

Sleepover/Weekend Foster Toolkit

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Pilot Program Template

Directions

This pilot program is a template that can be tailored for your organization's use (delete this paragraph before finalizing your pilot program). It was designed with best practices in mind, but some administrators or counties may not be comfortable enough or able to reduce barriers to this extent. In these cases, it may be advantageous to start very small in order to prove that the program is safe and effective, and later reduce barriers as success is seen and confidence in the program has grown. Options are listed at the end of this document.

Background

Sleepover and weekend foster programs are quickly becoming known as a great way to find new foster caregivers, reduce kennel stress and get better information on dogs' behavior. Sleepovers are helpful in marketing dogs for adoption, as potential adopters want to know what a dog looks and acts like outside of their kennel and the opportunity for creative photography, videography and stories is increased.

A 2018 study of sleepover foster programs at 4 shelters throughout the country found that while on just one overnight stay, dogs' cortisol (the stress hormone) levels dropped significantly. Upon return to the shelter, their cortisol levels returned to levels similar to what they were before, but they went no higher.

Goals

- To increase the number of people who can participate in all types of foster care
- To increase adoptions of medium and large dogs due to increased information on the dogs' behavior outside the shelter and more marketing material
- To provide better care for dogs by reducing stress temporarily
- To increase enrichment for our organization's dogs
- To acquire better marketing material, faster by enabling foster caregivers to assist with taking pictures, videos and telling stories about their foster pets
- To increase our organization's capacity by freeing up kennel space through foster care

Pilot

- Pilot will last for 2 months
 - Program will be open to the public.
 - Program orientation will be done through a series of emails and on-the-spot training; orientation will not be required.
 - Foster coordinator will keep a running list of between three and ten dogs that can participate in the program (depending on the size of your facility and access to volunteers)
 - At the end of 2 months we will meet, look at program data, determine if program is viable and adjust program guidelines and logistics.

Logistics

Before program begins

- Create a template for kennel/condo signs that can be placed on dogs' kennels when they leave for a sleepover to inform staff and volunteers of the dog's current location
- Find and train dedicated program volunteers
 - Create a job description for dedicated program volunteers (decide on duties such as gathering supplies, assisting with matching dogs and fosters, harnessing and leashing dogs, checking dogs in and out in the organization's software, etc.)
See job description template on page 5 of this document
 - Train 3-4 dedicated program volunteers to assist with running the program
- Decide on program data to be gathered and create system for tracking it.
- Create template emails
 - Confirming participation, time of pickup and what they'll need to bring with them
 - Email with information on how to market their sleepover foster (taking photos and videos, posting these in the foster/volunteer/staff Facebook group)
 - Email with information on how to return their sleepover pet and what to do if they would like to adopt or foster longer
- Create Google form to sign up, view the online orientation (discuss pertinent ground rules, what to do in an emergency and other important information) and answer questions about the video
- Create a marketing plan, press release and promotional social media posts for the program

Staffing

- Behavior staff (or caretaker, foster coordinator, or program volunteer) will meet available dogs and ensure that 3-10 dogs who have been in the shelter for 30 days or more are offered for participation weekly (unless all dogs are made available, or all dogs of a specific behavior dot color).
- Dedicated program volunteer (or foster coordinator, behaviorist or adoptions staff) will assist fosters in gathering supplies, choosing dogs, harnessing and leashing dogs.
- Dedicated program volunteer (or adoptions staff or foster coordinator) will check dogs out of the organization's software for sleepovers and back in when they return.

Length of time

- Dogs can be picked up for sleepover foster between the hours of ___ and ___ and dropped off ____.
- Sleepovers last at least one night (except in the case of emergency).

