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## **BTRF Foster Carers' Training Scheme Guidelines**

You will be reading this as you are considering becoming part of our very elite BTRF team!!

Firstly, thank you for wanting to know more about opening up your home and giving your time to a dog who is looking for a fresh start in life.

The role of a foster carer is very important to us and you will be playing a huge part in helping to rehabilitate a dog and to improve their chance of finding a new home.

Living with a foster family gives a dog one to one care that they may not receive in a kennel environment. It is quieter and less stressful to a dog where simply just moving them from one environment to another can cause huge stress alone. Our whole purpose as a rescue organisation is to minimise this stress and help our dogs settle away from an environment they may have lived in for several years.

Fostering can be very rewarding as well as committed work, but we will put in place all the support that you need and you will be part of a great team who will be there to offer you training as well as help and advice whenever you need it, right through the fostering journey.

### **Your Role**

It can be very rewarding knowing that you have played a vital part in setting a dog on their journey with their new family.

You will be responsible for caring for the dogs needs:

- Feeding
- Appropriate exercise
- Grooming
- Keeping the team / your appointed behaviourist / trainer updated with the dogs' progress and reporting back if things are not going as expected so that we can discuss adjustments to the training plan if needed
- Where relevant, working closely with the behaviourist / trainer appointed to you
- Where relevant, caring for the dog medically and working with us and the vet overseeing the dogs care

Many of the dogs that come into our care have existing behavioural issues to some degree. Depending on the level of foster care you are taking on, you may be working closely with our appointed behaviourist to help the dog through these behavioural / training issues.

You must also be willing to follow modern, science reward based training methodologies only.

There are 6 different levels of foster care that we will be looking for:

- **Level 1** - Carers able to take a dog in emergency to get them safe from their current environment
- **Level 2** – Carers able to take on a dog who may require medical care possibly including administering medication where needed
- **Level 3** – Carers able to work with a trainer with dogs in need of help with basic life skills training and care
- **Level 4** – Carers, possibly retired or working from home, and able to work with a behaviourist to help dogs suffering with separation anxiety
- **Level 5** – Carers prepared to work with our appointed behaviourist where they need help with mild behavioural issues
- **Level 6** – Carers with existing modern, reward science - based experience of working with a behaviourist (or ideally are qualified dog trainers / behaviourists themselves) and who are prepared to work very closely with BTRF and the appointed behaviourist to help a dog with a bite history (that has been appropriately assessed)

The application form you will be completing with this information pack will ask you to indicate which levels of care you are prepared to offer. We will then discuss this with you at the home check if we feel we would like to shortlist you to that stage.

## The Training Programme

All our foster carers will be expected to participate in a training programme to offer some knowledge of certain important aspects of basic dog psychology and learning theory. This is to ensure that you have the basic skills to be able to work with the training and behaviour team in helping the dogs prepare for their new home. As well as helping to you prepare you, the care giver, for the time when the dog is ready to leave you and to take their place in their new home. We hope that you will find this training interesting and informative and rewarding too as it will enable us all to work as a team to help the dogs in our care.

The training programme will consist of a series of 3 monthly group training sessions lasting 3 hours each and will be presented by one of our appointed behaviourists in an area near to you (travel costs will be reimbursed.) A member of the BTRF team will also be present at these sessions.

This training will include the follow aspects of dog training and learning:

- The Pack Leadership Myth - dogs and wolves
- Canine Learning Theory
- The importance of reading and understanding body language
- Understanding the signs of stress in dogs
- Ways of minimising that stress
- Understanding canine enrichment and the implications of frustration
- The importance of working closely with BTRF and the appointed behaviourist to help the dog through any issues
- How to keep a behavioural diary and record data
- How to emotionally prepare for the final handover

## **Our Role**

We are here to support you through the fostering procedure at all times. You will not be left alone or left to your own devices of course, especially where a dog needs behavioural support. A behaviourist will be appointed to you and the dog in your care. They will be guiding you through the training stage by stage. Kaye Scott, Trish Mahon, Morag Sutherland and Lorraine Godfrey on the BTRF Training and Behaviour Team are all qualified professionals in the field of training and behaviour. They will be liaising closely with the appointed behaviourists and will also be on hand to offer help and advice if needed.

Wherever possible we will always provide you with a Management Plan before the foster dog arrives. This will give you advice on how to settle the dog quickly and carefully, to minimise the stress and things to watch for and consider in the first few days. As far as we can, we will tailored this to the dog you are fostering if we know their history.

We have a foster carers' Facebook group where you can interact with the other foster carers on the team. This is a great way of staying in touch and sharing experiences and understanding that you are not alone!

