



Dog & Cat Foster Care in the United States: 2022 Survey Report



Executive Summary

The 2022 survey conducted by Maddie's Fund[®] provides valuable insights into the utilization and support of foster care programs for dogs and cats in the United States. The survey revealed that a significant majority of physical shelters (88%) reported having a foster care program in place. However, there are still barriers that prevent some shelters from establishing foster care programs, such as difficulties in finding suitable foster homes, concerns about liability, limited staff resources, and insufficient funding.

The survey also explored the trends in intake and utilization of foster care programs. The intake of dogs and cats in physical shelters remained relatively stable since 2018. Regarding foster care utilization, the survey showed an increase in the percentage of animals placed in foster care for physical shelters compared to 2018.

The survey further examined the dynamics of foster care programs and identified important factors impacting foster care placement. The data indicated a consistent number of pets being sent to foster care by physical shelters and rescue organizations over the past four years. However, there was a positive growth in the number of active foster caregivers in both physical shelters and rescue organizations compared to 2018. Importantly, the survey revealed a correlation between the foster onboarding wait time and the number of pets sent to foster care. Shorter foster onboarding wait times were associated with a higher median number of pets placed in foster care.

Furthermore, the survey shed light on the changing landscape of foster caregiver processes. A notable shift towards online training was observed in both physical shelters and rescue organizations. This adoption of online training methods may streamline the onboarding process and enhance accessibility for potential foster caregivers. Embracing community members and making it easy for people to foster not only creates a culture of inclusivity but may be an important factor in developing more robust foster programs.

In addition, the survey findings underscored the impact of time-consuming steps, such as home checks, on foster care placement. The inclusion of these steps in the onboarding process was associated with lower numbers of foster placements. This highlights the need for physical shelters and rescue organizations to carefully evaluate the necessity of time-consuming requirements and consider alternative approaches to expedite the onboarding process without compromising the quality of care provided to foster animals.

Background

Foster care programs play a vital role in providing temporary homes and care for animals in need. These programs are essential for ensuring the well-being of animals and supporting the work of animal welfare organizations. To gain insights into the utilization and support of foster care programs, Maddie's Fund has conducted a biannual survey in the United States. This report focuses on the findings from the survey conducted in 2022, as well as any trends observed when comparing the data to previous years. **We kindly request that you respect Maddie's Fund's data sharing policy and seek permission before sharing any survey results.**

Methods

In early 2023, Maddie's Fund conducted an online survey to gather valuable insights about foster activities of animal shelters and rescues in 2022. The survey aimed to collect information on various aspects, such as the number of animals taken in, the number of animals placed in foster care, and the process of selecting foster caregivers.

To ensure a diverse range of responses, the survey was distributed via the email lists of multiple organizations involved in animal welfare, such as 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. As an incentive for participation, organizations that completed the entire survey had the chance to win one of ten \$500 grants.

After removing duplicate responses, a total of 2,406 organizations provided answers to the survey. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the survey findings, providing a clear overview of the data. Statistical tests were employed to analyze any changes observed over time, allowing for meaningful comparisons between different periods.

Limitations

It's important to approach the findings of this survey with some considerations in mind, as there are certain limitations to the data collected. Firstly, the survey was distributed to the email lists of a particular group of organizations, which means that the participating organizations may not fully represent all animal welfare organizations. Additionally, it's worth noting that slight changes in the wording of survey questions compared to previous years could have influenced how respondents understood and answered them. This could potentially affect the comparability of data between different survey years.

Furthermore, the survey relied on self-reported information provided by staff or volunteers within participating organizations. While they were encouraged to provide accurate reporting, there is still a possibility of errors or inconsistencies due to human error or subjective interpretation. Nonetheless, the survey provides valuable insights into the utilization and support of foster care programs and offers a basis for understanding trends and potential areas for improvement in the field.

Organization Profiles

The participating organizations consisted of various types of organizations involved in animal welfare. These included private non-profit organizations without a physical shelter (40%), private non-profit organizations with a physical shelter but no government contract (37%), private non-profit organizations with a physical shelter and a government contract (13%), government organizations with a physical shelter (10%), and government organizations without a physical shelter (1%). It's worth noting that this distribution remained consistent across the survey years of 2018, 2020, and 2022, indicating stability in the composition of respondents over time.

