UNDERSTANDING TURNOVER OF FOSTER CAREGIVERS: EXPLORING THE REASONS AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Maddie's Fund

ORGANIZATIONAL SCIENCE | UNC CHARLOTTE

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this project was to better understand the reasons that foster caregivers leave organizations; in addition to reasons for turnover, we also wanted to uncover potential "buffers" that organizations can put into place to increase retention. More specifically, Maddie's Fund had three goals:

1. Define reasons for voluntary turnover in foster caregivers
2. Categorize foster caregivers into "types" (based on their level of service) to compare reasons for leaving across the different groups
3. Identify effective strategies for volunteer retention (i.e. is there anything organizations can do to prevent caregivers from leaving?)

To accomplish these goals, we carried out four principal project phases (detailed in the introduction section): a literature search, pilot survey, phone interviews and final survey. Overall, over 4,800 people were either surveyed or interviewed as part of this project.

To summarize the results, we turn back to the project goals.

Top 5 reasons for voluntary turnover in foster caregivers across caregiver types
We presented respondents with a list of reasons for turnover based on our first three project phases and asked them to indicate how important the factors were/would be in their decision to leave. The top 5 reasons, across caregiver types, were:

1. Needing time to focus solely on one's own pets
2. Adopting too many of the animals themselves (i.e. "too many foster fails")
3. Schedule not allowing of foster caregiving
4. Personal issues (i.e. age/health-related issues, taking care of loved ones, divorce, etc.)
5. Living situation not allowing of foster caregiving

Comparing reasons for leaving across types
It turns out that the reasons for leaving *do* vary to a small extent across caregivers. We categorized respondents into "types": ex-fosters, fosters taking a break, and current fosters. Below are the top 3 turnover reasons for each type of foster:

Ex-Fosters	Fosters on a Break	Current Fosters
1. Focusing on my own pets	1. Schedule does not allow for foster caregiving	1. Schedule would not allow for foster caregiving
2. Last animal was a foster fail	2. Focusing on my own pets	2. Burnout
3. Schedule does not allow for foster caregiving	3. Living situation does not allow for fostering	3. Foster animal incompatible with home pets

Other important factors for caregiver turnover

From other sections on our final survey, we know that there are additional factors organizations should be mindful of (these were significantly related to whether a caregiver would continue fostering **across categories**):

➢ Feeling supported by the organization
➢ Feeling that one's input matters (that the organization listens to feedback from volunteers)
➢ Feeling appreciated by the organization
➢ Having training on: basic handling and behavioral issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets) + healthcare/medical issues (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)
  ○ It is important to note that 20-35% of ex-fosters, 15-25% of fosters taking a break, and 13-20% of current fosters indicated that they did **not** receive training from their organization
  ○ For fosters taking a break and current fosters, this lack of training was **negatively related** to their propensity to continue fostering

Foster teams: a strategy for buffering against "unavoidable" turnover?

It might seem as though some of the top reasons for turnover are entirely *unavoidable*, but we do not believe that is the case in that additional support and flexibility would help address the issue at hand. More specifically, one buffer that could alleviate a lot of the issues that may *seem* unavoidable is **implementing foster teams**. Foster teams are groups of volunteers working together to coordinate and implement all aspects of the care, marketing, and adoption of foster animals.

On our final survey, we asked respondents about their reactions to foster teams, and the results were strongly positive. Over 80% of caregivers agreed/strongly agreed that the foster team concept could work well for some people/organizations. When asked about the outcomes of foster teams (e.g. leading to more satisfaction among volunteers, more retention, and more happy/healthy pets), the average responses were well above-average (~3.8 on a scale from 1-5).

Thus, if organizations were to successfully implement foster teams—especially targeting those who have left/are considering leaving due to needing to focus on one's animals, having adopted too many fosters, or not having a schedule that allows for full-time fostering—then these volunteers could still be actively involved in fostering (i.e. they could take on the roles that do not involve having the animal in their home full-time such as team coordinator, photographer, biography writer, back-up foster).

More strategies for volunteer retention

Although we believe that many of the top reasons for turnover could be buffered by implementing foster teams, we also asked respondents to rate how important other buffers could be for an organization to implement.

- ➢ For both **ex-fosters and fosters taking a break,** the top 2 buffers were improving communication and offering more training
- ➢ For **current fosters,** the top 2 buffers were improving communication and assistance with adopting out animals faster
- ➢ Many respondents, in all groups, wrote in "other" buffers; the most common themes were: offering more flexible arrangements, more opportunities to give input, and increased recognition/appreciation

Our hope is that this report allows animal welfare organizations to further understand some of the reasons for foster caregiver turnover (and that these reasons differ based on foster caregiver types). Furthermore, we present some potential buffers that organizations can put into place (which, again, differ based on foster caregiver types) to increase volunteer retention.

Introduction/Overview of Project Phases

Our goals for this project were:

1. Define reasons for voluntary turnover in foster caregivers
2. Categorize foster caregivers into "types" (based on their level of service) to compare reasons for leaving across the different groups
3. Identify effective strategies for volunteer retention (i.e. is there anything organizations can do to prevent caregivers from leaving?)

To accomplish these goals, we carried out four principal phases.

➢ **Phase 1:** we started with a **literature search** of both science and trade sources. At this initial stage, we wanted to begin to understand reasons for turnover along with potential buffers against turnover. We purposefully did **not** limit ourselves to the animal sheltering realm, but rather searched any literature that pertained to turnover and retention, along with compassion fatigue in the fostering realm (both human and animal fostering). These initial learnings informed and contextualized our efforts in addition to giving us some initial turnover/buffer factors for our Phase 2 survey.

➢ **Phase 2:** with our **Pilot Survey**, we wanted to build on our foundation from the literature search to better understand the reasons for turnover among foster caregivers. More specifically, we designed a short survey (<5 minutes) to understand fosters level of service, their primary reason(s) for leaving a foster caregiving organization—or why they might *potentially* leave if they were still fostering—and what the organization could do/could have done to prevent turnover.

➢ **Phase 3**: before creating our final survey, in Phase 3 we conducted phone **interviews with foster program managers** to pare down our lists of reasons for turnover/retention from our literature search and pilot survey. These interviews also served as a means for triangulation: that is, we checked with these experts to make sure that our preliminary conclusions from the first two phases were correct before moving onto Phase 4.

➢ **Phase 4**: the project culminated with our **Phase 4 Final Survey**. With this survey, we wanted to gain a deep understanding of why foster caregivers leave organizations—and whether this depends on the 'category' of respondent (i.e. those that have left the organization, those who are taking a break from the organization, and those still volunteering with the organization who could potentially leave)—along with what buffers organizations can put in place to possibly prevent turnover. With this survey, we also were able to examine moderators of our results—that is, whether respondents' perceptions depend on demographic information.

Phase 1: Literature Search

In this first phase, we conducted a literature search on retention, turnover, and compassion fatigue in the fostering realm. As mentioned, we searched both science and trade sources for insights; more specifically, we searched Google Scholar and Google for a variety of search terms/search term combinations; some examples include: "Foster turnover," "foster burnout," "compassion fatigue," "compassion fatigue and foster," "animal foster" "foster retention," "foster volunteer," "foster caregiver," etc.

From this literature search, we composed a long list of potential reasons for foster turnover and potential buffers against that turnover. Each list had 10-20 reasons (see below); we found these initial ideas to be helpful moving forward because they gave us context for the project and they were instrumental in creating our Phase 2 Survey questions.

Potential reasons for foster turnover
- Health/behavioral problems with animals
- Animals leaving/removal ("overwhelming feelings of loss when foster leaves")
- Lack of specific information (re: animal's history)
- Lack of adequate medical care for animal
- Lack of time/energy
- Spousal/family unequal commitment to fostering
- A complicated fostering process (e.g. difficult to get the animal from the rescue, lots of paperwork/regulations etc.)
- Lack of role clarity/lots of role ambiguity
- Lack of training in preparation for fostering
- Lack of ongoing educational opportunities
- Lack of communication/responsiveness on the part of the organization
- Poor first six months (e.g. the first six months of a foster's experience is critical to retention)
- Having an animal that cannot/does not get adopted for whatever reason
- Needing a break
- Age of caregiver

Potential buffers to foster turnover
- Deep concern or love for animals (e.g. even if fostering is tough, the caregiver could have such a love for animals/fostering that he/she continues and does not leave)
- Reduced other responsibilities (e.g. being retired, etc.)
- Teamwork (either among foster family or other foster volunteers)
- Able to work well with foster liaison
- Recognition
- Being involved in adopting out the animals
- Respite between fosters
- Having a "support group" where fosters can vent their frustrations and share joys with other fosters
- Developing well-defined organizational goals and objectives
- Creating and sharing a vision with volunteers
- Easy to find a permanent ho

Phase 2: Pilot Survey

The full text of the Phase 2 survey can be found in Appendix B. 235 full survey responses were recorded over 11 days, from March 1-12, 2017. Of those 235 respondents, 129 were current foster caregivers, 81 were on a break, 15 were ex-foster caregivers, 9 categorized themselves as "other," and 1 person took the survey that had never been a foster caregiver. As an incentive for participants, we selected five winners of $20 Visa gift cards; these winners were chosen using a random number generator on the list of those who provided us with their email address for a chance to win.