Process for Participants

- Participants can sign up online via Google Form. The orientation video will be embedded in the Google Form, and participants will check a box verifying that they have seen it. 5-6 questions about important topics from the video will be asked.
 - We will collect the following information on potential sleepover foster caregivers:
 - First and last name(s)
 - Home and mobile phone numbers
 - Address

- Any special needs for foster dogs (e.g., must be okay with cats or small children)
 - Information on their experience with dogs, and what they're looking for in a sleepover dog
- An email will be sent to participants confirming their participation, listing the time of pickup. The foster manual will be attached.
- Fosters will pick up their weekend foster between the hours of __ and ____.
- 1-2 emails will be sent to participants with more information on marketing their sleepover foster, how to share information about their foster's behavior with staff and what to do if they decide to adopt or be a longer-term foster.
- Participants can return their dogs between __ and __. Foster program volunteers will be in during this time to assist them in returning the dog and checking it back in.
- If a participant would like to adopt their dog or keep it in foster longer, they need to email the foster coordinator.

Safety

- Dogs must leave the building and be walked wearing an EasyWalk or Freedom harness, martingale collar, sturdy leash and a carabiner linking the harness to the collar as a backup at all times (or use two leashes—one for the harness and one for the collar).
- Only dogs on the adoption floor are allowed to go, except with a manager's approval
- Dogs are not allowed off-leash (in public places – okay at private homes provided dog is in secure area without other dogs around) or in dog parks.
- Before leaving the building, the foster caregiver(s) will have the organization's emergency contact information programmed into their phone or written down and carried with them throughout the field trip.

Emergencies

- The protocol for emergencies and dogs who need to be urgently returned will be the same as it is for our longer-term foster program

Data to be collected

- Data will be collected on the program and its results in order to determine the program's efficacy and success. We will track the following data:
 - The total number of sleepovers
 - The number of dogs who are served by the program
 - The total number of sleepover fosters
 - The number of incidents (bites and other emergencies) that happen on sleepovers, with written details
 - The number of dogs that are adopted or fostered for a longer period that are directly related to a sleepover (for example, a foster who decides to keep the dog in foster until adoption, dog who meets adopter on a sleepover or through social media done on the dog's sleepover, etc.)

Marketing the program

- We will create a marketing plan for the program to ensure its long-term success.

- We will create a press release to announce the start of the program and put out the word to local media and community members.
- We will create several graphics and a video to educate the community on the benefits of sleepovers and how they can get involved.
- We will market the program consistently by posting photos, stories and video from sleepovers at least 2-3 times per week.
- We will set the expectation from the beginning that creating marketing material for the pet fostered is part of a foster caregiver's job.
 - Suggest that field trip fosters take a partner with them to help take photos and video; if they don't have someone to partner with, we can try to set them up with a photographer or volunteer.

Potential barriers

- The more successful the program is, the more work it could become. Assigning other staff and/or volunteers to assist with (or run) the program can help mitigate this.
- Liability concerns
 - With foster care, one of the biggest areas of risk is in neglecting to be completely transparent about pets' behavioral histories. You must ensure that fosters be given pets' full behavioral histories before taking them out of the shelter.
 - Having a watertight foster agreement and having all of your fosters, from field trips to longer-term foster, sign it can protect your organization. We recommend having your city or county's attorney review it first.
 - The liability that an organization has with foster care is similar to the liability they have with adoptions.

For More Information

- Study: Do shelter dogs benefit from short-term foster sleepovers?
<http://chewonthis.maddiesfund.org/2017/09/study-do-shelter-dogs-benefit-from-short-term-foster-sleepovers/>
- Webcast: Foster Sleepovers Can Improve the Lives of Shelter Dogs
- <http://www.maddiesfund.org/foster-sleepovers-can-improve-the-lives-of-shelter-dogs.htm>
- Short-Term Foster Manual, Medium & Large Adult Dog Foster Apprenticeship
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1U1pMIRyHVDM7XpMg9Blvu_S0_xxDz_-

Options

- Program can be piloted with current volunteers and fosters only
 - If this is the case, since volunteers already know the dogs, you could open it up to any dog on the adoption floor, those with long stays or special needs, etc.
- Pilot the program on 1-2 specific days of the week, and/or do foster transfers at times your organization is closed
- If needed, in-person orientations can be scheduled on days and times that are convenient to the general public; online orientations can also be created.

