

# **Golden Gate Labrador Retriever Rescue**



## **Foster Handbook**

19 June 2017

This handbook is dedicated to the many foster families and individuals that provide incredible support to our dogs. We acknowledge the instrumental role that fosters play in the successful re-homing of surrendered and rescued labs. Without our many fosters, we would not be able to exist. Thank you!



The information in this handbook is compiled from a number of sources and we thank them all for their advice and contributions.

# Table of Contents

Role of the Foster.....3

Becoming a Foster .....4

Support to the Foster.....6

Foster Care.....7

Photos, Videos, and Biography .....13

Vet Appointments.....14

Pet Fairs .....16

Meet-and-Greets .....17

Transfer of Foster Dog to Adopter.....19

Emergencies.....21

Failed Foster.....24

References .....25

## Role of the Foster

Within the GGLRR organization, the foster plays a critical role in the rescue and placement of our dogs in their new forever homes. The majority of our dogs are placed in foster homes soon after they are surrendered to us by the owners or rescued from a shelter. Fosters are the bridge to provide a safe and secure home for the dog until we find it its new forever home. This temporary refuge might be for several days or weeks... or several months.

Fosters perform a variety of duties, depending on the situation and the particular dog. Of course, fosters feed and shelter a dog. Fosters take the dog for walks and provide opportunities for exercise. Fosters may help transporting the dog to and from the vet for any medical care. Fosters provide opportunities for the dog to socialize with other dogs or with other humans. Fosters provide basic care and grooming for the dog. Fosters may chaperone visits between their foster dog and prospective adopters. Fosters also maintain close communications with the dog's Rescue Rep.

Fosters open up their homes and their hearts to our dogs. They do so with the full understanding that they are expected to relinquish the foster dog to a new forever home once that family or individual is found. On occasion, at the foster's special request, we adopt a dog to the foster – this is affectionately known as a “Failed Foster” (see page 21).

We are truly blessed to have so many dedicated and enthusiastic fosters to contribute to the success of Golden Gate Labrador Retriever Rescue.

# Becoming a Foster

Becoming a foster for GGLRR takes several steps.

Prospective fosters can express interest in becoming a foster via our website, at a pet fair, or by talking to any of our volunteers. In some cases, our own volunteers reach out and solicit their friends, neighbors, or acquaintances to become fosters.

An individual who is interested in fostering needs to complete a GGLRR Foster Application/Agreement. This document is typically emailed to the candidate by an existing GGLRR volunteer. This form serves as a method to collect information from the candidate foster, but also serves as the signed commitment by the individual to provide the requisite care to any dog placed in their foster care.

Second, a visit to the candidate foster's home is required to ensure the home is a safe and appropriate place to temporarily care for a GGLRR dog. This home visit is performed by a GGLRR rep using a GGLRR Foster Home Visit Checklist. This checklist is not provided to the candidate foster in advance of the visit, as we want the visit to be as genuine as possible. As would be expected, the foster home visit is not too different that the home visits we perform for candidate adopters.

Once the application/agreement is completed (and reviewed by GGLRR's foster coordinator with favorable results) AND the foster home visit is completed (with satisfactory results), the foster is notified that they've been accepted as a GGLRR foster (Hooray!). The new foster is placed on our list of available fosters... waiting for the appropriate rescued lab to come along.

Matching up a rescued dog with a foster is a deliberate and conscious decision that takes into account both the needs of the dog and capabilities, competencies, and situation of the foster. We endeavor to provide as much information to the prospective foster about the dog we'd like them to foster, and allow them to make the decision as to whether or not to proceed with the foster. Our fosters

have the absolute right of refusal to foster any particular dog. We do not want to put our fosters in the position of taking a dog they are not comfortable with.

# Support to the Foster

Our fosters must have the strong support from the GGLRR organization. In particular, the Representative (aka “Rep”) for any dog in our program is the foster’s primary point of contact for any issues with their foster dog.