The first question in this survey asked respondents to identify which "category" they were in: current foster caregiver, taking a break from fostering, ex-foster caregiver, or other. In looking through the "other" responses, we concluded that **there were no "categories" of respondents who we did not capture**; these were mainly idiosyncratic responses—for example, "I recently signed up, but have not started fostering yet," and "I was taking a break, but I recently took in a cat because its owner died;" there were also respondents in this group who likely should've chosen "I'm on a break from foster caregiving" because they said things like "waiting for kittens who need to be fostered during kitten season," and "my last foster just got adopted and I am taking a few weeks off due to travel."

In terms of results, the survey gave us some critical insights.
➤ We narrowed down a range for **number of litters** of kittens/puppies fosters take care of in a year (used the range for our Final Survey in a closed-ended format)
  o We also narrowed down a range of the **number of adult cats/dogs** fosters take care of in a year (used the range for our Final Survey in a closed-ended format)
➤ We started to be able to tell that **training** might be a potential issue for foster caregivers—on average there were <20% of respondents who strongly agreed that they received adequate training on several different, important topics
➤ Through our open-ended questions about why people could stop/have stopped fostering, we were able to generate an **even stronger list of reasons for turnover** than in our literature search
  o Similarly, we obtained a strong list of **potential actions** organizations can take to buffer against fosters turning over
  o It is important to note that for both—the reasons for turnover and buffering—we **reached saturation** through analyzing the open-ended responses; between the list we generated through our literature search and the additional reasons respondents were listing, by about 30% through the 230+ responses we were no longer adding additional reasons

Overall, the pilot survey was *successful*. It gave us confidence that our categorization strategy was solid—there were no "categories of respondents" that we were failing to capture with our branching strategy, we better understood the level of activity for our respondents (by asking them how many animals they take care of in a given period) and the respondents added to/strengthened our lists of potential reasons for foster turnover and things organizations can do to buffer against that turnover.

Phase 3: Interviews with Foster Program Leaders

Following our Phase 2 survey, we conducted a handful of phone interviews with foster program leaders. The purpose of these interviews, again, was to further understand the reasons for foster burnout and turnover. By interviewing the leaders in this phase, we obtained a unique perspective that was different from the foster/ex-foster volunteers that we obtained in phase two.

For the interviews, we spoke to:
- ➢ Rebecca Blackburn, Charlottesville SPCA
- ➢ Amy Schindler, Jacksonville Humane Society
- ➢ Mesa Herman, Seattle Humane Society
- ➢ Sara Gillette, Kansas City Pet Project
- ➢ Shannon Clounts, Peggy Adams Rescue

The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix C. Basically, we asked interviewees for their thoughts on why foster caregivers foster in general, why they continue to foster with their organization, what could cause fosters to leave, and what they do at their organization to keep fosters around. In addition to these "reasons for leaving and staying" questions, we asked them about two areas specifically that we were continuing to grapple with after our literature search and pilot survey: this unique situation of fosters taking a break—to make sure we understood why and how common it is in healthy organizations like theirs—and how big of a determining factor training can play since we started to see a lot of variation on our pilot survey.

These interviews were very helpful; we had several **takeaways**:
- ➢ The leaders told us, without us priming them with any examples of reasons for leaving/staying, **very similar reasons that fosters might turnover or stay**
    - o This made us feel confident in our lists moving forward to the final survey
- ➢ We also felt comforted to hear that **taking a break** in the fostering realm is a normal phenomenon
    - o However, three of our interviewees also said that those taking a break are not a population that is normally specifically surveyed, which validated our efforts to categorize respondents.
- ➢ Finally, we realized through our conversations with these women that we needed to **expand our training questions** to ask about some other, specific aspects of training that they feel is important for fosters
    - o For example, basic medical care and care/feeding were important categories of training that we had not yet included

Taken together, in addition to the results of our literature search and pilot survey, we began to have a **holistic view** of reasons for voluntary turnover, types of foster caregivers, and processes organizations could put in place to prevent turnover that served as a foundation for our final survey.

Phase 4: Final Survey

The text of the full survey can be found in Appendix D. **4,588** survey responses were recorded over the period of July 27-August 31, 2017; of those responses, 72.5% (3,329) were complete responses (i.e. some respondents did not answer all questions). These responses were obtained using different recruitment means:

➤ We first reached out to previous UNC-Charlotte Volunteer Program Assessment clients (animal shelters that have been through our assessment and volunteered to stay on our email list for future surveys), which resulted in 68 responses
➤ After this initial VPA-email blast, Maddie's Fund sent out a recruitment email, which resulted in 1,223 responses
    o We believe this email from Maddie's was also forwarded within organizations because 207 respondents indicated they received an email from their foster organization

> We did **not** find any significant differences between the different sources of data.

➤ Following the Maddie's Fund e-blast, we posted a link to the survey on Maddie's Fund's Facebook page, which resulted in 632 responses
    o We believe the Maddie's Fund Facebook post was shared on Dr. Marty Becker's Facebook page/website because we had 667 respondents indicate that they heard about the survey from "Dr. Marty Becker's email, website, or social media"
➤ Finally, there were some respondents—532—who cited "other" for their source; by far the most common "other" sources were "my organization's Facebook page" and "from a friend on Facebook"/"email from a friend"

As an incentive for participants, we selected 20 winners of $25 Visa gift cards; these winners were chosen using a random number generator on the list of those who provided us with their email address for a chance to win.

Overview of final survey respondents' demographics
➤ **Categories of respondents:**
    o 253 who have never been a foster caregiver (excluded from data analyses and this report)
    o 869 ex-fosters
    o 739 fosters taking a break
    o 2788 current fosters
➤ **Age:** 50%+ of respondents were between 46-65, with another 30% between 26-45
➤ **Gender**: more than 95% of respondents were female
➤ **Employment:** largest category of respondents was work full-time (49.2%); second most common category was retired (21.1%)
➤ **Education:** top three responses were 1) bachelor's degree (36.2%), 2) Master's degree (18.4%) and 3) some college credit (16.8%)
➤ **Living situation:** most foster caregivers in our sample own a home (79.8%)
➤ **Number of people in household:** about 75% of respondents only have 1-2 humans in their household and 0 children
➤ **Other pets:** the most common responses for personal pets were 1-3 dogs (64.2%) and 1-3 cats (47.7%)

Missing data

It is common for survey results to contain missing data, and our Phase 4 Survey was no exception. We did not want to force respondents to answer all questions, because this can result in biased results (i.e. if a respondent does not want to answer a question, he/she might pick strongly disagree out of feeling that the question is not applicable).

The amount of missing data fluctuates throughout the survey, but as is typical, generally increased as the survey went on: at the beginning of the survey (characteristics), the missing data is only 1-4% and by the end (foster teams and demographics), the amount is closer to ~15-25%. The reason for this is most likely survey fatigue since the amount of missing data increases towards the latter questions.

A couple specific notes about the missing data

➢ Based on significance tests (where we compared the amount of missing data between groups), **the only significant difference we found was that ex-fosters had a significantly higher level of missing data for questions regarding turnover** (see Chapter 3)

➢ More than 2/3rds of respondents—for both those taking a break and current fosters—did not answer our extensive "within-person volunteering history" questions. With such a low sample size, and lots of respondents choosing "other" when they *did* respond, we did not feel we could draw meaningful conclusions from these questions (see appendix F)

> We did **not** any significant differences between those with a high amount of missing data vs. those with a low amount of missing data.

Importantly, we had a large enough sample size to draw what we see as robust conclusions.

How the data are presented

Since the survey was so extensive in the range of topics that it covered, the results of the final survey are presented in "chapters," whereby we review the results from each section of the final survey.

> Maddie's Fund was **correct** in predicting that the different "foster types" would differ in their characteristics, reasons for leaving, potential buffers, etc.—this was the case and thus we present the data to showcase these differences.

Except for the foster teams chapter, **each chapter is further broken down into the different respondent groups** (ex-foster, then fosters taking a break, then current fosters). The reason for this is that we found **significant differences** between the groups for all sections of our survey (again, apart from foster teams).

We believe organizations can use the data effectively this way, because they likely will have to use different strategies based on whether their trying to improve the experience for active fosters or trying to re-recruit those on a break/ex-fosters.

Phase 4, Chapter 1: Fostering Background

To understand the fostering background of respondents, we asked questions pertaining to their level of fostering activity and types of animals they foster(ed) for.

