

The Use of Mentors in Foster Programs: The Case of IAR

Independent Animal Rescue (IAR), an all volunteer non-profit organization in North Carolina, uses mentors to carry their foster program. They presently have more than 250 cats in foster homes. They are able to be so successful, thanks to one foster coordinator and 10 mentors in their foster program.

How it works:

The IAR foster coordinator hand picks the really good foster parents, the ones who follow rules¹. He asks these good foster parents if they would like to become mentors. Mentors:

- Provide new foster parents with foster manual/packet and talk them through the basics (because people do not read);
- Are the ones responsible for training new foster parents;
- Match pets with new foster parents;
- Help foster parents do the write-ups (kennel cards)²
- Are the ones to call if foster parents have a question/problem (unless an emergency).

The foster coordinator has monthly group training sessions³ for new (8-10) foster homes. These meetings are friendly, inclusive, open meetings where the joys and needs of pet fostering are discussed. All new foster parents are required to attend a monthly meeting before getting an animal. After the training session, interested new foster parents are assigned to a mentor. The new foster parent then meets with the mentor one on one.

Mentors make sure that the first fostering experience of new foster parents is positive and easy. That is the key to retain foster parents.

¹ Librarians and nurses are the best foster parents because they are professionals who care and follow rules. IAR periodically sends letters to these targeted people asking them to become foster parents.

² See <http://www.petfoster.org/faq65.html>

³ For anyone considering fostering who wants to find out more, and for current foster parents who want more information on pet care and IAR procedures.