To fully support the foster, the Rep is responsible to:

- Keep the foster informed of the adoption status of the dog.
- Provide the foster with any needed supplies, especially:
  - Collar and leash
  - Food
  - Crate/kennel
  - GGLRR dog tag
  - Flea/tick preventive
  - Heartworm preventive
  - Dog bed
- Inform the foster of any behavior or temperament issues with the dog.
- Inform the foster of any due dates for medication, heartworm preventive medicine, flea/tick preventive, etc.
- Inform the foster of any medical issues with the dog, especially upcoming medical treatment or tests.
- Coordinate any meet-and-greets.
- Provide the foster with a Foster Dog Report Card to complete.
- Be involved in the foster dog’s attendance at any pet fairs.
- Find temporary foster, if the foster needs a temporary break, goes on vacation, or has some other short-term commitment that prevents them from maintaining the foster of the dog.
- Find a replacement foster, if the foster needs to relinquish the dog permanently.
- Seek input from the foster on the bio/write-up for the dog.
- Provide help and guidance in any emergency situations.

# Foster Care

This may be the most important section of this handbook as this provides an overview of what care the dog should be provided when in the care of the foster.

To the dog, the foster home represents the new pack that he or she is now part of. The dog does not know it is temporary. All it knows is something has changed, and this place and these humans are new. So, in a sense, the foster usually needs to approach their care as if they were adopting the dog outright – this is a terrific default approach to take.

At the end of this handbook is a terrific list of references that contain a wealth of information for fosters, Reps, and new dog owners.

## *Understanding where the foster dog's head may be at:*

Many foster dogs bring baggage with them. The foster dog may be coming from a chaotic and stressful shelter. The foster dog may have been in multiple homes or facilities in recent weeks or months. Expect the dog to exhibit anxiety, fear, and/or stress. Your home may be the dog's first calm and secure environment in a long time.

The foster dog does not know it is a foster dog when it arrives to a foster home. All it knows is that it is in a new place, with unfamiliar people and perhaps other unfamiliar dogs. It has somehow “joined a new pack”... and is trying to make sense of it all.

## *Introducing your foster lab to your house:*

Keep in mind that as the foster dog roams around your house in the first few hours and days... he or she will be searching for answers to some key questions: “Am I in charge here? Or is someone else in charge here? Should I take charge here?” Establishing your new pack's structure starts the moment the foster dog walks into your home.

If able, take your foster dog on a walk in your neighborhood upon initial arrival (before you take the foster dog into your house). This allows the dog to focus on you leading them... establishing that new bond. Those walks that you will be taking the dog on in the first few days both tire the dog out and establish that pack structure. Bring lots of high-value kibble to reward the dog's attention and good behavior. A tired dog is a good dog – very wise words.

During the first trip into the house, walk the foster dog through your house and right out to the backyard to show him or her where to pee... and praise the dog when he or she does pee. You want to imprint that proper pee location soonest, so when you take the dog back into the house you know that he or she just peed.

Dogs should **not** be allowed free access to the entire house at first, but kept in a small area, e.g. the kitchen, to replicate the safety of the canine den. Your foster dog should have a lead attached to the collar at all times during the first few days to communicate the presence of authority at the other end of the leash. Dogs should be introduced to the rest of the house while on the lead. If possible, a crate should be available (if you don't have a crate, GGLRR may provide one). Your foster dog should be closely supervised for the first few days, and sleep either in a crate, or on tie-down in your bedroom.

We recommend that dogs should have a comfortable dog bed available, (GGLRR may be able to provide one) and not be allowed to get on furniture or on the beds of family members. If you have a dog, your foster may be most comfortable sleeping in the same room as your dog.

#### *Introducing your Foster Lab to your dog:*

We have found that it is best to have your dog and your Foster Lab first meet on neutral ground, and that you closely supervise their introduction. A nearby park or an area near your house works well for this. Begin by allowing a brief meet and sniff, with dogs facing in opposite directions, then move them along. Observe the body language as you are walking and if all seems relaxed, allow another round of sniffing. A little grumbling or barking is normal, but be aware of curling lips or

bared teeth. After walking for 15 minutes, return to the home and allow the foster dog to enter first. Ask the Rep/Transporter to accompany you, so that both dogs may remain on the lead as you take them inside, then bring them to the back yard for a brief walk around. Your foster dog should then be crated or put on a tie-down where he/she will be kept for the first few days, when not under direct supervision. The same procedure should be followed with prospective adopters who bring their dogs for meetings to your home.

