

PAWS for Action – Making a Difference
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It is more than a platitude. It is a well-known fact that it is better to give than to receive. Most of us have felt a tremendous sense of joy when we have embraced an opportunity to help someone or give someone a gift we know they will appreciate.

It seems paradoxical but it is the truth. And there are so many ways to be of service these days. Most nonprofit organizations rely heavily on volunteers to accomplish their mission.

For the purpose of this column I will talk about one specific way to be of service to lost and homeless companion animals. One of the resources most shelters have in short supply is foster homes.

Currently at PAWS Humane in Columbus, we have a gorgeous boxer, primarily white with brindle patches. His name is Bruce and he is a most dashing five year old boxer. He has soulful boxer eyes which today are begging me to take him home. But I already have one foster in the house and I think I better not push my luck.

Bruce is one of those dogs who doesn't do well in a shelter. He is exhibiting signs of stress such as panting and pacing. Some dogs, and cats for that matter, just don't do well even in the nicest of shelter settings. Shelters are noisy places and even a clean shelter smells funny to those sensitive dog and cat noses. They are unable to get away from the lights or the people peering at them through the glass.

Dr. Pamela Reid of the ASPCA notes that there are three stages of stress that shelter animals go through when they are initially confined. In the first stage they experience a sense of alarm pumping out cortisol into the body to ready it for action. This is followed by adaptation, in which the animal begins to take action to resist whatever is causing the stress. If the animal is unable to return to a comfortable state he will ultimately reach a point of exhaustion. At this point the animal becomes more susceptible to various medical ailments. Some animals may even reach a point of mental breakdown that is difficult, if not impossible to recover from.

This third stage can be averted when shelter personnel are alert to the weighty responsibility they have to help animals avoid this fate. Each animal is an individual. Most weather their time in a shelter with relative ease. Others have little tolerance for the shelter environment.

That brings me back to Bruce. He has been with PAWS Humane for 19 days and he does not seem to be adjusting well. Over the next few days our staff members will pay close attention to Bruce and make sure he gets regular walks, food puzzles, Kongs with peanut butter, or whatever they can think of to help him stay occupied with positive things and give him less time to worry.

Foster homes are the life blood of shelters and rescues. If this is something you would be interested in learning more about please go to the website of your local shelter to find out how you can help. What a great New Year's resolution this would be.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.