Fostering Background Results

Background: Ex-Fosters

1. **How long has it been since you last provided foster care for the organization you most recently fostered for?**

	N	%
Less than 6 months ago	143	16.7%
6 months-less than 1 year ago	124	14.5%
1-2 years ago	229	26.8%
2+ years ago	360	42.1%

2. **How did you characterize your level of foster activity before you left?**

	N	%
Seasonal foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered at certain times of the year, like summer, but not others)	18	2.2%
One-time foster caregiver (i.e. I am fostering a pet now but don't plan on fostering in the future)	208	25.7%
Every-once-in-a-while foster caregiver (i.e. I foster a pet intermittently but not regularly)	330	40.8%
Frequent foster caregiver (i.e. I provide foster care almost continuously or continuously, as long as there are pets available to foster)	253	31.3%

3. **In thinking about the last 12 months before you left the organization, how many of those days would you say you had 1 or more foster pets in your home?**

	N	%
A little of the time (1 to 20%)	271	34.0%
Some of the time (21-40%)	122	15.3%
Around half the time (41-60%)	91	11.4%
A majority of the time (61-80%)	118	14.8%
Most of the time (81-100%)	194	24.4%

4. Over the last 12 months before you left, how many litters of kittens/puppies did you foster?

	Kittens *N*	Kittens %	Puppies *N*	Puppies %
0	582	72.9%	683	86.5%
1-3	147	18.4%	92	11.6%
4-6	44	5.5%	12	1.5%
7-9	9	1.1%	2	0.3%
10+	16	2.0%	1	0.1%

5. Over the last 12 months before you left, how many adult cats/dogs did you foster?

	Cats *N*	Cats %	Dogs *N*	Dogs %
0	449	56.4%	265	33.5%
1-10	254	31.9%	462	58.4%
11-20	49	6.2%	41	5.2%
21-30	19	2.4%	14	1.8%
31-40	12	1.5%	6	0.8%
41-50	4	0.5%	0	0%
50+	9	1.1%	3	0.4%

Takeaways
➢ 42.1% of ex-fosters left the organization 2+ years ago; another 26.8% left 1-2 years ago
➢ Before leaving the organization, over 40% considered themselves to be "every-once-in-a-while caregivers," with another 31% of respondents who considered themselves "frequent foster caregivers"
➢ 34% of ex-fosters they had a pet in their house only "a little of the time"; at the other extreme, about ¼ of them had a pet "most of the time"
➢ Most ex-fosters did not foster any litters of kittens/puppies in the year before leaving
➢ As for adult animals, most respondents (56.4%) did not foster any adult cats, though 31% did foster between 1-10 adult cats
    o For adult dogs, over half (58.4%) of ex-fosters had between 1-10

Background: Fosters Taking a Break

1. **How long have you been on a break from foster caregiving?**

	N	%
Less than 3 months	301	41.3%
4-6 months	117	16.0%
6 months-less than a year	147	20.2%
1-2 years	113	15.5%
2+ years	51	7.0%

2. **How did you characterize your level of foster activity before your break?**

	N	%
Seasonal foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered at certain times of the year, like summer, but not others)	56	7.8%
One-time foster caregiver (i.e. I am fostering a pet now but don't plan on fostering in the future)	46	6.4%
Every-once-in-a-while foster caregiver (i.e. I foster a pet intermittently but not regularly)	282	39.2%
Frequent foster caregiver (i.e. I provide foster care almost continuously or continuously, as long as there are pets available to foster)	335	46.6%

3. **In thinking about the last 12 months before your break, how many of those days would you say you had 1 or more foster pets in your home?**

	N	%
A little of the time (1 to 20%)	135	18.7%
Some of the time (21-40%)	155	21.5%
Around half the time (41-60%)	136	18.9%
A majority of the time (61-80%)	121	16.8%
Most of the time (81-100%)	174	24.1%

4. **Over the last 12 months before your break, how many litters of kittens/puppies did you foster?**

	Kittens *N*	Kittens %	Puppies *N*	Puppies %
0	421	58.7%	578	81.1%
1-3	187	26.1%	96	13.5%
4-6	67	9.3%	28	3.9%
7-9	30	4.2%	5	0.7%
10+	12	1.7%	6	0.8%

5. **Over the last 12 months before your break, how many adult cats/dogs did you foster?**

	Cats *N*	Cats %	Dogs *N*	Dogs %
0	352	49.2%	212	29.7%
1-10	228	31.8%	420	58.8%
11-20	75	10.5%	54	7.6%
21-30	30	4.2%	8	1.1%
31-40	17	2.4%	7	1.0%
41-50	4	0.6%	3	0.4%
50+	10	1.4%	10	1.4%

Takeaways
- Over 40% of respondents were newly on a break (less than 3 months), about 20% have been on a break for between 6 months and a year
- Almost half of those on a break (46.6%) identified as "frequent" caregivers, with another 39.2% who considered themselves to be "every-once-in-a-while" caregivers
- The distribution of the percentage of time that they had at least 1 foster animal in their home is mostly evenly distributed
- While the majority of those taking a break did not have any litters of kittens (58.7%) or puppies (81.1%), there were 26.1% who indicated they had 1-3 litters of kittens and almost 10% who indicated that they had 4-6 litters of kittens
- For adult animals, almost half (49.2%) did not foster any adult cats, though 31.8% did foster between 1-10 adult cats
    - For adult dogs, 58.8% indicated they fostered between 1-10 dogs before their break, with another 29.7% who did not have any

Background: Current Fosters

1. **How do you characterize your level of foster activity with this organization?**

	N	%
Seasonal foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered at certain times of the year, like summer, but not others)	149	5.6%
One-time foster caregiver (i.e. I am fostering a pet now but don't plan on fostering in the future)	38	1.4%
Every-once-in-a-while foster caregiver (i.e. I foster a pet intermittently but not regularly)	601	22.6%
Frequent foster caregiver (i.e. I provide foster care almost continuously or continuously, as long as there are pets available to foster)	1872	70.4%

2. **In thinking about the last 12 months, how many of those days would you say you had 1 or more foster pets in your home?**

	N	%
A little of the time (1 to 20%)	301	11.4%
Some of the time (21-40%)	344	13.0%
Around half the time (41-60%)	358	13.6%
A majority of the time (61-80%)	412	15.6%
Most of the time (81-100%)	1223	46.4%

3. **Over the last 12 months, how many litters of kittens/puppies did you foster?**

	Kittens *N*	Kittens %	Puppies *N*	Puppies %
0	1329	50.6%	2016	77.6%
1-3	598	22.8%	395	15.2%
4-6	341	13.0%	100	3.9%
7-9	165	6.3%	39	1.5%
10+	195	7.4%	47	1.8%

4. Over the last 12 months before your break, how many adult cats/dogs did you foster?

	Cats *N*	Cats %	Dogs *N*	Dogs %
0	1020	39.1%	1051	40.3%
1-10	722	27.6%	1061	40.7%
11-20	355	13.6%	231	8.9%
21-30	202	7.7%	112	4.3%
31-40	124	4.7%	39	1.5%
41-50	64	2.5%	37	1.4%
50+	125	4.8%	75	2.9%

Takeaways
➢ Over 70% of current foster caregivers consider themselves to be "frequent foster caregivers"
➢ About half of current fosters (46.4%) indicated that they have had at least 1 pet in their home "most of the time," with another 15.6% who have had at least 1 pet a "majority of the time"
➢ In terms of the animals they foster, litters of kittens were more common than puppies
➢ There were about 40% of current fosters who did not have any adult cats/dogs (upon further examination of the data, in general those that did not have adult animals *did* indicate that they fostered litters of kittens/puppies
    o For those who *did* care for adult animals (i.e. had more than 0), 27.6% of them had 1-3 cats (40.7% had between 1-3 dogs); there were also around 10% of current fosters who had between 11-20 dogs and cats

Does background matter?

For each category of respondent, we included a question about their likelihood to keep fostering with the organization (or return to fostering as was the case for those on a break/former caregivers).

We ran a series of correlations between the background characteristics and fosters' propensity to continue fostering (along with some moderation analyses), and found:

➢ For **ex-fosters and fosters taking a break,** there was **not** a significant relationship between their level of foster activity and their propensity to continue fostering (i.e. their level of fostering activity before leaving the organization/taking a break from the organization was not correlated with their likelihood to foster again).

> Data suggest that if fosters continue to be active, and keep an animal in their home a majority of the time, they are more likely to keep fostering. Might this be a momentum type of effect and that it is best to keep fosters busy?

➢ However, **for current fosters,** there **was a significant positive relationship** (*r* = .18) between their level of foster activity and their propensity to continue fostering.
  o **Interpretation:** current fosters are *more likely to continue fostering if they are frequent foster caregivers*

➢ We also found that the amount of time current foster caregivers had 1 or more animals in their home **moderates** the relationship between foster activity and propensity to continue fostering
  o **Interpretation:** frequent foster caregivers with more than 1 animal in their home a majority of the time are *even **more** likely* to continue foster caregiving

Phase 4, Chapter 2: Perceptions of Training and Other Organizational Attitudes

We know that **training** can be critical to the retention of foster caregivers. We therefore included a section on training to better understand what types of training caregivers are/are not receiving (which, again, *did* significantly differ by category of respondents—this will be obvious below).

In addition to whether caregivers perceive that their level of training is high, we also gathered data on other perceptions they have about their organizations. These questions, borrowed from our validated Volunteer Program Assessment survey, can also shed some light on how fosters are feeling about their current/previous organizations.

Training Results

For each of our training items, we asked respondents to indicate if they did not receive that type of training. Therefore, the first table in each section contains data on the number of respondents who indicated they did not receive training; the remaining tables contain data on the extent to which respondents, who *did* receive training, agree that their training was adequate.

> For easy comparison across groups, we end both the training and other organizational attitudes sections with a table that presents the group means for each question.