Some foster dogs may have kennel cough that was undetected before their arrival. If you have another dog, please be sure to avoid sharing of food and water bowls, toys and bedding. Some strains of kennel cough are resistant to the bordatella vaccination and may be contracted anywhere, such as the dog park, beaches or trails frequented by dogs.

#### *Introducing your Foster Lab to your cat:*

We endeavor to know in advance if a foster dog will “get along with” cats before assigning a foster dog to a home with a cat. This is not always possible. Before a foster (with cats) takes in a new foster dog, they should ask “how is the dog with cats?”. Care must be used when making that first introduction between a foster dog and your cat. See reference (m).

#### *Rewarding/Training your Foster Lab:*

Many rescued Labs have little or no training, or they have forgotten their training in the stress of a new situation. It is helpful in training or retraining them if meals, treats, affection and play are earned by compliance with simple commands, such as sit, down and stay.

#### *Feeding your Foster Lab:*

Because many of our rescued Labs come from shelters or less-than-ideal environments, we recommend that you establish a feeding place for your Foster that is separate from where you normally feed your dog. This reduces the chance for conflicts over food.

You will be given feeding instructions as to amounts and type of food for two meals per day, and instructions for any medications your foster dog may be taking or need. Canned green beans and bits of carrot are excellent low-calorie treats.

It is a good idea to have a little plain cooked white rice on hand, which, added to kibble may help to avert diarrhea, which some dogs may have for the first few days in a new environment.

Hand-feeding your new foster Lab for the first few days is a great way to establish your leadership role in your home. It also provides a convenient opportunity to work with the dog on the basic commands “sit”, “stay”, and “come”.

#### Collar, Leash, ID:

You will be provided with a collar, leash and GGLRR ID tag. Your foster dog should wear the collar with “GGLRR” ID tag at all times. Please be aware of the possibility of your foster dog’s attempt to escape. You must be sure to have the dog on-leash and under control before opening any door to the outside, in case he/she should bolt out into the street. **Never leave your foster dog unattended in the yard.** Many people are surprised by how high a determined dog can jump or how quickly they can dig a hole under a fence to escape.

#### Walking your Foster dog:

Often, the labs we rescue have had little or no leash training, or they are too excited by their new situation to comply with good leash behavior. We have found that a gentle-leader or easy-walk type harness is effective at helping the dog to learn better leash-walking skills. GGLRR may also provide other types of collars (e.g., a martindale or a correction collar) depending on the needs of individual dogs and their fosters.

Foster dogs **should not be taken to the dog park** until the foster is comfortable that the dog responds to commands and is well-socialized with other dogs. **Foster dogs should never be allowed off-leash on walks or at a dog park.** The use of long-leads is ideal for allowing the dog extra freedom during such outings.

### Anxiety in Foster Labs:

Many rescued dogs are anxious in a new situation, but it is important to resist reassuring with petting or affection, which only reinforce the dog's anxious behavior. It is best to ignore behavior that is unacceptable and reward the desired behavior. This can take some time, patience and persistence, but will be most effective in reassuring the dog, and preparing him/her for a new home.

It is not unusual for foster dogs to be restless during the night for a few nights. Crating can help with this. If the dog is barking, take him/her out to potty one time only and otherwise, try to ignore the barking to begin teaching the dog to self-comfort. Resist bringing the dog into bed with you for reassurance. Foster dogs should not be allowed on the furniture. This is a privilege his future owners may or may not choose to grant, once their leadership position is established.

To address anxiety, we ask fosters to refer to our guidance describing the method and proper use of the "comfort tie" or "tie-down". Crate training can also be helpful in dealing with an anxious dog. Neither of these methods is a punishment; rather, they can provide a safe, calming place. **Dogs should never be left alone on comfort tie**, but can and should be crated if you need to leave a new foster dog alone for short periods.

### Regular Schedule:

Dogs should be on a consistent schedule for meals, walking, exercise and play/training times.