Within this report, we will use the terms "physical shelters" and "rescue organizations" to refer to different types of organizations. Physical shelters encompass government organizations with a physical shelter, private non-profit organizations with a physical shelter and a government contract, and private non-profit organizations with a physical shelter but no government contract. On the other hand, rescue organizations encompass private non-profit organizations without a physical shelter.

By categorizing the organizations in this way, we can better understand and analyze the findings specific to each type, considering the distinct roles and characteristics of physical shelters and rescue organizations in the context of foster care programs.

Foster Care Landscape in Physical Shelters: Intake, Programs, and Utilization

In this section, we delve into foster care within physical shelters. We examine key aspects such as intake of dogs and cats, the presence of foster care programs, the utilization of foster care, and the emerging trend of sleepover/short-term foster care.

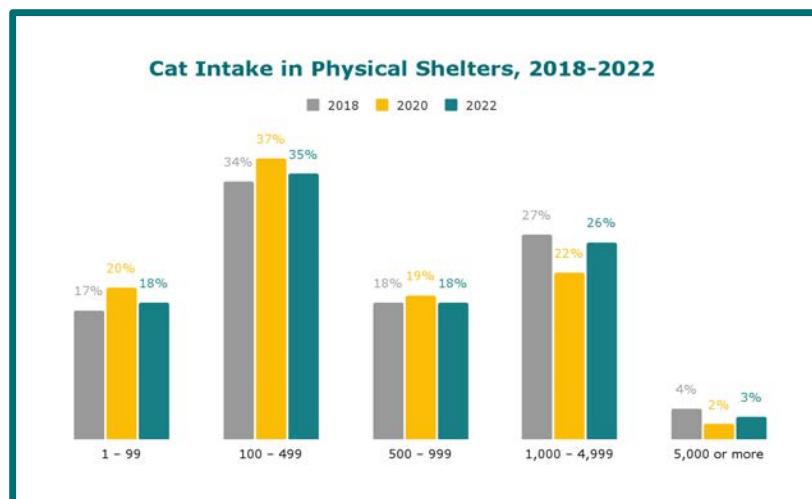
Dog Intake in Physical Shelters

Approximately 19% of the shelters reported taking in 1 to 99 dogs, while 34% took in 100 to 499 dogs. Additionally, 18% of the shelters accepted 500 to 999 dogs, and 24% took in a larger number of dogs, ranging from 1,000 to 4,999. A smaller proportion of shelters, 5%, reported an intake of 5,000 or more dogs. It is noteworthy that the dog intake patterns remained relatively stable since 2018, with no significant changes observed when comparing the data to previous years.

Cat Intake in Physical Shelters

According to the data, 18% of the shelters reported taking in 1 to 99 cats, while 35% received 100 to 499 cats. Additionally, 18% of the shelters had an intake of 500 to 999 cats, and 26% received a larger number of cats, ranging from 1,000 to 4,999. A smaller proportion of shelters, 3%, reported an intake of 5,000 or more cats.

Comparing the cat intake data to previous years, there were no significant differences observed when compared to 2018. However, a notable change was observed when comparing the data to 2020. Specifically, there was a significant increase in the intake of 1,000 to 4,999 cats and 5,000 or more cats, which returned to the levels seen in 2018. This suggests that the change in cat intake between 2020 and 2022 is not reflective of an ongoing trend but may be attributed to a specific event, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Foster Care Programs in Physical Shelter

Foster care programs play a crucial role in providing temporary homes and care for cats and dogs in physical shelters. The survey findings revealed that 88% of physical shelters reported having a foster care program in place. This indicates that a significant majority of these shelters are providing animals with temporary homes outside of the shelter environment. Comparing these results to the data from 2018, there were no significant differences observed, indicating stability in the presence of foster care programs over the last four years.

When comparing the data to 2020, a notable change was observed. In 2020, only 79% of physical shelters had a foster care program, whereas in 2022, the percentage increased to 88%. This significant increase suggests that the rise in foster care programs between 2020 and 2022 is not reflective of an ongoing trend but may be attributed to a specific event or circumstance, such as operations returning to previous levels after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Foster Care Program Availability in Physical Shelters, 2018 - 2022



Reasons for Not Having a Foster Care Program in Physical Shelters

While foster care programs are beneficial for animals in physical shelters, not all shelters have implemented such programs. Understanding the reasons behind the absence of foster care programs can provide insights into the challenges faced by these shelters.

