**Evidence Supporting a**

**Home-Based Approach to Pet Sheltering**

Statement from the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, 2022:

Because confinement has negative impacts on animal behavior, reducing the duration of time spent in cages or kennels is critical. Foster care is the preferred method of housing for dogs and cats who do not need care that must be provided in-shelter (e.g. for safety, legal, medical or behavioral reasons) because it allows for regular social interaction and for animals to choose where and how they spend their time (Gunter et al. 2019 PeerJ).

Foster = better pet wellbeing

* [Stress in Shelter Dogs and the Use of Foster Care to Improve Animal Welfare](https://honors.libraries.psu.edu/files/final_submissions/2339)
  + Cortisol levels were lower for dogs living in foster homes than in the shelter.
  + Living in a foster home is less stressful for a dog than living in a shelter. The increased use of foster care programs in animal shelters could be an effective way to reduce stress in shelter pets.

# [Cat Foster Program Outcomes: Behavior, Stress, and Cat–Human Interaction](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/12/17/2166)

* + Foster cats did not display decreased social behavior, increased fear or aggression, or increased cortisol levels while in the foster home, even for as little as 1 night. Therefore, even short-term cat fostering does not appear to be more stressful for cats than staying in the shelter.
  + Short-term fostering may also be a viable option for improving adoption outcomes.

# [An actigraphy-based comparison of shelter dog and owned dog activity patterns](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/11/2061/htm)

* + Animal shelters tend to be stressful environments for dogs because of the sights, sounds, odors, and schedules that characterize shelter living.
  + The shelter environment may inhibit dogs from resting. Dogs in the shelter were significantly more active than owned dogs.

# [Psychological Stress, Its Reduction, and Long-Term Consequences: What Studies with Laboratory Animals Might Teach Us about Life in the Dog Shelter](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/11/2061/htm)

* + Stressors encountered in the shelter may be shaping later behavior in unwanted ways.
  + In a stressful, competitive environment, behavioral traits such as reduced sociality, increased reactivity and aggression, and a re-focusing of cognition on skills relevant to basic survival at the expense of “higher level” skills might all be adaptive. Indeed, all have been documented to develop disproportionally following early stressful conditions
* [Foster care has an impact on dogs’ welfare and adoption](https://www.maddiesfund.org/assets/foster-care/adult-dog-foster-study-summary.pdf?_ga=2.28001397.856501091.1647281315-1383506934.1632315018)

# When pets were in foster homes, behaviors associated with well-being improved and those associated with poor well-being lessened. Results suggest that dogs benefit dramatically from foster care.

# [Characterizing Human–Dog Attachment Relationships in Foster and Shelter Environments as a Potential Mechanism for Achieving Mutual Wellbeing and Success](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/1/67)

* + Foster increased the likelihood that a dog will experience the establishment of a secure attachment to a caretaker before final adoption, enabling them to practice forming bonds with humans.
  + The proportion of secure attachment styles in shelter dogs included in this study were significantly lower than the proportion of secure attachment styles previously reported for owned dogs. Dogs in foster homes formed secure attachments to their caretakers at rates similar to those of owned dogs living in homes.
* [Changes associated with improved outcomes for cats entering RSPCA Queensland shelters from 2011 to 2016](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6025144/#:~:text=Improved%20outcomes%20were%20facilitated%20by,of%20young%20kittens%20dramatically%20decreased)
  + Foster care provided increased opportunities for initially poorly socialized cats to develop social behaviors, provide care for very young kittens, increased the network of potential adopters and led to less euthanasia.

# [Evaluating Cognitive and Behavioral Outcomes in Conjunction with the Secure Base Effect for Dogs in Shelter and Foster Environments](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/9/11/932)

# Foster dogs have significantly higher levels of attachment and attention-seeking behaviors when compared with dogs living in the shelter.

* + Secure attachment in foster homes was associated with improved persistence and performance on a point following task.