Program Preview

Action Item	Approximate Time Required	Templates and Resources	Impact
Planning Tasks			
Create a list of goals for your program based on your data on length of stay and outcomes	30 minutes or more	See page 8 of Alley Cat Allies' toolkit	This will help give your organization a strategy for building your program. It will also help you to break up tasks into meaningful goals that can be achieved easily.
Create or edit a pilot program document that describes program goals, logistics and data to be collected	30 minutes or more	You can use this template	This will enable you to create a thoughtful, organized plan for the program that can be presented to administrators and other stakeholders.
Create or update documents for your program, such as a manual for participants, kennel signs, etc.	30 minutes or more	You can use Austin Animal Center's manual and foster agreement , and LifeLine Animal Project's Weekend Warriors documents as templates	You can add program information to your existing manual, use your current foster agreement or create a separate set of documents just for sleepover/weekend foster. The manual will provide foster caregivers with an understanding of program basics, what to expect, their roles and their responsibilities. A good agreement or waiver will help to protect your organization; we recommend having it reviewed by an attorney.
Create sleepover/weekend foster program onboarding process	30 minutes or more	You can use Best Friends Animal Society- LA's online training and LifeLine Animal Project's Weekend Warriors documents as	This will help foster caregivers to understand the program's requirements and rules. Onboarding of new foster caregivers can be done on-the-spot or on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Using the shortest amount of time from foster

		templates	application to onboarding will help ensure that you don't lose any potential foster caregivers due to the length of the wait.
<p>Purchase or request supplies, if needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Martingale collars - Harnesses - Leashes - Crates - Etc. 	20 minutes or more	<p>Consider creating an Amazon wish list, or asking for donations of specific items.</p> <p>'Adopt me' vests and supply bags can even be made by members of your community!</p>	Having foster supplies available to foster caregivers can help to increase safety and make it easier for people to foster.
<p>Edit or create a foster profile form that fosters can use to send in behavioral information on their field trip fosters, the process for sending the forms out to fosters and for recording the information they report in your files.</p>	30 minutes or more	<p>You can use this dog foster profile template or this report card</p>	<p>This will enable foster caregivers to report the information that you need on foster pets' behavior in the home. Collecting information on a timely basis will help to ensure that your organization has accurate behavioral and medical records on every pet.</p>
<p>Update or create job descriptions for your foster coordinator, other staff and/or volunteers assisting with the program</p>	45 minutes or more	<p>Here are several job descriptions for foster assistants and teams</p>	<p>This will enable staff, program volunteers and your organization to be clear on their responsibilities.</p>
<p>Recruit and train staff and/or foster assistant(s)</p>	1 hour or more		<p>Adoptions staff at some shelters help check fosters in and out as well. Dedicated program volunteers will help the program run more efficiently, saving staff time and allowing more pets to be placed.</p>
<p>Create and implement a marketing plan</p>	1 hour or more	<p>You can use this marketing plan as a template</p>	<p>This will help you to get the word out about your program and recruit participants.</p>

Ongoing Tasks

Onboard new sleepover/weekend foster participants	30 minutes or more per week	Using Google Forms to put orientation/training online is an efficient way to do this (see Best Friends Animal Society-LA's online training)	This ensures that you're always growing your program and that foster caregivers are aware of your organization's policies, procedures and best practices for foster care. You can do orientations on-the-spot, have training online or have scheduled in-person group orientations. If in-person group orientations are chosen, make sure they are scheduled often and at times convenient for your foster caregivers.
Update and monitor the data on your program	20 minutes or more per week	You can use this template from Humane Rescue Alliance's In Real Life program	This will enable you to see if your program is working efficiently enough to meet your needs and will help you to define areas that need improvement.
Formalize Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the program	45 minutes or more		Once the pilot program is successful, create SOPs for the program to ensure it runs efficiently and safely.
Continue marketing the program and the pets who participate in it	30 minutes or more	See this marketing plan for details	Continually marketing the program and the pets that participate is needed for the overall success of the program.