According to the survey, the top five reasons reported for not having a foster care program in physical shelters are as follows:

1. **Difficult to find foster homes (41%):** Many shelters expressed challenges in finding suitable homes and caregivers to provide temporary care for the animals.
2. **Other reasons (31%):** Some shelters provided unique reasons specific to their circumstances, indicating that there can be a range of factors influencing the absence of foster care programs.
3. **Concerns about liability (30%):** Shelters cited concerns related to liability as a barrier to establishing foster care programs.
4. **Don't have enough staff (28%):** Lack of sufficient staff resources was identified as a limiting factor for establishing and managing foster care programs. It is worth noting that the percentage of shelters citing this reason has significantly decreased from 46% in 2018 to 28% in 2022, indicating a positive trend in overcoming staffing challenges.
5. **Don't have enough funding (24%):** Financial constraints were mentioned as a significant barrier to initiating and sustaining foster care programs.

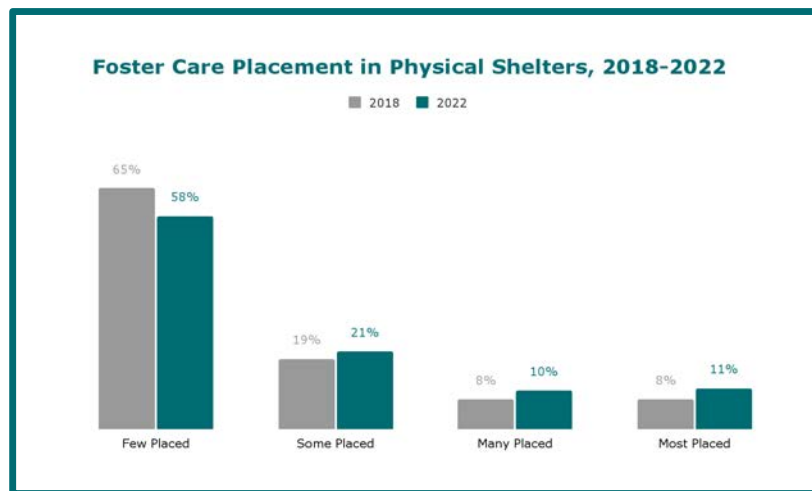
The survey results shed light on the multifaceted reasons behind the absence of foster care programs in physical shelters. Addressing these challenges, such as through recruitment efforts, liability mitigation strategies, and resource allocation, may contribute to the expansion of foster care programs, ultimately benefiting the well-being and successful placement of animals in need.

Foster Care Placement in Physical Shelters

The survey asked physical shelters about the percentage of dogs and/or cats admitted for adoption that were placed in foster care for a day or more. Here are the findings for 2022:

- 58% of shelters placed a few (0-25%) of the animals in foster care.
- 21% of shelters placed some (26-50%) of the animals in foster care.
- 10% of shelters placed many (51-75%) of the animals in foster care.
- 11% of shelters placed most (76-100%) of the animals in foster care.

These results show a significant change compared to 2018, with an increase in the number of animals placed in the some, many, and most categories of foster care. Unfortunately, we couldn't compare the 2020 results due to differences in the survey questionnaire.



Sleepover/Short-term Foster Care in Physical Shelters

Physical shelters were asked whether they sent dogs and/or cats for sleepovers or short-term foster care. The survey results revealed that 49% of physical shelters sent dogs for sleepovers/short-term foster care, while 31% sent cats for the same purpose. Comparing these findings to the data from 2018, there were no significant differences. However, a notable increase was observed between 2020 and 2022. During this period, a higher percentage of dogs (from 42% to 49%) and cats (from 27% to 31%) were sent for sleepovers or short-term foster care. This suggests that the increase is not part of a general trend but due to specific circumstances, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Foster Care Programs: Pets Sent to Foster Care, Caregivers, and Process in Physical Shelters and Rescue Organizations

In this section, we delve into the dynamics of foster care programs within both physical shelters and rescue organizations. We examine essential aspects such as the number of pets sent to foster care, the foster caregivers involved, the duration of foster placements, and the processes involved in becoming a foster caregiver.