Training: Ex-Fosters

Ex-fosters who did not receive training:

	N	%
Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	261	33.4%
Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	215	24.7%
Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	207	23.8%
Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	177	20.4%

For those ex-fosters who *did* receive training, we asked them to evaluate the quality of it: *I received adequate training on…*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	5.4%	11.3%	22.1%	35.8%	25.4%	61.2%	3.64
Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	3.9%	8.2%	19.5%	40.3%	28.1%	68.4%	3.80
Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	4.9%	10.1%	17.1%	43.1%	24.7%	67.8%	3.73
Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	2.9%	9.7%	16.6%	44.7%	26.1%	70.8%	3.81

Takeaways
➢ The number of ex-fosters who indicated they did **not** receive training ranges from 20% to over 33%
➢ For those that *did* receive training, the type of training with the highest percent favorable—that is, those who agree/strongly agree that they received adequate training—was "adoption of pets" (70.8%), while the lowest was "basic handling and behavior issues" (61.2%)

Training: Fosters Taking a Break

Fosters taking a break who did not receive training:

	N	%
Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	199	26.9%
Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	153	20.7%
Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	139	18.8%
Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	125	16.9%

For those taking a break who *did* receive training, we asked them to evaluate the quality of it: *I received adequate training on…*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	3.0%	10.1%	18.1%	41.9%	27.0%	68.9%	3.80
Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	2.6%	6.4%	15.8%	45.5%	29.7%	75.2%	3.93
Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	2.7%	9.4%	16.1%	47.7%	24.2%	71.9%	3.81
Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	2.1%	9.8%	14.1%	46.4%	27.6%	74.0%	3.88

Takeaways

➢ For fosters taking a break, the number of respondents who did not receive trainings is lower than ex-fosters; however, over 26% of those taking a break indicated that they did not receive "basic handling and behavior issues" training

➢ For those that *did* receive training, the type of training with the highest percent favorable was "basic care and feeding" (75.2%), while the lowest was, again, "basic handling and behavior issues" (68.9%)

> For fosters taking a break, those who did **not** receive training were **significantly less likely** to continue fostering

Training: Current Fosters

Current fosters who did not receive training:

	N	%
Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	594	21.3%
Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	483	17.3%
Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	402	14.4%
Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	371	13.3%

For those current fosters who _did_ receive training, we asked them to evaluate the quality of it: _I received adequate training on…_

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	3.0%	6.3%	15.8%	41.3%	33.6%	74.9%	3.96
Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	2.6%	4.2%	12.4%	42.8%	37.9%	80.7%	4.09
Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	2.5%	5.0%	12.1%	45.4%	35.1%	80.5%	4.06
Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	2.1%	5.3%	15.4%	42.8%	34.4%	77.2%	4.02

Takeaways

> For current fosters, the training data are significantly higher—based on a significance test where we compared means—as compared to those taking a break and ex-fosters

> However, 13-20% of current fosters reported that they did not receive training

> For those that _did_ receive training, the type of training with the highest percent favorable was "basic care and feeding" (80.7%), while the lowest was, again, "basic handling and behavior issues" (74.9%)

> For current fosters, those who did **not** receive training were **significantly less likely** to continue fostering

Training: Comparison Across Groups

	Ex-Fosters	Fosters on a Break	Current Fosters
	Mean	Mean	Mean
Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	3.64	3.80	3.96
Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	3.80	3.93	4.09
Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	3.73	3.81	4.06
Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	3.81	3.88	4.02

> The mean ratings for training were significantly different (current fosters highest, then fosters on a break, then ex-fosters)

> Fosters taking a break and current fosters are less likely to continue fostering if they do not receive training

Other Organizational Attitudes Results

Similar to the training results, in this section we present each of the groups' data and then end with a table comparing the means across groups.

Other Attitudes: Ex-Fosters

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
I feel **connected** to my organization.	3.5%	6.3%	15.9%	31.9%	42.4%	74.3%	4.04
I feel **supported** by my organization.	6.4%	9.9%	15.4%	34.6%	33.7%	68.3%	3.79
Communication with volunteers seems to be good at this organization.	6.3%	15.3%	18.0%	37.1%	23.3%	60.4%	3.56
This organization has a great deal of **personal meaning** for me.	3.0%	4.5%	17.8%	33.7%	41.0%	74.7%	4.05
I feel **appreciated** at this organization.	6.1%	10.2%	17.1%	36.0%	30.5%	66.5%	3.75
I feel my **input is valued** at this organization.	6.8%	14.3%	23.2%	27.6%	28.1%	55.7%	3.56
I feel this organization has **adequate financial resources** to effectively run a foster program.	5.7%	16.5%	18.4%	37.0%	22.4%	59.4%	3.54

Other Attitudes: Fosters Taking a Break

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
I feel **connected** to my organization.	2.2%	6.2%	9.5%	40.8%	41.3%	82.1%	4.13
I feel **supported** by my organization.	3.6%	8.2%	13.6%	39.3%	35.3%	74.6%	3.94
Communication with volunteers seems to be good at this organization.	4.2%	11.9%	15.1%	43.8%	25.0%	68.8%	3.73
This organization has a great deal of **personal meaning** for me.	1.7%	3.1%	14.2%	36.9%	44.0%	80.9%	4.18
I feel **appreciated** at this organization.	6.0%	8.5%	15.2%	38.1%	32.2%	70.3%	3.82
I feel my **input is valued** at this organization.	6.4%	12.9%	20.9%	33.3%	26.5%	59.8%	3.61
I feel this organization has **adequate financial resources** to effectively run a foster program.	4.5%	14.2%	18.6%	37.3%	25.4%	62.7%	3.65

Other Attitudes: Current Fosters

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
I feel **connected** to my organization.	2.0%	2.8%	8.1%	35.2%	51.8%	87.0%	4.32
I feel **supported** by my organization.	2.3%	4.3%	8.7%	35.1%	49.6%	84.7%	4.25
Communication with volunteers seems to be good at this organization.	3.1%	8.5%	13.6%	41.7%	33.0%	74.7%	3.93
This organization has a great deal of **personal meaning** for me.	1.4%	2.3%	10.5%	32.0%	53.9%	85.9%	4.35
I feel **appreciated** at this organization.	2.1%	5.0%	11.3%	38.8%	42.8%	81.6%	4.15
I feel my **input is valued** at this organization.	2.8%	6.6%	16.9%	37.4%	36.3%	73.7%	3.98
I feel this organization has **adequate financial resources** to effectively run a foster program.	5.7%	14.1%	19.9%	40.1%	20.2%	60.3%	3.55

Other Attitudes: Comparison Across Groups

	Ex-Fosters	Fosters on a Break	Current Fosters
	Mean	Mean	Mean
I feel **connected** to my organization.	4.04	4.13	4.32
I feel **supported** by my organization.	3.79	3.94	4.25
Communication with volunteers seems to be good at this organization.	3.56	3.73	3.93
This organization has a great deal of **personal meaning** for me.	4.05	4.18	4.35
I feel **appreciated** at this organization.	3.75	3.82	4.15
I feel my **input is valued** at this organization.	3.56	3.61	3.98
I feel this organization has **adequate financial resources** to effectively run a foster program.	3.54	3.65	3.55

Takeaways
➢ From the table above comparing group means on each question, it is clear that these different types of fosters have different experiences with their organizations
  o That is, current fosters are feeling significantly more connected, supported, appreciated, valued, etc. than their counterparts

➢ Although there were significant differences between mean group ratings, the *patterns* were actually the same (i.e. attitudes with highest ratings were the same across groups)[1]
  - o The attitudes with highest percent favorables were "this organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me" followed by "I feel connected to my organization"
  - o The attitudes with lowest percent favorables were "I feel this organization has adequate financial resources" and "I feel my input is valued at this organization"

Do these attitudes matter?

In the next section, we will present the results for what respondents chose as their top factors for continuing with and leaving (or potentially leaving) and organization. However, we also wanted to analyze the potential relationship between training and these other organizational attitudes to see how much they are a factor in a foster continuing to work with an organization.

We computed the correlations between respondents' ratings of training along with the other attitudes and their propensity to foster. Tables with all correlations are presented in Appendix E, but top results are presented below[2].

For ex-fosters, the strongest correlations with "how likely are you to return to fostering with this organization in the future"? were:
➢ The extent to which they feel supported ($r = .45$)
➢ The extent to which they feel their input is valued ($r = .44$)
➢ The extent to which they feel their organization appreciates them ($r = .43$)

For fosters taking a break, the strongest correlations with ""how likely are you to foster another pet from this organization?" were:
➢ The extent to which they feel supported ($r = .51$)
➢ The extent to which they feel their organization appreciates them ($r = .50$)
➢ The extent to which they feel their input is valued ($r = .45$)

> Organizations should focus on making all groups of fosters feel supported, connected, appreciated, and that their input is valuable

For current fosters, the strongest correlations with "how likely are you to continue fostering with this organization in the future?" were:
➢ The extent to which they feel connected to the organization ($r = .50$)
➢ The extent to which they feel supported ($r = .49$)
➢ The extent to which they feel their organization appreciates them ($r = .48$)

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[1] The only category that does **not** follow the pattern of significant differences is "I feel this organization has adequate financial resources to effectively run a foster program"; for all other attitudes, current fosters were significantly higher than those taking a break and those taking a break were significantly higher than ex-fosters, but for financial resources the mean is significantly higher for those taking a break
[2] All correlations were significant at the $p < .01$ level

What about training? The relationships between all the training categories and whether fosters would like to continue with an organization were also significant, but the correlations were lower than the organizational attitudes above (they ranged from *r* = .22 to .32 for each category of respondent). This is **not** to say that training does not matter, though, because the relationships with fosters' propensity to continue fostering were still significant.[3] Furthermore, fosters taking a break and current fosters who did not receive **any** training were **significantly less likely to continue fostering.**

> Do not neglect training: all types of training had a significant relationship with a foster's propensity to continue fostering

It is also interesting to note that the relationship between respondents' perception of whether the organization has adequate financial resources was the lowest correlation (*r* = .19, .20, and .19 for ex, taking a break, and current respectively) of all the attitudes—including training! This is encouraging for animal sheltering organizations because we often hear about their fears and frustrations of being underfunded/lacking resources.

Overall, organizations should focus on ensuring that fosters feel supported, appreciated, that their input is valued (remember that input being valued—the ability to communicate up to the organization—was consistently rated low by respondents), while also continuing to push training.

Are these results dependent on any factors?

Do how fosters feel about the organization depend on their demographic background? In order to investigate this question, we ran numerous moderated regressions that analyzed whether people's attitudes toward the organization (training and other perceptions) were dependent on their demographic backgrounds.