Best Practices for Sleepovers

- Ideally, sleepovers should be open to the public
 - New caregivers can be emailed a manual in advance
 - A staff member or dedicated program volunteer should help match caregivers with dogs, fit the harness on the dog and assist with putting the dog into their vehicle
 - If orientation/training is preferred, it should be available online or scheduled often and at accessible days and times
- Sleepovers should be possible any day of the week
 - Organizations can schedule pick-up and drop-off times to correspond with hours they are closed
- Only dogs on the adoption floor should be eligible to go, except in cases of skilled caregivers that have a manager's approval
 - Program should target the dogs who need it the most: dogs with long stays, seniors, and those beginning to show signs of kennel stress
 - Dogs should have no history of aggression and shouldn't be excessively reactive or mouthy, except in cases of skilled caregivers that have a manager's approval
- Caregiver must sign organization's foster agreement or waiver
- Dogs should be wearing a collar and a harness
 - For added safety, attach a carabiner from the dog's collar to its harness or attach two leashes, one to the collar and one to the harness
 - Attach foster tags if possible
- Dogs should be vaccinated for rabies
- Fosters should be lent an 'Adopt Me' vest, leash or bandana in case they take the dog to a public place
- A field trip sign should be placed on the dog's kennel during the sleepover
- Caregivers should be given emergency contact information and/or must put this information into their phone before leaving with the dog
- Caregiver must be given information on the dog's behavioral and medical history and must receive any medications the dog needs before leaving the building
- Dogs should not be taken to any public off-leash areas including dog parks
- If caregivers wish to introduce the dog to their own dogs, they must discuss a plan for this with the organization. We do not recommend introducing foster dogs to cats during a sleepover.
- Organizations should convey the expectation that foster caregivers will assist with marketing the dog by taking photos, writing about the dog's weekend, etc.

Sleepover/Weekend Foster Program Checklist

Documents

- Participant signup form created
- Pet report card or feedback form created and printed, if needed
- Kennel signs made and laminated, if needed
- Job description for program volunteers created
- Business cards and/or information for participants (adoption, emergency numbers, etc.) are created and/or printed
- Marketing plan for program completed
- Press release for program completed and sent to local media outlets

Tasks

- Online or in-person orientation materials created, if needed
- Logistics for dog selection, if needed, are created
- Any training for program volunteers is completed (sign-out process, harnessing dogs, etc.)
- Copies of foster agreement are printed, if needed
- Spreadsheet or other method of tracking data is created
- Posts, videos and/or graphics to kick off the program on social media are created and scheduled

Supplies

- Martingale collars
- Sturdy 4' - 6' leashes
- 'Adopt me' vests or leashes
- 1-2 types of harnesses

___ Foster tags

___ Carabiners (to connect collar & harness)

___ Doggie waste bags

___ Treats

___ Supply bag

___ Crates

Job Description Template for Sleepover Program Assistant

POSITION TYPE: Voluntary

POSITION REPORTS TO: Foster Coordinator, (name)

POSITION SUMMARY:

Volunteers in this role will assist the Foster Coordinator with tasks related to coordinating, managing, and expediting the shelter's sleepover/weekend foster program, which includes:

- Communicating with the Foster Coordinator about dogs who are eligible for sleepovers or are currently on sleepovers
- Gathering supplies needed by foster families for their sleepover dogs and assisting with organizing the foster supply area on a regular basis.
- Harnessing, leashing and ensuring that a martingale collar and carabiner is on every sleepover dog before they leave the building
- Communicating with foster care providers about animals in their care and any needed refills on food/supplies
- Using the shelter's animal inventory software, to enter information on sleepover dogs including foster profiles, photos, and bios
- Having a working knowledge of commonly-asked questions and answers about the sleepover program

POSITION SPECIFICATIONS:

Volunteers must have the ability to interact with staff, visitors, and other volunteers in a courteous manner, and be able to stay focused and polite even in stressful situations. They must have the ability to follow directions with minimal supervision, and to communicate well in a fast-paced environment. They also must have data entry skills and a willingness to learn and properly utilize the shelter's animal inventory software.

