

## **12/9/2012: Feature Story**

### *Foster a Pet, Save a Life*

CHICAGO, IL: Earlier this year, a PAWS Chicago volunteer, Jake Smith\*, was asked to foster a 3 month old poodle mix for a week. At the end of the week, he was to take her to Kriser's, an all natural pet store in Chicago for an adoption event.

The poodle mix, Bailey, made quite the impression on him and his family. He didn't go into the foster process thinking that he would adopt but he became attached to her very quickly.

"As each day passed it became more evident that I was going to consider adopting her...it's not easy to say goodbye!" said Smith\*.

Foster families for homeless dogs and cats are responsible for taking the animal into their home and taking care of it the way they would their own dog or cat. Foster animals from PAWS Chicago provide any medical care that is needed as well as food, a crate, blanket, leash, and collar for dogs. However, fosters will need to provide a litter box for cats and kittens.

Fostering is important to animal shelters because it opens up more space at the shelter to take in other animals. In addition, some animals need to be fostered because they need more medical attention than other animals in the shelter. Other animals have behavioral issues that are addressed easier in a home setting.

It is important for puppies and kittens to be fostered because their immune systems are typically lower so they are more likely to become sick in the shelter. There are also cases when puppies and kittens are rescued but not old enough to be adopted. In this case they need in-home care with a family before they can be put up for adoption.

The foster program at PAWS Chicago also creates an opportunity for the staff and volunteers to become more knowledgeable about the animals. It also creates a "bio" for the animals upon their return to the shelter, because the cat or dog has spent one on one time with the staff and they are now more knowledgeable about the animal's personality.

A typical day with a foster animal is not much different from having a dog or cat. Smith\* was fostering a puppy, so she needed shorter walks than older dogs but needed to be fed twice a day and had lots of play time.

It's important to note that a foster parent should keep a close eye on the animal, especially for foster puppies and kittens. "They can be like toddlers. So, just like you would keep a watchful eye on your kids, I would say the same applies to a cat or a dog," advises Smith\*.

To become a foster parent for PAWS Chicago, the foster parent must be 21 years of age or older. They also must have reliable transportation to the PAWS Chicago Rescue and Recovery Center for appointments and to the Berwyn Animal Hospital in case of an emergency.

In addition, if there are other pets in the home, they all must be spayed or neutered. If necessary, it is recommended that the foster family has the ability to isolate the foster animal in a separate room. They also should not expose their pet to the foster animal for health reasons and to alleviate stress for both of the animals.

Foster parents should also be able to donate their time to the rehabilitation of the animal they are fostering. Playtime is beneficial to all of the animals.

A foster parent doesn't have to be a dog or cat whisperer but it does take the right person to be able to foster an animal. It's important to have patience and dedication to care for the animal during the foster period, no matter the length of foster time.

Smith's\* foster experience is technically considered a "failed foster" because he adopted Bailey. While this is not an uncommon outcome, fostering a cat or dog provides the animal with a nice home for the foster period and also makes finding their forever home a quicker process, to the benefit of everyone involved.

"As the adoption event came closer, there really was no way that I was going to say goodbye," stated Smith\*. "In the end, every day that I've had her in my life has been nothing but pure joy."

SOURCE:

\* Name has been changed for confidentiality reasons

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