We report the moderators that existed across all categories of respondents.

➢ The correlation between receiving "basic care and feeding" training and a foster's propensity to continue fostering was moderated by **age** and **education**
  o The relationship was stronger for older fosters
  o The relationship was also stronger for more educated fosters
  o *Interpretation:* the older/more educated fosters are, the more important it is that they receive basic care and feeding training in order for them to continue fostering

➢ The correlation between feeling connected to the organization and a foster's propensity to continue fostering was moderated by **number of children**
  o The relationship was stronger for those with less children
  o *Interpretation:* for those with less children, it is more important for them to feel connected in order for them to continue fostering

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[3] Not only are the correlations with training and propensity to continue fostering significant at the *p* < .01 level, but in the social sciences correlations that are between .30 and .50 are considered "moderate," which many of the training numbers were; correlations above .50 are considered large

➢ The correlation between feeling that their input is valued by the organization and a foster's propensity to continue fostering was moderated by **income**
  - ○ The relationship was stronger for those with more income
  - ○ *Interpretation:* the more income fosters have, the more important it is that they feel their input is valued in order for them to continue fostering

Phase 4, Chapter 3: Factors Predicting Turnover and Potential Buffers

From the previous section, we know that factors such as how much fosters feel their input is valued, how supported volunteers feel, and how much they feel appreciated can be related to whether or not a caregiver wants to continue with an organization. However, in our final survey we also asked respondents more pointed questions about what influenced/may influence their decision to leave and what an organization could've done/could do to prevent them from leaving.

As previously mentioned, the answer choices we included were based off our first three phases of this project; that is, we gathered factors that affect turnover/could be buffers from the literature, from interviews, and from our Phase 2 survey. Our Phase 2 survey indicated that the reasons for leaving (or potentially leaving) are different depending on whether someone is a current foster hypothetically thinking about leaving, someone taking a break with one foot out the door, or someone who has actually left. **Thus, the potential turnover reasons were intentionally different for each foster type.**

Turnover Results

Turnover: Ex-fosters

Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following reasons caused you to leave the organization.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
Schedule did not allow for fostering (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.	23.1%	18.2%	21.8%	22.1%	14.7%	36.8%	2.87
Was **focusing on my own pets**	12.4%	11.0%	19.1%	33.7%	23.7%	57.4%	3.45
Bad experience with last foster animal	58.3%	18.1%	11.7%	7.3%	4.6%	11.9%	1.82
Last foster animal was a **foster fail** (i.e. you adopted the last animal you fostered)	29.3%	15.2%	8.1%	10.0%	37.4%	47.4%	3.11
Living situation did not allow for fostering at the time (i.e. moving, remodeling)	37.8%	16.3%	13.8%	17.8%	14.2%	32.0%	2.54
Lack of **organizational support**	41.2%	15.7%	19.1%	14.5%	9.6%	24.1%	2.36
Cost	50.5%	20.2%	15.8%	10.3%	3.1%	13.4%	1.95
Too many **sad outcomes**	51.0%	25.2%	15.7%	5.2%	2.8%	8.0%	1.84
Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)	54.4%	22.4%	12.8%	7.7%	2.7%	10.4%	1.82

What is the top reason that you left this organization? Please select one; if it's something else, click "other" and please explain.

	N	%
Was **focusing on my own pets**	204	29.1%
Last foster animal was a **foster fail** (i.e. you adopted the last animal you fostered)	172	24.5%
Schedule did not allow for fostering (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.)	86	12.3%
Living situation did not allow for fostering at the time (i.e. moving, remodeling)	84	12%
Other (please explain)	72	10.1%
Lack of **organizational support**	51	7.3%
Bad experience with last foster animal	16	2.3%
Cost	9	1.3%
Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)	8	1.1%

Takeaways
- When rating all reasons individually…
  - The top 3 reasons for turnover were:
    - Focusing on my own pets (3.45)
    - Last animal was a foster fail (3.11)
    - Schedule did not allow for fostering (2.87)
- When forced to select a top reason…
  - "**Focusing on my own pets**" was selected as the top reason by most ex-fosters caregivers (29.1%)
- Based on our thematic analysis of the "other" responses, the most common themes were[4]:
  - Still with the organization, just not fostering
  - Health/age-related reasons
  - Moved
  - Own animals being aggressive towards the foster

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[4] Throughout the report, for all "other" responses we chose a systematic, random selection of the open-ended responses and did a thematic analysis where we categorized the responses into themes. The responses are then presented roughly in order of number of times mentioned—that is, if a theme was most prevalent in our "coding," it is listed first and then the second-most popular follows, etc.

Turnover: Fosters Taking a Break

Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following reasons have caused you to take a break from foster caregiving.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
Current **schedule** does not allow for fostering/too busy (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.)	10.9%	13.5%	11.9%	35.5%	28.2%	63.7%	3.57
Focusing on my own pets	8.1%	9.9%	10.8%	38.6%	32.6%	71.2%	3.78
Bad experience with last foster animal	59.7%	21.9%	8.7%	6.3%	3.4%	9.7%	1.72
Last foster animal was a **foster fail** (i.e. you adopted the last animal you fostered)	42.3%	20.5%	5.6%	8.5%	23.1%	31.6%	2.50
Waiting on the **"right"** animal to foster	43.3%	26.9%	18.8%	9.6%	1.4%	11.0%	1.99
Living situation did not allow for fostering at the time	38.0%	22.2%	8.1%	16.2%	15.5%	31.7%	2.49
Lack of **organizational support**	48.0%	22.6%	13.4%	11.2%	4.8%	16.0%	2.02
Cost	49.8%	24.7%	11.8%	10.6%	3.1%	13.7%	1.92
Too many **sad outcomes**	54.7%	27.2%	10.4%	5.7%	2.0%	7.7%	1.78
Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)	53.9%	26.7%	9.9%	7.6%	1.9%	9.5%	1.77

What is the top reason that you are taking a break from foster caregiving? Please select one; if it's something else, click "other" and please explain.

	N	%
Current schedule does not allow for fostering (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.)	260	38.9%
Focusing on my own pets	140	21.0%
Other (please explain)	75	11.3%
Living situation did not allow for fostering at the time (i.e. moving, remodeling)	72	10.8%
Last foster animal was a **foster fail** (i.e. you adopted the last animal you fostered)	52	7.8%
Lack of **organizational support**	25	3.7%
Bad experience with last foster animal	17	2.5%
Waiting on the **"right"** animal to foster	11	1.6%
Cost	9	1.3%
Destruction or damage to property from foster animals	7	1.1%

Takeaways

➢ When rating all reasons individually…
  o The top 2 reasons were (there is not a 3rd reason with a mean above 3.0):
    ▪ Focusing on my own pets (3.78)
    ▪ Current schedule does not allow for fostering (3.57)
➢ When forced to select a top reason…
  o "**Current schedule does not allow for caregiving**" (which had the *second* highest mean rating) was selected by most fosters taking a break as their top reason for taking time
➢ Based on our thematic analysis of the "other" responses, the most common themes were:
  o Family situations (i.e. sick children, getting a divorse, death in the family)
  o Health/age-related reasons
  o Compassion fatigue/burnout

Turnover: Current Fosters

From some research we have done, we know that people stop fostering for any number of reasons. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that you might stop fostering because of the following reasons.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
Schedule would not allow for foster caregiving	10.4%	15.3%	12.9%	47.7%	13.6%	61.3%	3.39
Cost	27.0%	32.3%	14.1%	20.1%	6.5%	26.6%	2.47
If I **move**	18.7%	24.7%	23.0%	24.0%	9.5%	33.5%	2.81
Too many **"foster fails"**	27.9%	31.1%	15.4%	19.3%	6.4%	25.7%	2.45
Lack of **organizational support**	20.6%	20.1%	13.4%	30.3%	15.6%	45.9%	3.00
Foster animal(s) incompatible with home pets	14.2%	20.7%	18.7%	33.3%	13.0%	46.3%	3.10
Burnout	9.6%	15.6%	19.0%	41.9%	13.8%	55.7%	3.35
Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)	20.3%	33.5%	21.3%	19.8%	5.1%	24.9%	2.56
If I were to have a **bad experience** with a foster animal	25.8%	39.7%	20.9%	11.3%	2.3%	13.6%	2.24

What is the top reason that you might stop fostering? Please select one; if it's something else, click "other" and please explain.