Pets Sent to Foster Care in Physical Shelters and Rescue Organizations

In 2022, the median number of total pets sent to foster care by physical shelters was 158. Among these pets, the median number of adult dogs sent to foster care was 20, while the median number of puppies sent was 15. For adult cats, the median number sent to foster care was 20, and for kittens, it was 59. It's important to note that there were no significant changes observed in these categories when comparing the data from 2022 to previous years. This suggests that the number of pets being sent to foster care by physical shelters has remained relatively stable over the past four years.

Median Number of Pets Sent to Foster Care by Physical Shelters, 2022



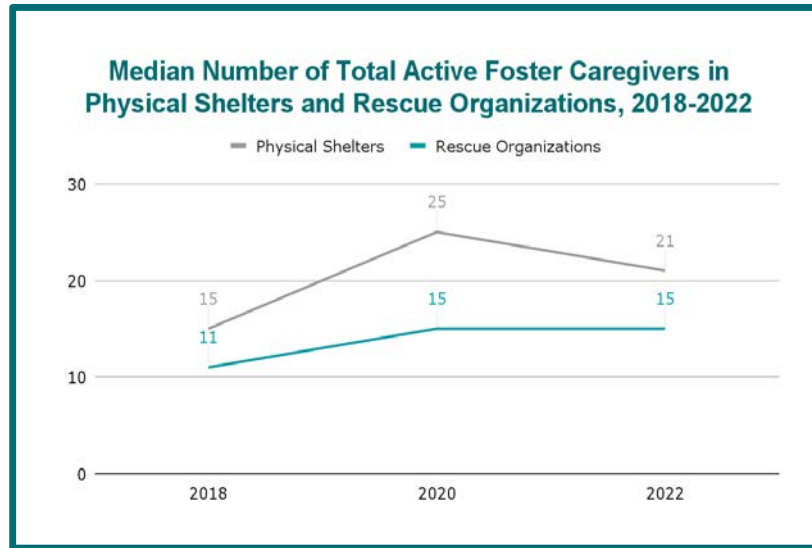
Rescue organizations reported sending a median of 118 total pets to foster care. Specifically, the median number of adult dogs sent to foster care was 25, while the median number of puppies was 4. For adult cats, the median number sent to foster care was 10, and for kittens, it was 17. Notably, there were no significant changes observed in any of these categories when comparing the data from 2022 to previous years. This suggests that rescue organizations have maintained a consistent pattern in the number of pets they send to foster care.

Median Number of Pets Sent to Foster Care by Rescue Organizations, 2022



Active Foster Caregivers in Physical Shelters and Rescue Organizations

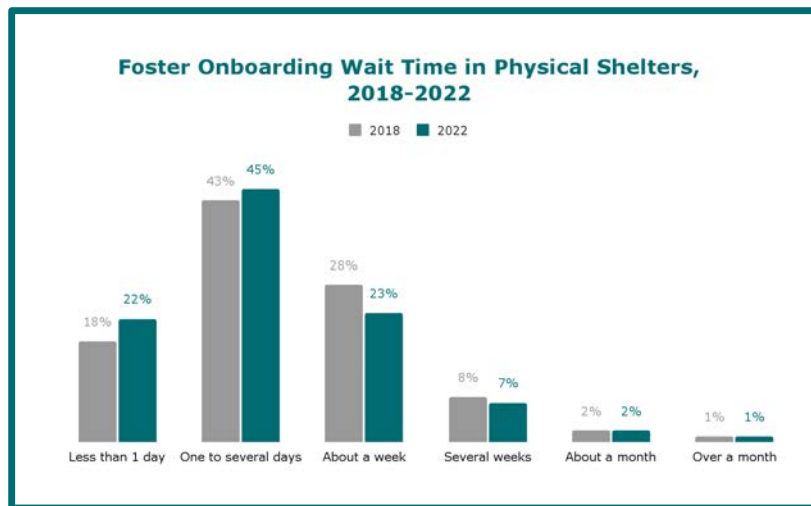
In 2022, physical shelters had a median number of 21 total active foster caregivers, while rescue organizations had a median of 15. When looking back at the numbers from 2018, there were interesting changes. Physical shelters experienced a significant increase from a median of 15 total active foster caregivers in 2018, showing evidence of foster program growth. Similarly, rescue organizations also saw a significant rise from a median of 11 total active foster caregivers in 2018.