### Medical Issues:

The Rep will inform the foster of any medical issues with the dog, and provide instructions on any medication.

Do not provide the foster dog with any medicine or homeopathic remedies without the full awareness and pre-concurrence of the Rescue Rep.

If the foster provides any heartworm or flea-tick treatment to the dog, the foster should notify the Rep via email of the date of providing the treatment so that the Rep can maintain awareness of such treatments.

The foster dog must not be provided with heartworm treatment prior to being determined to be "negative" for heartworm per a blood test. Contact the Rep if there is any question about this.

*Periodic Reports to the Rescue Rep:*

The Foster Dog Report Card is a great way to record how your foster dog is doing both to the Rescue Rep and to a prospective owner. The Rescue Rep will provide you with a copy of the report for you to fill out.

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Finally, enjoy your foster dog! Your relationship with him or her is the first step in the transition from the old environment to a new beginning. Your candid feedback to the dog's Rescue Rep about the temperament and personality of your foster dog is invaluable in the process of making the best possible match with his or her new family.

# Photos, Videos, and Biography

Fosters are encouraged to take photos and videos of their foster dogs.... And forward the photos and videos to the Rescue Rep for potential posting on our website.

Fosters should also review the on-line write-ups that the Rescue Rep makes for the dog, and notify the Rep if any changes are appropriate.

# Vet Appointments

Fosters may be asked to take their foster dog to a vet appointment.

Vet appointments are authorized by Liz (415-613-6374), Sandy (650-303-2436), Debbi (408-309-7830), or Kathleen (415-706-5868), and scheduled with one of the vets with whom we work. We are very cost-conscious when working with our vets as this is, by far, our largest expense.

Fosters may also be asked to provide a stool sample to a vet for a fecal exam.

GGLRR will pay for all pre-arranged vet visits and medications. In some cases, fosters will be reimbursed for some vet-related charges.

Some vet visits are “appointments”. In these cases, the dog has a prescribed time to be seen by a vet. The foster would remain at the vet for these “appointment” visits. Some vet visits are “drop-offs”. In these cases, the dog is dropped off prior to some designated time and picked up later in the day. The foster would not remain at the vet for these “drop-off” visits. While “drop-off” visits may be less convenient for the fosters, it is more beneficial for GGLRR as the vet typically charges significantly less as they do not have to commit an appointment slot to see the dog but, instead, are able to see the dog during a lull in their normal work day.

Do not seek or obtain additional services, treatments, or medications for the Foster Lab with prior discussion with Liz, Sandy, or the Rescue Rep. Some vets will recommend the purchase of products that we have in our inventories. Some vets will recommend protocols that we have already had performed or that may be unnecessary. We must carefully manage and control our veterinary expenses to control costs. Our vet bills are, by far, our largest expense each year.

For many of the appointments, the vet will notify Liz or another GGLRR rep of the results of the vet visit... and not communicate directly with the foster. In these cases, Liz or the Rescue Rep will fill the foster in on the vet's findings.

In some cases, foster dogs come with a plastic "Elizabethan" collar (E-collar) following the dog's spaying or neutering. The foster must follow the vet's recommendations on the employment of the E-collar to maintain the integrity of the surgery site.

# Pet Fairs

Pet Fairs are a key opportunity for GGLRR to showcase the dogs we have in our program. We typically have one to two Pet Fairs each month at various locations around the SF Bay area, and more frequent Pet Fairs during early December due to the fund-raiser Santa Photo Shoots that we do during the holiday season.

Fosters are encouraged to transport their dog to and from the pet fairs. Fosters are especially encouraged to remain for the duration of the pet fair, and sit alongside their dog as the animal's "pet fair buddy" – answering any and all questions about the dog to any interested people. Obviously, fosters are often the most knowledgeable about the behavior of that dog. We love for our fosters to be their dog's pet fair buddy.

The schedule for upcoming pet fair is posted on our website. <http://www.labrescue.org/pet-fair.html>

# Meet-and-Greets

The dog's Rep is responsible for scheduling meetings (known as "meet-and-greets") with prospective adopters at times that are convenient for the foster. Meet-and-greets provide the opportunity for prospective adopters to spend time with a dog that is up for adoption in a somewhat normal setting.