# [Factors Associated with High Live Release for Dogs at a Large, Open-Admission, Municipal Shelter](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/8/4/45)

* + Dogs returned from foster care had a 70% reduction in health concerns, compared with dogs sent to foster.
  + Foster care increased the odds of live release by about five-fold for all dogs

# [Evaluation of a pheromone collar on canine behaviors during transition from foster homes to a training kennel in juvenile Military Working Dogs](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1558787816300351?via%3Dihub)

* + Moving a dog from a foster home to a kennel environment increases their stress levels, with or without pheromone collars.
* [Pre-mortem risk factors for mortality in kittens less than 8 weeks old at a dedicated kitten nursery](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1098612X20974960)
  + Foster care programs help to mitigate concerns regarding disease exposure and transmission, inadequate nutrition, and stress
* [Assessing the welfare of shelter dogs by studying their sleep/rest patterns](https://studenttheses.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12932/27950/Artikel%20onderzoeksstage%20L.M.%20Bril.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
  + Shelter dogs have more and shorter sleep-wake cycles than dogs in domestic situations
  + After two weeks the dogs weighed significantly less than they did on arriving at the shelter, which could be a sign that they are experiencing stress

Short-term foster

* [Evaluating the effects of a temporary fostering program on shelter dog welfare](https://peerj.com/articles/6620/)
  + Dogs’ cortisol: creatinine ratios (stress hormone) dropped significantly during their overnight fostering stay, and returned only to baseline levels after their return to the shelter.
  + Dogs had their longest bouts of rest during sleepovers, followed by in the shelter after their sleepovers.
* [Foster field trips improve welfare in dogs](https://chewonthis.maddiesfund.org/2018/05/study-can-foster-field-trips-improve-welfare-in-dogs/)
  + During field trips of 1 hour or more, significant improvements in behavior were shown on 15 of 21 survey items, which included trembling, barking and repetitive behaviors such as jumping and walking in circles
* [Investigating the impact of brief outings on the welfare of dogs living in US shelters](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/11/2/548)
  + Field trips do not provide the same reduction in stress as previously shown with temporary fostering. Nevertheless, short-term outings may provide shelter dogs with greater adoption visibility and assist in foster recruitment and, thus, should be further explored.

Foster leads to a decrease in adoption return rates

* [Adoption Can Be a Risky Business: Risk Factors Predictive of Dogs Adopted from RSPCA Queensland Being Returned](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/12/19/2568/htm#B48-animals-12-02568)
  + Spending time in foster care before adoption time was associated with a lower risk of adoption return. Risk of return appeared similar for dogs adopted after shorter and longer periods in foster care, and even a foster care period of 7 to 13 days appeared beneficial. Foster care appears to provide a preparatory basis for the transition to a home environment.
* [Evaluation of a novel dog adoption program in 2 US communities](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0091959)
  + Seven percent of dogs who were adopted through the [Adoption Ambassador program](https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/adoption-ambassadors-foster-program) were returned to the shelter, compared to 17% of dogs adopted directly from the shelter.
* [Placing medium and large dogs with behavioral challenges in foster homes](https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/SAWA%20Foster%20presentation%20for%20ASPCA_0.pdf)
  + Return rate of dogs in the study: 9.6%; Shelter’s overall return rate for adopted dogs: 13%

Fostering = Better Human Wellbeing

* [Examining How Dog ‘Acquisition’ Affects Physical Activity and Psychosocial Well-Being: Findings from the BuddyStudy Pilot Trial](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/9/9/666/htm)
  + This study examined how fostering a rescue dog affected the humans’ physical activity and psychosocial well-being. Nearly half of study participants saw large increases in physical activity and nearly three-quarters saw improvements in mood after fostering for six weeks. More than half met someone new in their neighborhood because of their foster dog.

Summary of the positive benefits of foster programs:

* Foster reduces pets’ stress levels.
* Pets in foster have improved wellbeing compared to pets in the shelter.
* Organizations can learn more about pets’ personalities while they’re in foster homes.
* Foster placement leads to increases in positive outcomes for pets.
* The pet gets an advocate who often helps market them for adoption and continues to be involved in their life at the shelter.
* The shelter gets information on the pet’s behavior in a home, which can be different than what is seen in the shelter.
* It increases shelter pets’ visibility in the community.
* The opportunity to get great photos of the pet in a home environment and out and about.
* It leads to a quieter shelter, which benefits the staff and resident pets.
* Pets going to foster homes help to open up space at the shelter.
* Pets aren’t exposed to as many pathogens as in a shelter
* Short-term foster options are the “gateway” to more fostering. Not everyone can foster long-term. Short-term programs lower the bar and allow more people to participate in fostering.
* The organization engages with their community in a positive way.