WORKING CONDITIONS:

The working conditions described here are representative of those an employee encounters while performing the essential function of this job.

Subject to animal bites and scratches. Exposure to chemicals, prescribed drugs such as antibiotics, topical medications, etc., and cleaning products. Exposure to zoonotic (animal transmitted) diseases.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:

The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an employee to successfully perform the essential function of this job.

Regular lifting to 10 lbs., frequent lifting to 35 lbs., and occasional lifting over 35 lbs. with reasonable accommodations. Frequent walking, standing, bending, and stooping.

TIME COMMITMENT:

As needed by the Foster Coordinator. Foster program assistants should be able to commit to a 6 hour a month minimum with regular shifts.

Sleepover/Weekend Foster Marketing Plan

News Media

2-3 Weeks Prior to Launch: Press release; invite local news/weather personality or reporter to take part
Ongoing: Press releases on success stories, program expansion, program data

Social Media

1-2 Weeks Prior to Launch: Announcement campaign

At Least 3 Times a Week: Posts on dogs who recently went on sleepovers

At Least Once a Week: Posts recruiting sleepover participants for individual dogs who need a night or two away

Ongoing: Soliciting sleepover fosters, Facebook group for fosters/volunteers/staff or Facebook group or page for the program and its participants only, crowd sourced Instagram account and/or common hashtag for participants to use

Website

One Week Prior to Launch: Slider or pop up about program, branded landing page for the program (for example, www.myshelter.com/weekendfoster)

Ongoing: Updated information on program webpage

Distribution List/Newsletters

1-2 Weeks Prior to Launch: Send information on program via email or newsletter

Regularly in Newsletter: Sleepover success stories and instructions for how to get involved, recurring segment on best sleepover photos, information on any program expansion or updates

Printed Materials

Fliers about program

Foster agreements and/or packets

Business cards for participants with space for pet's name and adoption information (business cards can be made cheaply via vistaprint.com and designed for free on canva.com)

Outreach

Form partnerships with local businesses in order to cross-promote the program

Meet with your city or county's Chamber of Commerce to discuss partnership and cross-promotion

OPTIONAL:

Program Promotional Items

"Adopt Me" leashes and vests

Cloth bag for supplies with program logo

Water bottle with program logo

Cloth water bowl with program logo

Stickers with program logo

T-shirts for participants

If promotional water bottles, etc., are out of your range, you can find sticker printing done cheaply online and use stickers to brand your water bottles and bowls.

Sleepover/Weekend Foster Program Press Release Template

Use: Immediate (or use the week the program begins)

Agency: (Organization Name)

Title: (Organization Name) Invites the Public to Have a Sleepover with a Shelter Dog

(Town, state) (Organization name) is giving the public a chance to take shelter dogs on sleepovers through its (program name) program. Participants can take a dog home for the night (or a weekend) and get to know them in a home environment.

The (name) program was created in order to help reduce kennel stress, provide dogs with enrichment and increase their visibility in the community. Sleepovers are a great excuse to spend a weekend doing something new or exploring (your town's name).

(Add quote from your organization's director)

The program was designed to make it easy for the community to participate, so signing up is easy. Participants will be provided with everything they need for a successful sleepover (or list items). Individuals interested in the (name) program should email (contact info) to sign up. (Describe process)

Similar programs at shelters across the country have been enormously successful, and (organization's name) is excited to introduce this to the community.

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