Often, fosters will be asked to support "meet-and-greets" with prospective adopters. The dog's Rep may or may not be able to attend these sessions.

The dog's Rep will clear any prospective adopter prior to scheduling the meet-and-greet. This screening will likely include questioning the adopter over the phone and possibly requiring the adopter to complete the adoption application prior to holding the meet-and-greet. Reps realize that the foster's time is valuable, and endeavor not to waste fosters' time with prospective adopters that have not been pre-screened.

Meet-and-greets can take many forms. They can be conducted in the backyard of the foster's home, or they can be conducted at a nearby park. They should include taking the dog for a walk.

If prospective adopters will be bringing their own dog to the meeting, please follow the same procedure outlined above for introducing your dog to a foster dog. Dogs should be under direct supervision at all times and under control on the lead. It is a good idea to have all toys and food put away when visiting dogs are in your home. If the adopter's own dog is clearly reactive and or aggressive, have the owners return their dog to their the car. The Rep should then discuss the prospective owner's plan for managing the situation in the unlikely event that they would be given the dog.

Fosters serve as the eyes and ears of GGLRR during these meet-and-greets, especially if the Rep is not present. Reps will ask the opinion of the foster as to whether or not they feel the prospective adopter is a viable candidate to adopt the dog. The observations and opinions of the foster hold great value.

Reps may give you contact information for interested potential adopters, so that you can schedule meetings when it is convenient for you.

Dogs are not adopted immediately after a first meet-and-greet. The Rep and foster will confer on the best possible match for each dog. The decision on who to adopt the dog to rests with the Rep.

# Transfer of Foster Dog to Adopter

Once the Rescue Rep makes the decision whom to adopt the dog to, the Rep and foster prepare to transfer the dog to the new family or individual.

The adopter may come to the foster's home to accept custody of the dog, the foster may be asked (or may volunteer) to transport the dog to the home of the adopter, or a GGLRR volunteer may transport to dog to the adopter.

Prior to releasing the foster dog to its new forever home, the foster should complete the **Notes For Adopting Family** form. This form provides a synopsis of the dog's routine, behavior, and any other issues that will enable the new family to maintain the appropriate care for the dog. The Rescue Rep will provide a blank copy of this form to the foster in advance of the transfer.

Adopters will be instructed to bring their own collar and leash with them when they come to pick up the dog. The only exception will be for when the dog is a direct-adoption-from-owner in which case the dog's existing collar will be provided with the dog.

Adopters will also be encouraged to obtain and bring a personalized ID tag to go on the dog's collar. This personalized ID tag should be affixed to the dog's collar before they depart. The GGLRR red dog tag should be removed from the collar when the dog is handed over to the new family. If the adopter does not have a personalized ID tag to go on the dog's collar, the red GGLRR dog tag (with Liz's phone number on it) should go with the dog upon adoption. Instruct the adopter to return the red GGLRR tag to the Rescue Rep once they have a personalized ID tag for the dog.

The foster should provide to new adopter with ~4 days' worth of dog food... unless the new owner states that they have already purchased the same kind of food that the dog is currently eating. This will provide a short period for the owner to gradually transition the dog to another kibble if desired.

The new family is also responsible to provide all other supplies, including a dog bed and toys.

# Emergencies

In an emergency, the safety and security of the humans and the dogs are paramount.

The foster may encounter one of the following situations (that we hope will never occur):

- The foster dog bites someone or another dog
- The foster dog escapes and eludes capture
- The foster dog is hit by a car
- The foster dog is bit by another dog
- The foster dog becomes hurt or injured
- The foster appears to be ill or is not acting or behaving normally

It is inappropriate to prescribe guidelines for the above situations beyond:

- Do everything in your power to stabilize/secure the situation.
- Ensure the humans and/or dog(s) are provided appropriate medical care.
- Notify the authorities as appropriate.

Should any of these situations or some other emergency situation occurs, take immediate action to stabilize/secure the situation and call the dog's Rep or the GGLRR Adoption Coordinator as soon as possible.