	N	%
Schedule would not allow for foster caregiving	509	21.7%
Lack of **organizational support**	340	14.5%
Burnout	329	14.0%
Other (please explain)	296	12.6%
Foster animal(s) incompatible with home pets	245	10.4%
If I **move**	188	8.0%
Too many **"foster fails"**	160	6.8%
Cost	127	5.4%
Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)	76	3.2%
Too many **sad outcomes**	58	2.5%
If I were to have a **bad experience** with a foster animal	23	1.0%

Takeaways
- When rating all reasons individually…
  - The top 3 reasons were:
    - Schedule would not allow for foster caregiving (3.39)
    - Burnout (3.35)
    - Foster animal incompatible with home pets (3.10)
- When forced to select top reason…
  - The reason with the highest number of current fosters was "**schedule would not allow for foster caregiving**" (21.7%)
- Based on our thematic analysis of the "other" responses, the most common themes were:
  - "Would never stop fostering!"
  - Anticipating age/health-related issues
  - If family were no longer helping with fostering

Turnover: Comparison Across Groups

- For **ex-fosters,** the most highly rated reasons they left the organization were:
  - Focusing on my own pets*[5]
  - Last animal was a foster fail

- For **fosters taking a break**, the most highly rated reasons they decided to take a break were:
  - Focusing on my own pets

> The top reasons that fosters have left/would leave **do** differ by foster type

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[5] * = highest rated turnover reason when forced to select just one

- o Current schedule does not allow for foster caregiving*

- ➢ For **current fosters,** the most highly rated reasons they *would* leave the organization were:
    - o Schedule would not allow for foster caregiving*
    - o Burnout

- ➢ **Across groups,** the most common "other" reasons for turnover were:
    - o Health/age-related reasons (i.e. sick, getting too old to foster)
    - o Family issues (e.g. death in the family, sick loved one)

> Having a bad experience with a foster animal, destruction/damage by a foster animal, and cost were consistently rated **low** across groups, meaning these reasons do **not** factor highly into turnover decisions

- ➢ Moderation analyses indicated, across all groups, that **older** fosters were less likely to agree that **scheduling** is a top reason for turnover
    - o **Fosters with higher income** were also less likely to agree that **cost** is a top reason for turnover

Buffer Results

Buffers: Ex-fosters

We know that there are a number of things that organizations can do to keep their foster caregivers from leaving. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following changes the organization could have made would have prevented you from leaving.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
More **training**	17.1%	14.4%	24.5%	32.4%	11.5%	43.9%	3.07
Cover more of the **cost**	25.7%	18.3%	26.8%	21.3%	7.9%	29.2%	2.67
Improve **communication**	16.6%	12.1%	16.6%	29.3%	25.4%	54.7%	3.35
Decrease **friction** between volunteers and staff	22.2%	14.6%	27.9%	16.7%	18.7%	35.4%	2.95
Assist with **"adopting out"** the animals more/faster	18.6%	16.9%	28.5%	22.2%	13.7%	35.9%	2.96

What is the top change the organization could have made to prevent you from leaving (please select one; if it's something else, click "other" and please explain.

	N	*%*
Other (please explain)	262	40.2%
Improve **communication**	119	18.3%
Assist with **"adopting out"** the animals more/faster	90	13.8%
More **training**	76	11.6%
Decrease **friction** between volunteers and staff	74	11.3%
Cover more of the **cost**	31	4.8%

Buffers: Fosters Taking a Break

We know that there are a number of things that organizations can do to keep their foster caregivers from leaving. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following changes the organization could make could prevent you from leaving for good.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
More **training**	7.5%	10.8%	25.2%	38.9%	17.6%	56.5%	3.48
Cover more of the **cost**	15.2%	20.2%	31.3%	22.4%	11.0%	33.4%	2.94
Improve **communication**	7.1%	9.1%	17.6%	34.3%	31.9%	66.2%	3.75
Decrease **friction** between volunteers and staff	14.5%	13.7%	29.7%	24.4%	17.7%	42.1%	3.17
Assist with **"adopting out"** the animals more/faster	9.3%	16.2%	30.6%	28.2%	15.7%	43.9%	3.25

What is the top change the organization could make to prevent you from leaving for good? Please select one; if it's something else, click "other" and please explain.

	N	*%*
Other (please explain)	167	26.9%
Improve **communication**	161	26.0%
Assist with **"adopting out"** the animals more/faster	113	18.2%
More **training**	73	11.8%
Decrease **friction** between volunteers and staff	56	9.0%
Cover more of the **cost**	50	8.1%

Takeaways for both ex-fosters and those taking a break
➢ When rating all buffers individually…
  o The top 2 buffers were…
    ▪ Improving communication (3.35, 3.75 respectively)
    ▪ Offering more training (3.07, 3.48 respectively)

> When interpreting the buffer results for these two groups, it is important to keep in mind that many selected "other"; several common themes are listed here

➢ *However*, "**other**" was the most common "top reason" for leaving for both of these groups (40.2% and 26.9%)
➢ The fact that these percentages were so large prompted us to do a thematic analysis of the written-in "other" responses; the most common themes (in order of prevalence) were:
  o "There's nothing they can do"/"just can't help right now"
    ▪ This was mentioned in conjunction with being sick, having moved, dealing with family situation, focusing on own pets or job, etc.
    ▪ This was a more common "other" response for ex-fosters; for fosters taking a break, the most common "other" request was for more flexible arrangements (below)
  o More flexible arrangements for fosters (backup foster, temporary foster opportunities, and ability to drop animal off at shelter were all mentioned)
  o More opportunities to give input/have that input acted upon
  o Recognition
  o Assisting with burnout
  o Improving/replacing organization's leadership
  o Change organizational policies—euthanasia was the most popular issue here

Buffers: Current Fosters

We also know that there are a number of things that organizations can do to keep their foster caregivers from leaving. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following changes your organization could make could prevent you from leaving (if you were hypothetically considering leaving).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
More **training**	5.2%	11.4%	25.6%	40.8%	17.1%	57.9%	3.48
Cover more of the **cost**	12.0%	19.5%	25.2%	27.9%	15.4%	43.3%	3.15
Improve **communication**	5.3%	9.1%	20.3%	37.7%	27.6%	65.3%	3.73
Decrease **friction** between volunteers and staff	10.5%	15.2%	31.0%	23.9%	19.4%	43.3%	3.27
Assist with **"adopting out"** the animals more/faster	7.5%	14.6%	28.8%	30.6%	18.5%	49.1%	3.68

What is the top change your organization could do to prevent you from hypothetically leaving (please select one; if it's something else, click "other" and please explain)?

	N	%
Improve **communication**	534	24.1%
Assist with **"adopting out"** the animals more/faster	520	23.5%
Other (please explain)	347	15.7%
Cover more of the **cost**	302	13.6%
More **training**	271	12.2%
Decrease **friction** between volunteers and staff	241	10.9%

Takeaways
- When rating all buffers individually…
  - The top 2 buffers were:
    - Improve communication (3.73)
    - Assist with 'adopting out' animals faster (3.68)
- When forced to select a top buffer…
  - The most common answer was **improve communication** (24.1%), with assistance adopting out faster falling close behind (23.5%)
- There were not as many current fosters who chose "other" as their top reason
  - Of those that *did* choose "other," the most common themes were:
    - Nothing the organization could do—would be because of a personal situation (e.g. health deteriorating, family health issues, too old)
    - Listening to volunteers' ideas more
    - Increasing appreciation/recognition
    - Assisting with burnout

Buffers: Comparison Across Groups

- For **ex-fosters and fosters taking a break,** the most highly rated buffers were:
  - Improve communication
  - Offer more training
  - Though many respondents chose "other"*[6]

> Covering more of the cost was consistently rated **low** across groups, meaning fosters do **not** agree that organizations covering more of the cost would prevent them from leaving

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[6] * = highest rated buffer when forced to select just one

> ➢ For **current fosters,** the most highly rated buffers were:
>   - o Improve communication*
>   - o Assist with 'adopting' animals faster
>
> ➢ Other important buffers that respondents wrote in were:
>   - o More flexible arrangements for fosters
>   - o More opportunities to give input/listen to volunteers' input more
>   - o Increase appreciation and recognition

> We also asked respondents for their suggestions to improve their organizations; see Appendix G for their open-ended responses

Phase 4, Chapter 4: Exploring the Viability of Foster Teams Concept

As part of our final foster turnover survey, we took the opportunity to ask current fosters, fosters on a break from fostering, and ex-fosters for their reactions to a new concept in the animal welfare space, "foster teams." Foster teams are groups of volunteers working together to coordinate and implement all aspects of the care, marketing and adoption of foster animals. Foster teams can make fostering easier and transform fostering into a community effort.

Since foster teams are a new concept for most organizations—there are very few currently "doing" foster teams—we wanted to present the concept and get the reactions of the target population while they were taking our survey. Therefore, after the participants answered questions about their foster caregiving experiences, they were asked to read about the concept of foster teams (see Appendix D) and then answer several questions about their reactions to the idea.

The results are quite promising.

Foster Team Results

1. **To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I think this is a concept that could work well for some people/organizations.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Percent Favorable	Mean
2.00%	2.10%	13.20%	49.80%	32.80%	82.60%	4.09

Takeaways
➢ **More than 82%** of respondents agree or strongly agree that foster teams could work well for some people/organizations
➢ Furthermore, the average response was **above a 4** on a 5-point scale

Open-ended Responses

In your own words, please explain your response to whether foster teams could work for some people/organizations.

Randomly selected positive comments (25):

Teams can provide support for others and reduce the possibility of someone being overwhelmed
Many fosters feel overworked and overburdened. This concept could work well for them by dispersing responsibilities.
It would share the work load and better care for the babies.

Some single Foster volunteers may become overwhelmed, especially with litters after litters. Or if some animals become ill. This way they may feel more supported and have others to lean upon. Not so alone.

Foster teams might allow different levels of involvement enabling more people to be involved and, in theory, decreasing burnout/increasing foster retention.

I think it would work in many organizations

Dividing the work and capitalizing on each team member's strengths, while not burning people out by expecting performance in areas where they're weak, could help retain fosters.

Foster teams work because they also help socialize the animals

Would help spread out the workload

If a person doesn't want to house an animal but wants to help, this would be a great way to get involved

I think it would work great for foster based rescues who are responsible for everything and do not have the amount of volunteers that a larger organization might.

I think it could work for ALL shelters/rescues.

Different personalities, different skill sets, and new ideas! I prefer staying home so I can post our events with good photos and descriptions, but my husband loves being out in public promoting our local shelter and the adoptable pets. A team member could coordinate with foster families to pick up and return their fosters after the event.

