

Foster Care for Stressed and Fearful Dogs

Longmont Humane Society

Project title: Foster Care for Stressed and Fearful dogs

Organization: Longmont Humane Society

Project lead(s): Rhea Moriarty

Project completed: 12/31/17

Grant amount: \$7,300

Initiative: Foster Care

Project type: Phase 1

Project Summary: Longmont Humane Society evaluated an expansion of their foster program to include foster caregivers trained to foster dogs who are shy, anxious or otherwise stressed in the kennel environment. A total of 33 dogs were sent to foster homes through this project. Of 33 dogs, 31 were successfully adopted (94% live release rate).

Objectives: To expand the foster program to include specially trained foster caregivers for dogs that are shy, anxious, or otherwise stressed in the kennel environment; To place 30 dogs into foster care and find adoptive homes for them.

Methods: Dogs who exhibited anxiety, fear or signs of significant stress in the shelter were considered for the foster program. Longmont Humane Society (LHS) prepared written materials to train foster volunteers to meet the dogs' needs. LHS recruited foster caregivers and placed 33 dogs with them. To ensure successful foster placement, LHS continued supporting foster caregivers while the dogs were being fostered. Veterinary staff was called upon to assess whether a dog's behavior was due to a medical condition that may or may not benefit from pharmaceutical intervention.

Results:

- 43 families were trained to become foster caregivers for the 33 dogs selected in this study.
- Of the 33 fostered dogs, 31 were adopted, resulting in a live release rate of 94%.
- However, 5 were returned, resulting in a return rate of 16%. Of those 5 that were returned, 2 were adopted to new homes and not returned, 2 were transferred to another agency for adoption, and 1 is at LHS for concentrated behavioral work.
- The average length of stay (LOS) of the dogs while in foster homes was 34 days. The average LOS once they were made available for adoption was 19 days, compared with the overall LHS average for all dogs of 11 days. The average LOS for dogs returned from foster homes to LHS for adoption was 9 days, versus 23 days for dogs adopted directly from foster homes.

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Conclusions: The expanded foster program is a viable alternative for dogs who do poorly in the shelter. By placing dogs with shy, fearful or kennel-stressed behaviors in foster care, those dogs were able to receive added support from trained foster caregivers, while Longmont Humane Society was able to free shelter space for other dogs. As an open-admission shelter seeking to save as many lives as possible, the expanded foster care program increased Longmont Humane Society's lifesaving capacity.

Keywords: Foster Care, Shelter Pets, Fearful Dogs, Stressed Dogs, Fostering

Audience: Shelter/rescue, Executive leadership, Veterinary team