## What do I do if my foster dog gets lost?

- Don't panic!
- Call your Rescue Rep immediately.
- Time is of the essence in recovering a dog safely. Walk around your neighborhood or the area where your dog was last seen, talk to neighbors or people in the vicinity and let them know your dog is missing.
- Notify your local animal shelter immediately and check with them frequently.

Lab Rescue will also take necessary steps (flyers, shelter checks) to recover dogs as soon as possible.

#### What should I do if my foster dog becomes ill?

If you notice your foster dog is showing signs of illness, please contact your Rep, Liz (415-613-6374), Sandy (650-303-2436), Debbi (408-309-7830), or Kathleen (415-706-5868) to determine if veterinary care is needed and to arrange for an appointment.

It is very important to take your foster dog to a GGLRR-affiliated veterinarian in order to ensure reimbursement for any care required. If the situation permits, contact your Rep for authorization prior to taking the dog to the vet for treatment.

#### What should I do if I see worms in my foster dog's stool?

Some of our foster dogs do suffer from internal parasites (including worms). It is a good practice to visually examine the foster dog's stool to look for any strange contents. If you spot worms, it is not an emergency, but do save that stool sample and contact your Rescue Rep who will likely have you take the stool sample to a local vet for analysis – likely followed by de-wormer medication.

#### What should I do if my foster dog becomes ill in the middle of the night?

If the case is an absolute emergency (see criteria below) take your dog to the closest GGLRR-affiliated emergency pet hospital, if available. If not, you may go to the nearest available emergency hospital. You must contact Liz or Kathleen within 12 hours to notify Lab rescue of your emergency. GGLRR cannot and will not reimburse non-emergency or after-hour veterinary visits if you fail to contact us.

### Emergency Conditions:

- Continuous diarrhea
- Continuous vomiting
- Bleeding from any orifice: nose, stool, urine
- Acute trauma: hit by a car, dropped, fallen from a height
- Injury from attack by another animal
- Unconscious or un-responsive
- Difficulty breathing
- Difficulty standing/walking
- Difficulty urinating or bowel movements
- Refusal to eat for 36 hours or more

# Failed Foster

Occasionally, fosters find themselves so taken with one of their fosters that they seek to adopt the dog themselves. We call these “Failed Fosters”. But they are not a failure by any means.

Any foster who wants to adopt the dog they are caring for should notify the dog’s representative. While there is not guarantee that they will be allowed to adopt the dog, the Rep will provide them every due consideration to become the dog’s new forever home.

Many of the GGLRR volunteers have been failed fosters – some multiple times. It comes with the territory.

While we hate to lose a foster if they become a new dog owner, we recognize that finding a fabulous forever home for that particular dog is what it is all about. We’ll get over it.

# References

- (a) Key Protocols for a Confident Dog, Kathy Kear, Cause & Effect Dog Training
- (b) Crate Training/Tie Down and Housebreaking Protocol, Kathy Kear and Eleanor Post, Cause & Effect Dog Training
- (c) The Comfort Tie, Kathy Kear, Cause & Effect Dog Training
- (d) Affection with your dog
- (e) Dog Training: Tie Down Tool, Humane Society of Silicon Valley
- (f) Controlling the Pack's Resources, Unleashed! Controlling the Pack's Resources, 707-763-9882, [unleash@sbcglobal.net](mailto:unleash@sbcglobal.net)
- (g) Canine Confrontations, Marin Humane Society
- (h) Counter Conditioning, Marin Humane Society
- (i) Nothing In Life Is Free
- (j) Dog Sense, Tricia King
- (k) Developing a Trusting Relationship, Tricia King
- (l) Difficult Dog Handout, Tricia King, Marin Humane Society
- (m) Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Cat, <http://www.reachoutrescue.org/info/display?PageID=10478>
- (n) Leader of the Pack, Patricia B. McConnell
- (o) The First Thing to Do When Getting A Dog From A Shelter

The majority of these references can be found in a publically-accessible folder  
GGLRR's Google Shared Drive,

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/OB5qTgPTj6hATZnRpdFdIUxpmQjg?usp=sharing>