It spreads the load-people do what they are good at doing.

It allows people to participate if they cannot physically house animals and provides caregiver support with the goal of reducing burnout.

It's working very well for the rescue I volunteer with

As long as the volunteers got a long and communicated well it could be helpful. We do this to some extent now. We have foster mentors that assist with vaccinations and health concerns. We also have a group of volunteers that upload photos and bios to our shelter software.

I do think foster teams could work in some incredibly well under special circumstances, like a particularly hard to place animal that really needs the added help of a foster team to get adopted out.

Foster teams would make it easier to think of yourself as a pet sitter and not the pet parent. So letting them go wouldn't be so heartbreaking. When it's too many heartbreaks, you get emotionally burnt out.

This team concept allows people who cannot take a pet into their home to help with a cause they're passionate about.

Again, great alternative for people who can't commit 100%.

Yes because it can help take the load off of one person doing it all and not being able to keep up.

I really don't see a downside, especially if used in conjunction with traditional fostering.

Absolutely. You just need to be organized, be a good communicator who gets along well with people, and get them excited to help!

Giving people an opportunity to help in a role other than having to bring a new pet into the household is a fantastic idea! This allows people to do what they feel they are best at while being able to help an animal (or animals) in need. I think this will, ultimately, lead to more volunteers and more safe animals.

Themes from positive responses:
- Foster teams can provide support/make fosters feel less "alone"
- Teams can work well for difficult to place animals
- Foster caregivers can contribute on a team even if they cannot have an animal in their home

- ➢ Diffuses the responsibilities/"spreads the load"
- ➢ Could reduce burnout

Randomly selected neutral/negative comments (25):

There would have to be enough people and interest, so it would only work with larger organizations.
Too many unknowns
For rescue groups spread out, the team concept would be difficult. So it may not work for all of them.
Some people need this, others don't
Highly dependent on the human personalities involved
Thinking back to school with assigned teams, there are always people who are stuck doing so much more while others contribute so much less. I'd also fear that happening, where I'm worried about dealing more with lazy/rude people within the organization instead of focusing my energy on the animals in need.
If volunteers lived close
It is very dependent of the organizations interest in their foster parents
In a larger city, this might be viable
Egos often get in the way of team efforts.
I'm just not sure – need more time to think about this new concept
I'm sure on a small scale it could be done but not sure how well for a larger facility/rescue
No...because people have their own way what they do; not to mention the stress this would be put on a dog to have so many different people taking care of it!
I believe this may not work in all situations. Organizations that are more foster based are more likely to have this work
All individuals are not necessarily equipped to be a foster caregiver
For a large rescue with a lot of people and money it probably would. Not for small rescues.
It would require enough interested volunteers.
I believe that location of shelter makes a difference. My organization is located in the desert, low income area. It's been hard work to find people who will commit to fostering. The idea of teams is great, will for sure help but there has to be people committed to this.   Also, some people prefer to do this alone. In which case, I would let them if I know they are excellent foster parents.
I don't see it working for us, but I suppose the concept was created for a reason, so it might work for some.
I don't think it will work very well, unless the organization is huge and perhaps has paid staff, because you cannot ever rely on someone else to do the job you could do yourself.
Doesn't seem like something I personally would like but it COULD be something for other people.
Our organization would need more volunteers in order to have foster teams
Some organizations are smaller and not enough people
I just don't know if it could work
I've never seen it in action, so I'm doubtful

Themes from neutral/negative responses:
- ➢ Too many unknowns
- ➢ **Lots** of these comments have to do with the fact that respondents seem to think the team concept could only work with larger organizations
- ➢ Seems like it would require $$

➢ Very dependent on the functionality of the shelter/organization
➢ Concerns about geographic dispersion

2. Would you have any interest in being on a foster team at some point?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	Percent Favorable	Mean
5.50%	15.20%	25.90%	31.60%	21.70%	53.30%	3.59

Takeaways

➢ Although these statistics are slightly lower, it is still encouraging that **more than half** of respondents indicated that they would probably/definitely be interested in giving foster teams a try
  ○ This is impressive given that, based on the open-ended comments, for many respondents the foster team concept was completely new
➢ The mean response was still **above average** (3.5+) on a 5-point scale

Open-ended Responses

In your own words, please explain your response to whether you would have interest in being on a foster team at some point.

Randomly selected positive comments (25):

I would love to partner with team members who have strengths in my weak areas (adoption promotion) so that my strengths (ability to house challenging animals) could be better utilized.
I think it would not be as beneficial to the animal as a normal fully involved foster parent would be
I enjoy fostering and I understand how helpful fostering can be to find the best home for fosters. I think spreading the responsibility will allow for more families to become fosters.
If there are fosters for my organization that live near me, I would be interested.
I think it works better than having only one person be responsible for everything. With the shared load we are more likely to cover all the bases and not miss an important item. Working together makes the entire load lighter. Taking turns feeding, cleaning, and taking care of the animals makes the job more easily handled. You can actually enjoy the dogs and not feel like it is a tremendous workload.
I need help.
I would like to do more to support other foster families.
I'm always interested in helping animals and learning new ways to do it.
I would like to give it a try!:)
Sounds like a good idea. It would also encourage relationships with other foster parents.
I like teamwork! I like helping others...a little can go a long way and during times when I'm not a primary foster it's a way too continue to contribute AND stay connected.
It could work for me when I am out of town.
I am always open to other methods for helping animals.
I'll always be interested in ways to help animals in need. If other things fall into place (schedules, etc), that's definitely a point of interest.

Yes! I would actually prefer to be on a foster team.
It sounds like a great idea. I'd like to do anything that will help dogs get the best homes.
It might be fun just to be the trainer for my foster group while someone else handles feeding or screening applications, etc.
I am already on a foster team and it's great.
I like the idea. I think it would help get more animals into loving homes.
I think it would be a great experience. I've done quite a bit of fostering as I run the organization I volunteer with and burnout sets in quickly - especially when you feel like you're the only one doing anything. Utilizing the team concept, I feel, will help alleviate some of the stress and time crunches I feel when fostering and will allow the foster care giver extra time to spend with that pet (or their own if they are feeling left out) leading to more well adjusted animals being adopted which will, hopefully, decrease the number of pets being relinquished back into shelters.
Support throughout the foster process is very important and a team supports each other
Would be good to have someone to foster while we are on vacation. I would like the team approach if it allowed for us to have more input into the adoption process.
I would love it. I would be able to focus on one aspect that I am best and most comfortable doing.
If I can help to get more done that will make fostering and getting a pet adopted quicker then why not do it?
Opportunity to let me focus on different areas rather trying to everything for foster dog. Sometimes I would like to have a break & not have a dog, but I'd love to help with training of one.

Themes from positive responses:
- ➢ Again, foster teams could lessen the load on each individual
- ➢ Some respondents seem eager just to try new things/learn about new best practices
- ➢ Could be better experience for the animals
- ➢ Allows for foster caregivers to take a break from being the "main caretaker"
- ➢ Could help fosters form new relationships

Randomly selected neutral/negative comments (25):

Not sure if I could manage that time commitment
Depending on the team members, structure, and all the details, I would consider it, however do not feel very confident about it.
Too many random other people to interact with.
We have a very small group ☹
I prefer to be independent. I'm busy and don't want to have to work with/around other people's schedules to accomplish tasks.
My health has worsened.
I cannot squeeze in the additional time and coordination.
I would be worried that things would fall through the cracks and people would not take full accountability - some would end up doing more than others or filling in where they were not originally supposed to
I'm just not interested and don't have time for that kind of organization.
It would depend how it was set up
I'd have to see what my role would be and if I had the time.
I prefer to handle my fosters independently
I'm happy with how I'm currently doing things
Possibly, but my favorite thing to do is actually work with the animals and keep them in my

home.

I work better alone and at my own pace

I don't mind doing all the work.

I have been involved with animal shelters, fostering, adoption programs as an employee, volunteer, and board member for nearly 40 years. It's time for me to step back and allow younger folks to continue this important work. I'm tired.

My time is limited.

I'm picky about who I work with and it would have to be someone that would be highly compatible with me and have the same belief system regarding the animals I foster.

I guess I'm just not a "people person"

I have not had good experiences with other animal rescuers.

My involvement could be waning due to age and health issues for myself and my elderly pets.

If you get too many people involved things get confusing and take more time than they should.

As mentioned before I prefer to be the main person monitoring the animal's medical and social needs.

I think I would have to have more information on how it would come together to make the rescue cohesive, rather than somewhat divided.