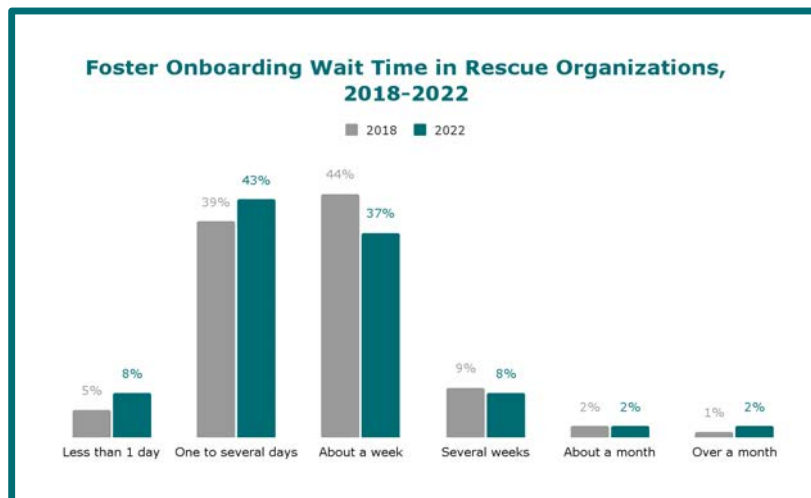
Foster Onboarding Wait Time in Physical Shelters and Rescue Organizations

In this section, we will be focusing on the concept of foster onboarding wait time. When we mention "foster onboarding wait time," we are specifically referring to the time it takes for a new foster caregiver to complete the process of becoming approved and ready to bring a pet home. This includes the period from their initial request to become a foster caregiver to the point at which they are able to officially take a pet into their care.

In physical shelters, foster caregiver wait time has noticeably changed from 2018 to 2022. According to the data, there has been a decrease in the percentage of caregivers mentioning about a week (from 28% to 23%) and several weeks (from 8% to 7%) as the time it takes to foster a pet. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the percentage of caregivers reporting less than 1 day (from 18% to 22%) and one to several days (from 43% to 45%) as the duration of the fostering process.



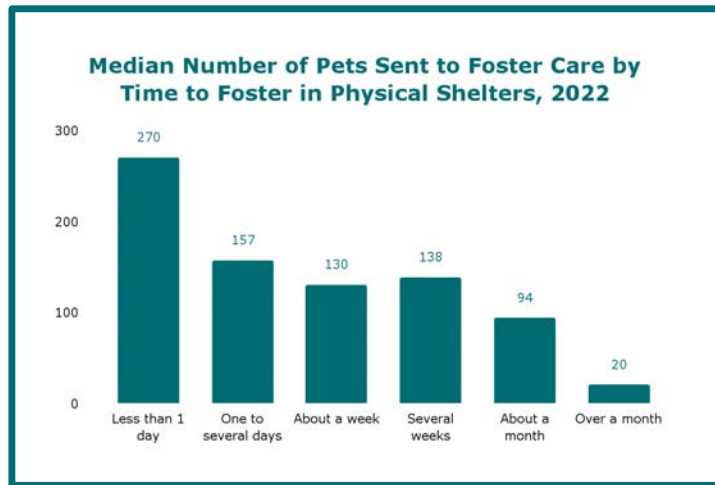
Similarly, in rescue organizations, there have been notable changes in the amount of time it takes for foster caregivers to bring a pet into their homes between 2018 and 2022. According to the data, there has been a decrease in the percentage of caregivers mentioning about a week (from 44% to 37%) and several weeks (from 9% to 8%) as the duration of the fostering process. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the percentage of caregivers reporting less than 1 day (from 5% to 8%) and one to several days (from 39% to 43%) as the time it takes to foster a pet.



The Relationship between Foster Onboarding Wait Time and Number of Pets Sent to Foster Care in Physical Shelters and Rescue Organizations