Our foster carers will be fully insured and the dog's microchip will be updated with your details whilst they are in your care. BTRF will also cover all costs of foster care. Our fundraising is used pretty much exclusively on training / behavioural / foster and medical care. This helps the dogs we rescue through all aspects of their journey to their new home and beyond. We would ask you to keep all receipts so we can reimburse you for expenses and put these into the accounts to satisfy the Charities Commission, as we are a registered charity.

## **Working with an appointed behaviourist**

This is where foster care really comes into its own. If a foster dog requires behavioural back up and support this may need to start in foster and be ongoing until the dog goes into its forever home, where it is highly likely the behavioural support will continue.

Our foster carers who have worked with a trainer / behaviourist have said what a rewarding journey it is and how much they have learned about dog psychology, learning theory and training! It's a commitment but it's a hugely important task to help the dog find and stay in its new home.

## **When a suitable home is found - saying goodbye.....**

We will arrange a meet and greet for the foster dog and the new owners. This gives them the opportunity to see the dog and for you to meet the adopters. If they have other dogs, we may ask a behaviourist or trainer to attend to make sure that introductions are done correctly.

Once the meet and greet is completed, you and the adopter can arrange for a time to complete the transfer. Hopefully, the dog is going to a home in the local area but, if not we can arrange transport and ask you to accompany the foster dog to its new home.

We understand how difficult it can be when your foster dog is ready for their new home but we will support you when the time comes. We will ensure that you play a big part in selecting and assessing the new home. After all, by this stage you will know the dog in your care better than anyone.

It's not easy to hand the dog over to the new home, especially if they have been part of your family for weeks or even months. There will inevitably be tears and sadness when you transfer the dog, but remember that the dog is going to a good home - BTRF vet our homes very carefully.

## Questions?

So you are all set but you will have a number of questions. Here are some of the more common ones and the answers:

### ***When will I get a dog to foster?***

Urgent cases turn up at all times of the day and night – even Christmas Day! We would ask our foster homes to be ready within a few hours of the first call. But if you aren't able to foster at that time, please be honest and tell us. The more volunteers we get the more homes we can choose to foster a dog.

### ***How long will they be in foster?***

Honest answer, we don't know. Some dogs are easy to rehome and pass through a foster home in a few days or a week or two. But for those with behavioural issues that we need to work through, this could mean they are with you longer. So, you have to be prepared to be in it for the long haul if necessary.

### ***Will the dog get on with my dogs?***

If you currently have a resident dog then your call to foster care is very carefully considered. We would make sure that the foster dog was sociable with other dogs and then introduced to your own dog carefully and this would be supervised by an appointed trainer / behaviourist / member of the BTRF Training and Behaviour Team. If this is not able to happen, then we would make sure that adequate stringent separation management was able to be put in place while we look for an alternative foster home.

### ***What about Exercising a dog in my care?***

Because the dog is in foster, we ask that he/she is kept on lead at all times in parks or on walks. An ID tag will be issued to you with the BTRF numbers for you to use and you should have a second tag with your own address on it too. Do remember that under the Dangerous Dogs Act, anyone that is with a dog is responsible for them at all times and any issues is down to the person whose control they are under at the time.

### ***Do I need to go back to basics with House Training?***

You will need to understand that when a dog is moved from its familiar environment to one it has no knowledge of and with people it doesn't know, they are put under stress, even though we do our best to minimise that stress. We recommend going back to house training as if the dog was a puppy. Don't expect the dog to know immediately where to toilet, you will need to show him/her for a few days so they get it right. The Training and Behaviour Team can help and advise on this if necessary. But please be patient - it's a stressful time for our rescue dogs.

***Do I get a say in where the dog goes?***

Absolutely! You are living with the dog and you will know them better than anyone. We will liaise with you when we feel a potential new home has been found and we will take your concerns or thoughts on board throughout the whole rehoming process. We also understand how emotional it will be for the carers to part with a dog they may have been living and working with for a number of months. We will offer full support and help you through this process.

***What if I decide to keep the dog?***

“Failed fosterers” are very common! Often, they will be so attached to the dog that they will want to keep them. While we are happy for foster carers to apply to adopt this means that they may not be able to foster in the future - it's a double edged sword! It's very tough to work with a dog and send them off to a new home but you are part of the dog's journey and sometimes a lifeline between their old home and new home.

***Am I allowed to put photos of the dog in my care on Social Media?***

The simple answer to this is No. We try to protect the identity of all our rescue dogs and their new adopting families. We often post success stories and photos of our dogs on our own BTRF Facebook page, but this is carefully monitored and we do this with direct permission from the new adopting owners. However, unless a special case, the names and identity of the dog and adopters are kept private. **We expect this of our foster carers too with the dogs in their care.**

*So that is foster care in a nutshell! We value our foster carers a great deal as they are the lifeline for many of our rescue dogs. It's a commitment and we do ask that they work closely with us every step of the way as this all helps to prepare the dog in their care for the transition to their new home.*

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