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**Why is foster needed and what are the expectations for the foster?**

Foster care is needed for a wide variety of reasons, which are detailed below. In all cases, the Foster Coordinator and other CRHS staff are available to provide guidance, training, and support as needed to help each foster experience be as successful as possible. Staff are available to assist during open hours for both urgent and non-urgent issues, and an “after-hours” phone number, where a manager is always “on call”, is provided to foster parents in case of emergency when the shelter is closed. CRHS coordinates/provides all medical and veterinary care needed and also provides all supplies (unless the foster parent chooses to purchase supplies to help with costs, which they can discuss with the Foster Coordinator).

**Nursing Animals and Orphaned “Bottle Babies”:**

Due to the busy nature of the shelter and the number of animals that enter and leave CRHS daily, some of them with unknown vaccination histories, it is best for nursing animals and litters of young kittens/puppies to be in foster care. This reduces stress and ensures that the neonates are much less likely to be exposed to things such as upper respiratory infections or Kennel Cough when their immune systems aren’t mature yet. Kittens/puppies stay in foster care until they’re an average of 8 weeks old –typically when they are done weaning and are of weight to receive their first two vaccinations (and boys are of weight to be neutered). Since kittens are so vulnerable, foster families must commit to weighing them regularly (an appropriate scale can be lent out by CRHS) and staying in close contact with the Foster Coordinator about their progress, to ensure that they are developing properly. When kittens/puppies need to come in for booster shots or check-ups, the Foster Coordinator will work with the foster parent to set a day/time that works for everyone (CRHS is open 7 days a week).

**Behavior:**

Sometimes animals that come to CRHS arrive with certain behavior issues or issues are discovered while they are in our care. Each case is unique and we would never knowingly put foster parents at risk from a truly dangerous animal. There are many behavior issues that can be resolved with training techniques and time, and other behaviors that are caused by the stressful shelter environment might be much more manageable or non-existent in a regular home setting. If it is a dog that is displaying behavior that needs extra time and attention our Dog Lead Caregiver and/or certified trainer will evaluate and come up with a plan for the dog that the foster family would need to commit to following; foster parents are also able to take their foster dog to training classes at the shelter free of charge if there is an applicable class opening. If it is a cat displaying behavior that needs extra time and attention our lead cat caregiver and kennel manager will work together to develop a plan for that cat that the foster parent would need to commit to following. Since behavior is an ever-evolving process foster parents should plan to discuss progress with the Foster Coordinator at least weekly via email or phone.

**Medical:**

CRHS is only staffed with animal caregivers during business hours. This means that there are times when an injured/recovering animal will need care at hours that staff would not typically be on duty. There are also cases in which the shelter is simply a bad environment to treat the medical issue in, as the risk of infection to the recovering animal or the risk of the animal that is sick transferring its illness to those in shelter that are healthy is quite high. In any of these cases CRHS would seek foster care. This issues can range widely and have previously included: recovery from surgery, orphaned un-weaned kittens, treatment for upper respiratory infection, recovery from a limb injury/broken bone, treatment for mange, and treatment for ringworm. Foster families would need to be willing and comfortable learning how to give the required course of treatment. A staff member or the Foster Coordinator would specifically go over the type of medical need, its required treatment, and the tentative treatment timeline before sending the animal home with you. (over 🡪)

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**Shelter Stress:**

Most animals that come to CRHS have never had to experience living in a shelter at any other time of their life. Whether that be a friendly stray that is accustomed to living outdoors or an animal that has had the same family for many years; in each case the shelter can be a very scary and stressful environment for that animal. Shelter stress can lead a normally happy dog to become depressed or anxious in its kennel or it can cause a cat to start displaying fearful aggressive behavior or lack of appetite. Shelter stress is a real danger to an animal’s mental and physical wellbeing. If CRHS staff suspect that an animal has developed shelter stress our goal is to find that animal a foster home that can give that animal time away from the shelter to return to that animal’s previously happy, healthy state of mind. Foster families are required to report any changes, especially those that are worsening, to the Foster Coordinator immediately. This is to hopefully ensure that other interventions can be developed to prevent that animal from continuing to decline mentally.

**General Expectations of Behavior and Commitment:**

Once you are approved to become a foster parent, you remain an “active” foster in our foster care network. While you may not hear from the Foster Coordinator for long periods of time, know that not every animal in need of foster care may meet *your* specific requirements/preferences that you are asked to list on your application. The Foster Coordinator strives to only contact the most appropriate foster matches so that no foster family feels obligated into taking on an animal or situation they are not comfortable with.

In all cases foster families must agree to follow the guidelines outlined in the species specific “Foster Manual” provided to them, as well as the Foster Waiver included on the application. During the foster period CRHS is considered the owner and possessor of the animal and maintains all rights to decisions about its care. If a foster parent repeatedly misses requirements – such as re-weighs, staying in touch with the Foster Coordinator, or following through with a training program for an animal – or doesn’t follow the Foster Manual guidelines, they can be asked to take a break from fostering at the discretion of the Foster Coordinator.

If a foster animal ever bites to break skin while in foster care, CRHS must be notified as soon as possible. It is a La Crosse County law that an animal who bites to break skin be quarantined for 10 days to ensure they are properly monitored for potential rabies. CRHS protocol that complies with that law requires the animal be returned to CRHS for its quarantine period. Unfortunately animals that have a bite record are not allowed to enter general foster care due to board policies regarding liability; however if a foster is still needed for animals in those cases, CRHS staff are allowed to foster it after its quarantine.

It is expected that if a foster family is no longer able to foster, either temporarily or permanently, they contact the Foster Coordinator as soon as possible. For planned travel or other situations where it’s known in advance that a foster parent will need a break, the Foster Coordinator will work with the foster parent to coordinate a time for the animal to return to the shelter or to switch to a different foster home foster if needed. If an animal is simply not working out in the home or the foster family has their own urgent issue that suddenly prevents them from continuing that foster placement, CRHS will work with them as quickly as possible to plan a return time. If a foster family decides they no longer wish to foster for CRHS, they should notify the Foster Coordinator so that they can be removed from the “active” foster file.