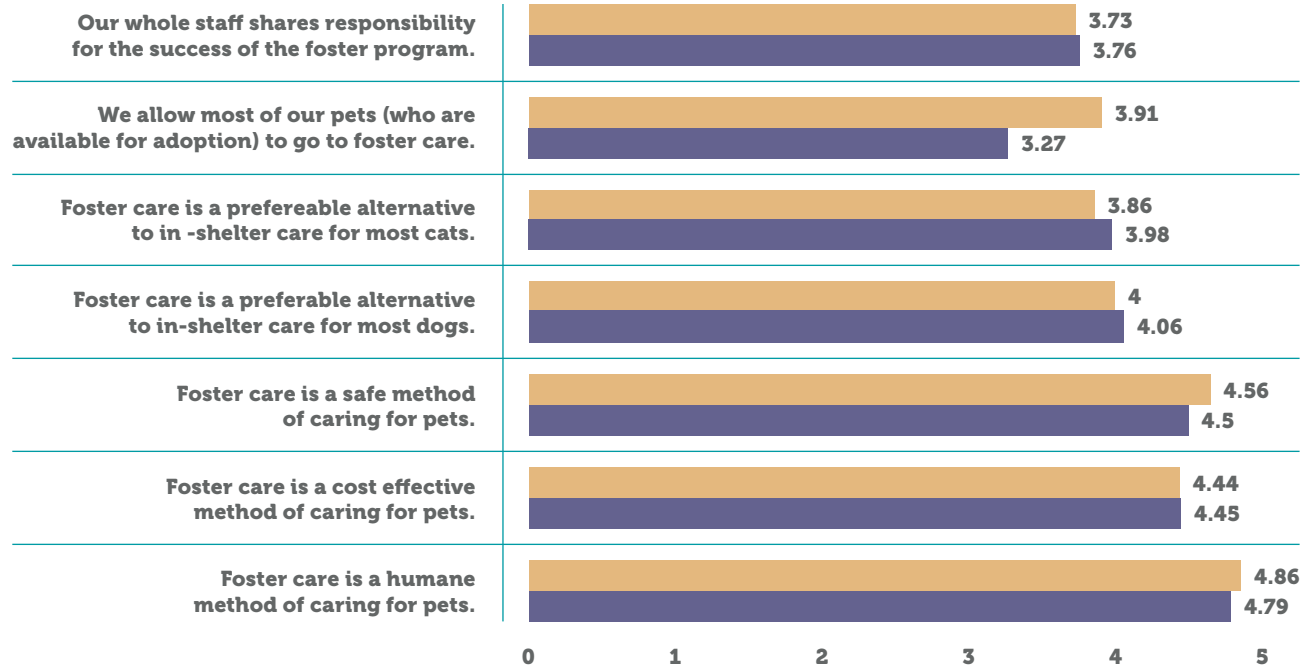
Opinions about Foster Care Programs and Support of Foster Caregivers

Organizations were asked to agree or disagree on two groups of statements. The rating scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with 3 being a neutral opinion. The first group of statements asked about policies regarding foster caregivers and caregiver support, and the second group focused on the respondent's opinion about foster care in general. Since all statements were ranked very high in the original survey administered in 2018 the change over two years was incremental but still positive. The largest increase in rating was 4% and was observed over two statements: 1. Foster caregivers have access to regular training and learning opportunities; and 2. Have a protocol to follow during emergency. In 2020, 3% fewer respondents stated that "Foster caregivers are allowed to manage the adoption process for their foster pets". There was a 16% decrease regarding "We allow most our pets (who are available for adoption) to go to foster care". The decrease in agreement for this statement most likely happened due to wording changes in the survey question. In the 2018 survey the statement said, "Most of our pets (who aren't required to be in the shelter, e.g., stray hold) are available for foster OR adoption". All the rest of the statements' wording was unchanged in the 2020 survey.



Foster Care

■ 2018 ■ 2020



Summary and Conclusions

When comparing survey results for 2020 versus 2018, a positive trend in fostering was observed. More pets went to foster care in 2020 than in 2018. The positive change was especially profound for dogs. Moreover, organizations reported more foster caregivers available to foster in 2020 than in 2018. Some of this change is likely associated with increased interest in foster care in the United States due to COVID-19. A repeat survey in 2022 will determine whether this trend continues with time.

Unfortunately, less shelters reported having a foster program. It was unclear whether the decrease was due to the fact that the surveys' samples did not include the same organizations.

2020 was a groundbreaking year for animal welfare. As shelters move toward a more community-centric model, sustaining 50% or more of the population of homeless pets in foster homes is not just a possibility but a reality in some cities.

We've made a lot of progress, but there remain organizations with small or non-existent foster programs. If you're interested in learning how to get a foster program started at your organization, check out the resources here: www.maddiesfund.org/foster-care-resources.htm





**Maddie's
Fund**

#ThanksToMaddie

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