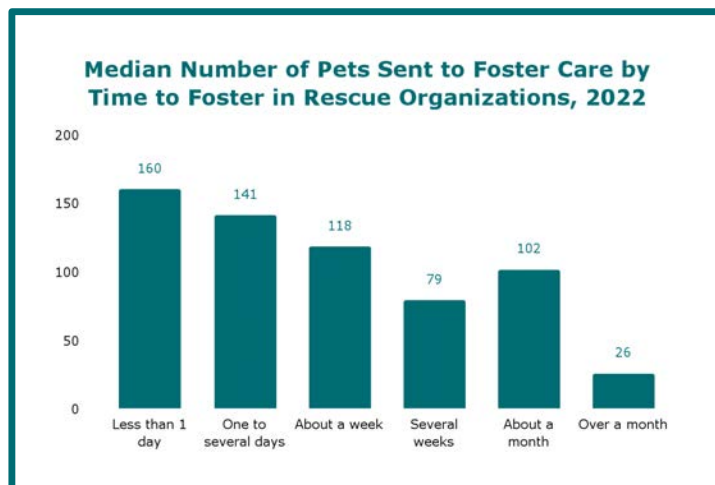
The relationship between foster onboarding wait time and number of pets sent to foster care in physical shelters and rescue organizations was explored, and the findings indicate a significant correlation between these factors.

In physical shelters, as the foster onboarding wait time increased, the median number of pets sent to foster care decreased. The data showed that when the foster onboarding wait time was less than 1 day, the median number of pets sent was 270. As the foster onboarding wait time increased to one to several days, about a week, several weeks, and about a month, the median numbers gradually decreased to 157, 130, 138, and 94, respectively. The lowest median number of 20 was observed when the foster onboarding wait time extended over a month.



Similarly, in rescue organizations, there was a significant relationship between the time it takes to foster a pet and the total number of pets sent to foster care. As the foster onboarding wait time increased, the median number of pets sent to foster care decreased. For a foster onboarding wait time of less than 1 day, the median number of pets sent was 160. As the foster onboarding wait time extended to one to several days, about a week, several weeks, about a month, and over a month, the median numbers decreased to 141, 118, 79, 102, and 26, respectively.

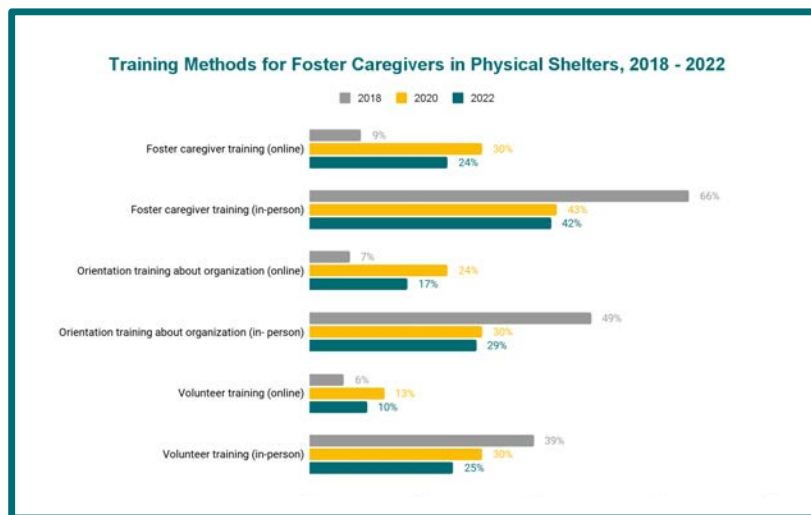
These findings suggest that there is a clear trend in both physical shelters and rescue organizations, where shorter foster onboarding wait times are associated with a higher median number of pets sent to foster care. This implies that reducing the time it takes to place pets in foster care may increase foster care placement.



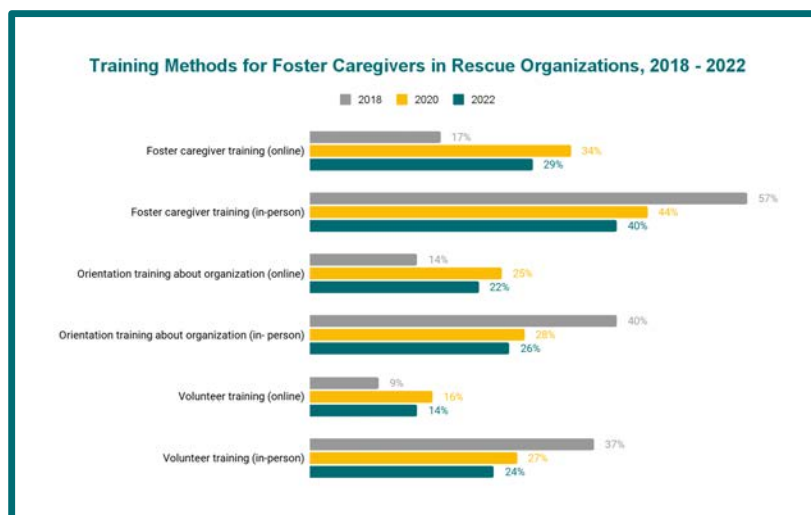
Shift Towards Online Training in Foster Caregiver Processes at Physical Shelters and Rescue Organizations

The process of becoming a foster caregiver has experienced significant changes in both physical shelters and rescue organizations from 2018 to 2022. Notably, there has been a noticeable shift towards the use of online training methods, replacing traditional in-person training. This shift is essential as providing fosters with training is a significant factor in improving foster retention, [per our research on foster turnover](#).

