

Foster Home Responsibilities

Thank you for your interest in helping the abandoned and unwanted animals of Historic Springfield. Our foster homes, many of which have been with us from the beginning of our program, experience great joy and deep satisfaction when they see that through their efforts a neglected dog gets a second chance at life and a new opportunity to share his or her unconditional love with people who care. Not only do foster homes have the joy of seeing their foster dog placed into a new forever home, but also there is the additional joy of seeing the happiness of the new family: many of these homes need the dog as much as the dog needs them.

What is Foster Care?

Being a foster home means sharing your home with a rescued dog: providing food, shelter, toys, walks (after the dog is well from heartworm treatment or more confident if shy), and lots of attention, until a permanent home for the dog is approved. We count on our foster homes to evaluate temperament and observe behaviors in a variety of situations, and we welcome those updates so we can assess the dog and enhance the description on the web site for potential adopters. Positive reinforcement training is encouraged. Most foster care situations require 2 weeks to a month of residential foster care, and in some cases especially if the dog is ill or older, several months. In rare cases, you must be able to cope with the possibility that SACARC and our doctors may find it necessary to put the dog to sleep--always for a reason we discuss at length (e.g., unwarranted aggression with other dogs and people, unprovoked biting of people, and terminal illness)--but never because we couldn't place the dog.

What You Need to Foster a Rescued Dog

The most important requirements are time and attention. You must be willing to include the dog in family activities, allow the dog to live as a house dog with much human companionship, and provide some daily one-on-one time with your rescue, including cuddles, play, and walks on leash, with our secure collar and SACARC tag on the dog at all times. The dog may not be completely house trained, in which case use a crate and take the dog out on leash, giving praise and treat reward when the dog is successful. Most dogs are trained within a week or two. Crates are an invaluable piece of equipment for rescue people; they are a great aid in transporting and isolating dogs. It is also a cozy den and a place of refuge for most dogs. We will loan foster homes a crate if requested.

A fenced yard must be of appropriate height (4-6' as some dogs are jumpers) and in secure condition. If it has a gate, the gate must be closed when the dog is in the yard to prevent the dog from getting loose. These are rescued dogs who have sometimes been runners, and we do not want people to have to chase and capture the dog in what can be a dangerous situation for both dog and pursuers.

Apartment homes can also be excellent foster homes, with proper attention to providing several leash-walks daily for the dog as well as adequate off-leash exercise in a safe area like a fenced dog park when possible. We have also found that most modern apartment complexes are now gated which protects the dog as well as residents.

We do not accept trailer homes due to the danger to our dogs in high wind/tornado situations.

Introducing Your Foster Dog

SACARC will discuss with you the best methods for introducing the new dog into your

household. During this time, the rescued dog may appear shy or submissive, may drool a bit with anxiety. Dogs are routine based animals and rescues particularly will be wary in a new situation. Your foster may also have been hit, dragged by the collar, or kicked, which you'll know immediately from his behavior around you and your family. Take it slow and easy; let the dog learn to regain trust; give him hugs and kisses as he can tolerate them; he may be surprised at first, but will eventually relish the attention and return it. You will know the dog is relaxing when his eyes soften, tail begins to wag, and he seeks you out.

Kids and Foster Dogs

If you have children, never introduce a new rescued dog to them without assistance. It is preferred to make introductions with a SACARC representative present but not required. Never leave a rescued dog and a child unsupervised. Sometimes, even though we make every attempt to uncover all available history on each dog, we may not have the full truth about the dog, and he or she may be a fear biter or dislike kids because of prior abuse from children who had not been taught how to treat animals kindly. It is preferred that foster homes have experience with pet dogs, and that children in the foster family are over the age of 5 years, though we realize many children even younger have a special rapport with animals. We will work with the family and dog on a case-by-case decision. Because these situations between kids and rescued dogs can be unpredictable, under no circumstances will we place our dogs in homes that run a baby sitting business.

Your Pets and the Foster Dog

Though many dogs and cats, especially those used to their owners' rescue work, welcome the rescued dog, keep in mind that there may be a period of adjustment for the first few days up to 2 - 3 weeks depending on the rescued dog's history and personality and the resident dog's willingness to accept the foster dog. As he or she becomes more confident, your foster dog may change their behavior towards resident pets, beginning to play and explore the pecking order. As the resident dog accepts the foster dog, the bonding becomes beneficial for both. Unless the dogs get along famously from the beginning, feed your pets and your rescued dog separately; consider feeding the rescued dog in a crate or a closed off bathroom if you notice any food aggression between dogs. Be careful when dispensing treats or other high-value items like rawhides or favorite toys. Sometimes what is thought to be food aggression is actually just a territorial imperative that will take care of itself as the pecking order is established and the dogs relax. Keeping this in mind, always supervise the interactions of your rescued dog with other pets. When leaving the rescued dog home alone (even if you have other pets at home), the use of a crate or gate is recommended at least the first few days up to two weeks until the pecking order is determined. For dogs going through Heartworm treatment, the crate is absolutely necessary to keep the dog quiet. Confining your rescued dog protects them, your pets, and your property from possible injury or damage.

SACARC recommends that all resident dogs be inoculated for kennel cough along with their regular vaccinations. All SACARC rescues of the appropriate age are inoculated for kennel cough. We cannot stress this enough: the incidence of kennel cough in dogs is increasing. However, we always recommend the bordetella inoculation for kennel cough in all resident dogs because the disease now has some 600 strains: it can be picked up by your own dogs on a simple walk in the neighborhood or nearby greenbelts. Though kennel cough is treatable with medication and rest, it has become so virulent that dogs can too easily go quickly into pneumonia. Please have your veterinarian include the bordetella as part of the regular vaccination regimen. Also, some dog owners mistakenly think heartworms are contagious: they are not. See our heartworm care guide and the American Heartworm Society web site for the explanation of heartworm disease and treatment. Finally, SACARC requires that all resident dogs in the foster home are neutered or spayed as we support only professional breeding of purebred dogs, and sometimes

when our dogs are very ill, we need to wait to spay/neuter them until they are well. But also, spaying and neutering your dogs is better for them both medically and behaviorally. Talk this over with your own veterinarians, if you have any doubts. We do make an exception for knowledgeable, professional breeders who want to work with our program to help our rescues. In these cases, to avoid accidents with breeding stock we would only place a rescued dog that had been spayed/neutered already.

What to Do in a Medical Emergency

We will try to place 'easy' dogs in new foster homes and will not place a seriously ill dog in a foster home until the family has gained experience. But if you do feel you have an emergency, and you cannot reach SACARC, you should take the injured or ill dog to the nearest vet who can stabilize the animal until SACARC can authorize further treatment. This is particularly necessary if your foster dog is going through heartworm treatment: any vomiting with listlessness must be reported immediately, and the dog taken to a vet as quickly as possible. Because we are responsible to our donors, dogs, and program welfare, SACARC representatives are the only persons who make major medical decisions for program dogs. You don't want that responsibility, and we have years of experience in making those decisions with the clinics.

How Expenses Are Handled

The foster home is responsible for food, toys, and in-home bathing and grooming; we are happy to provide tax receipts for expenses for which you have kept receipts. Foster homes usually transport the dogs for veterinary care because the dog is more comfortable with the foster family. If you are unable to do so, accommodations will be made by contacting a SACARC representative. We will contact you to obtain your permission to send prospective adoptive families to visit your foster dog in the home or to meet at a neutral location such as a public park. Finally, we will reimburse you for pre-approved emergency veterinary care and medications (again, save all your receipts).