In physical shelters, the percentage of online foster caregiver training has increased from 9% to 24%, while the percentage of in-person training has decreased from 66% to 42%. This shift highlights a growing preference for virtual learning platforms. Similarly, online orientation training about the organization has seen an increase from 7% to 17%, whereas in-person orientation training has decreased from 49% to 29%. Volunteer training has also followed this trend, with an increase in online training from 6% to 10% and a decrease in in-person training from 39% to 25%.



Likewise, in rescue organizations, there has been a similar shift towards online training methods. The percentage of online foster caregiver training increased from 17% to 29%, while in-person training decreased from 57% to 40%. Online orientation training about the organization also saw an increase from 14% to 22%, whereas in-person orientation training decreased from 40% to 26%. The percentage of online volunteer training increased from 9% to 14%, while in-person training decreased from 37% to 24%.



These changes reflect a clear trend towards the adoption of online training and orientation methods in both physical shelters and rescue organizations. The shift may be attributed to the advantages of online platforms, such as increased accessibility, convenience, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

The Impact of Requirements Before Fostering on Pet Placement in Physical Shelters and Rescue Organizations

We examined the impact of requirements before fostering on the number of pets sent to foster care in physical shelters and rescue organizations. Our findings indicated that there are foster requirements that have a negative correlation with pet placement.

We found that requirements related to evaluating foster caregivers’ home and life significantly influenced pet placement in both physical shelters and rescue organizations. These requirements included conducting home visits, meeting pets living in a household, and meeting other members of the household. When these requirements were conducted before fostering, there was a notable decrease in the number of pets sent to foster care. For example, in physical shelters, home visits led to a 74% decrease, meeting pets living in a household resulted in a 71% decrease, and meeting other members of the household caused a 66% decrease. Similarly, in rescue organizations, conducting home visits resulted in a 56% decrease, meeting pets living in a household showed a 58% decrease, and meeting other members of the household led to a 45% decrease.

Additionally, requirements related to verification checks, such as landlord checks and reference checks, had a significant impact on pet placement. When these requirements were conducted before fostering, pet placement decreased in both physical shelters and rescue organizations. For instance, in physical shelters, landlord checks showed a 59% decrease, and reference checks resulted in a 57% decrease. In rescue organizations, landlord checks led to a 37% decrease, and reference checks showed a 36% decrease in pet placement.

Percentage Change in Pet Placement by Fostering Requirement, 2022

	Physical Shelters	Rescue Organizations
Home visit	↓74%	↓56%
Meet pets living in household	↓71%	↓58%
Meet other members of household	↓66%	↓45%
Landlord check	↓59%	↓37%
Reference check	↓57%	↓36%

These findings suggest that certain requirements before fostering may hinder the placement of pets in foster care. To enhance the process and increase successful placements, organizations may consider streamlining and simplifying requirements, particularly those that are time-consuming. Home-based requirements, such as conducting home visits and meeting pets living in a household can be resource-intensive and may contribute to delays in pet placement.

Further, we examined the percentage of physical shelters and rescue organizations that currently implement these specific foster requirements. Our findings showed that rescue organizations have higher percentages of these requirements compared to physical shelters. For instance, rescue organizations have higher percentages of home visits (67% vs. 30%), meeting pets living in the household (55% vs. 34%), meeting other household members (44% vs. 21%), landlord checks (56% vs. 34%), and reference checks (54% vs. 25%).

These percentages highlight the varying emphasis placed on fostering requirements by physical shelters and rescue organizations and underscores the importance of continued research to understand the impact of foster requirements on pet placement outcomes. By gaining a better understanding of how these requirements affect pet placement, physical shelters and rescue organizations can make informed decisions about their foster processes and ultimately improve outcomes for pets in need.





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