Themes from neutral/negative responses:

➤ Concerns about size of organization not supporting foster team(s)
➤ **Lots** of the negative comments were from people who "prefer to work alone" or "prefer to do everything themselves"
➤ Health/age worries
➤ Fears about foster teams taking *more* time
➤ Some indicate that it would be dependent on how well the organization sets up/monitors the teams

3. **Please respond to the following statements about the potential outcomes of using foster teams. In general, do you think the foster team concept could…**

Lead to more overall adoptions?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	Percent Favorable	Mean
0.60%	5.30%	40.40%	36.80%	16.90%	70.20%	3.64

Lead to more people being involved in fostering?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	Percent Favorable	Mean
0.40%	3.40%	21.50%	49.60%	25.10%	74.70%	3.96

Lead to more satisfaction among volunteers supporting fostering?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	Percent Favorable	Mean
0.70%	4.20%	26.70%	44.60%	23.80%	68.40%	3.87

Lead to more retention among volunteers supporting fostering?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	Percent Favorable	Mean
0.70%	4.10%	29.00%	44.10%	22.10%	66.20%	3.83

Lead to happier and healthier pets?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	Percent Favorable	Mean
1.30%	7.00%	35.70%	34.00%	22.10%	56.10%	3.69

Takeaways
➤ More than 50% of respondents, and sometimes close to 75%, probably/definitely agree that foster teams could have **positive outcomes** for foster caregivers themselves, the organization, and the animals
➤ Furthermore, the average responses were **well above average** on a 5-point scale

4. What is your overall reaction to the concept of foster teams?

Dislike a great deal	Dislike	Neither like/dislike	Like	Like a great deal	Percent Favorable	Mean
2.10%	7.90%	19.90%	39.40%	30.70%	70.10%	3.89

Takeaways
➤ **More than 70%** of respondents like/really like the idea of foster teams overall
➤ Once again, the average response was **well above average** on a 5-point scale
➤ **Only 10%** of respondents had a negative reaction to foster teams
➤ It is important to keep in mind that many respondents *just* learned about the concept of foster teams via a couple paragraphs before responding to this question, which makes the favorable responses even more encouraging

Open-ended Responses

In your own words, please explain your response to your overall reaction to foster teams.

Randomly selected positive comments (25):

A foster team would be ideal for anyone wanting to help animals but lacking time and/or resources to take on a fostering job individually.
I think it sounds like a great idea because it would give foster's more of a voice in the care of the foster animals and it would help take some responsibility from the shelter management team.
It sounds as if it would be a fairer & more effective fostering program!
Can accommodate different schedules and strengths.
I think it could be great for long-term foster parents to have more involvement in more aspects of the process and could be a good intro for people who are interested in fostering, but may not feel able to take on full responsibility for a pet
It takes a village to raise a child and I think the same thing is true for successful animal fostering.
It seems like a good idea and it could involve more people.
I think they would relieve the caregiver of some of the responsibilities and prevent burnout among the caregivers
It might interest people who maybe don't have an adequate place or enough time
Everyone would have to work together as a TEAM to be efficient and meet all the intended goals!
Love it because I don't think everyone who has a foster pet is necessarily equipped or ready to take photos, write a bio, etc
It sounds like a great concept for people with busy lives who may not have the time to devote to doing it all.
It could help. We do need to help each other more! Especially when a foster is going out of town, with transportation issues, encouragement, etc. A team approach can help share the load.
Great way to build a vesting and continuing interest in fostering. Great way to alleviate chance of compassion fatigue. Team building is empowering.
Its a nice concept. It is hardest when you feel isolated with the entirety falls on your shoulders.
I believe this would be beneficial and take some of the pressure off the foster. I have a very busy schedule and fostering can be time consuming If a team member could be responsible for getting the animal to every adoption event, the animals would probably adopted faster. Good photos are critical so having a team member willing to get great photos is priceless.
We actually have teams in our rescue. We have home visit teams, staff who work with the dogs who are at our building until a foster is available, teams who process applications, go to events, etc. It's fantastic. When I am not hosting a foster, I'll help out the other teams.
Would help with the care of the animals. Help with the stress level of the people involved in fostering. Help new fosters who have no idea what they are doing. Take the "I am alone on an island" feeling out of fostering.
This sounds like a great idea! Many people want to help but just aren't able to commit 100%. Some volunteers at my shelter have co-fostered and that has been good. This sounds even better.
Fostering is hard but very rewarding. Teams might be able to provide each other with support. Fostering can be physically and mentally taxing. Teams again would be able to help as a support group.

Shared burden makes light the work? Something like that. A lot of people always say "oh I could never foster as it would be so hard to give up the dog." This is perfect for them. And those of us who prefer pets to people would get extra support for the adopting and possibly other things.
Sounds good. I know I work weekends so having someone to take my fosters to adoption events would be a great help to me.
That's what I have been asking for, for years. No foster should feel their out there alone.
It's a very good concept and I would be more than willing to participate.
I think it's a great idea! The more involved people are, the better chances of a great experience. Not everyone is able/willing to have a strange pet in their home, whether it's due to other pets, family, allergies, time commitment, etc, but many still want a way to help & I think having all the team roles available and allowing people to select what they think they would be best at is a fantastic idea!! This keeps everyone engaged & happy while providing fostering and nurturing for the pet. What a great concept!

Themes from positive responses:

➢ Foster teams could alleviate some work that the staff members in the organizations must perform
➢ Could promote fairness
➢ Many think it would be a good way to get new volunteers involved (i.e. increase recruitment); also, perhaps organizations could reach a new target group of volunteers by offering a way to foster that is not *as much* of a responsibility
➢ Capitalizes on individual's strengths (e.g. some people are very good at photography)
➢ Respondents who like teamwork/working on teams in other aspects of life tend to indicate that they think teams would be good in foster organizations as well

Randomly selected neutral/negative comments (25):

It would take someone to lead the team with great communication and organizational skills. If you that, great, if not it sounds like it would be a lesson in frustration.
I'm happy fostering as we do, so I don't feel a need for change.
I feel like having that many people involved may lead to more loss of communication and that could lead to frustration and burnout. Perhaps the "too many cooks in the kitchen" mentality
If it brings support from others working together it is a good concept. The problem I have seen in organizations is that a few people on the board make all the decisions which do not take into consideration how the people fostering feel. There is a lack of support and appreciation of the time, money & care that goes into the foster pets.
Reliance on others can lead to disappointment with having expectations other team members will have same dedicated work ethic
I think teams are a good idea, but I also think people will do more if communication is there.
Just doesn't fit my personal preference
Not for me but I can see how the direct support of others could be beneficial
Not sure of feasibility. Would require extensive coordination and collaboration.
I personally would rather take on the majority of the responsibility, I'd be worried that having so many people coordinating it would be too complicated and things would fall though the cracks
It will take time, communication, and cooperation to get these teams functioning adequately. They may be more time consuming in the beginning.
It could work but I guess I personally don't feel I need someone to take my fosters pictures or go to adoption events for me.
Not enough info to evaluate.
Actually I think it would be a great idea if you got the buy-in from everyone. Unfortunately

sometimes in the rescue community there is a number of people who sometimes relate better to animals and "don't play well with others", thinking that their way is the only, best way.
I am not a "people person" and prefer to work independently. I have been rescuing animals for the past 30 years. I own and operate a nonprofit animal sanctuary for dogs, cats, horses....and a pig.
Great idea if there are sufficient volunteers to cover all needs. If five people want to photograph and one will house the animal, there's no one left for transport, etc. Could also be complications arising from philosophical differences in treatment and training among team members.
Never thought of or heard of them
The only problem I foresee is that the fostered dog would be too confused by moving to multiple foster homes
I foster the animals with serious behavioral problems due to the fact I am an experienced veterinary technician specializing in behavior. I live remotely. Working with a team would require too much of my time teaching them how to work with the animals with behavior issues.
It's a different concept so I'm not sure if I'd like it.
I just prefer to do my own thing.
I think that shelters are already overwhelmed and this would require more work on their part. The ultimate responsibility is with the shelter and the more involved with a specific litter or animal, the more work this could create.
Can be too many "chefs in the kitchen" so to speak.
It would depend of the responsiveness and dedication of the team members. Would need to have support if members of the team were not fulfilling roles.
It's an interesting idea but I'd like to hear from people who have actually put it into practice

Themes from neutral/negative responses:
- ➢ Concerns about potential poor communication
- ➢ Fear that others will not follow through on their team responsibilities
- ➢ Personal preference for working alone/not "needing a team"
- ➢ Overall, lots of comments about how this concept could be good if done well

Are these results dependent on any factors?

Similar to what we did to investigate whether organizational attitudes were dependent on demographic information, we ran a series of regressions that analyzed whether how people felt about foster teams depended on their demographic information, their experiences with fostering, how they felt about their organizations, etc.

Though there were not many moderators, there are a couple of exceptions, which are important to keep in mind when interpreting these results.

For interest in being part of a foster team:
- ➢ There were group differences, such that the idea of being on a foster team at some point was most popular with **foster caregivers taking a break** (3.60 on a 5-point scale)

- o The second highest group was ex-fosters (3.44); last was current fosters (3.34)[7]
- ➢ Respondents were more likely to want to be part of a team if they strongly agreed about **feeling supported by their current/former organization**
  - o The same goes for **feeling that their current/former organization values their input**
  - o And, finally, more interested in being on a foster team if they **feel their current/former organization appreciate(d) them**
- ➢ **Takeaway:** if organizations try out the foster team concept/already have it in place and are trying to get fosters excited about joining, they should perhaps target those on a break (or ex-fosters) and also ensure that support, input being valued, and appreciation are high in the organization

For <u>overall reactions to the foster team concept</u>:
- ➢ There were group differences, such that the idea of foster teams in general was most popular with **ex-fosters** (4.0 on a 5-point scale)
  - o The second highest group was foster caregivers taking a break (3.93); last was current fosters (3.84)[8]
- ➢ The concept was also more popular with "every once in a while" foster caregivers (3.99 on a 5-point scale), followed closely by "one-time" foster caregivers (3.98)
  - o Those who are frequent caregivers rated them slightly lower (3.72)[9]
- ➢ **Takeaway:** again, organizations might consider targeting those ex-fosters/fosters taking a break to see if they can re-involve them in the organization by appealing to them with the foster team concept, which is arguably less commitment/responsibility

Overall, the fact that we did not find many moderating variables is **good** news for the viability of foster teams—this means that this new concept is "universally" appealing, relatively speaking. These results are also in line with Maddie's Fund previous market research, which showed that the idea of foster teams had different appeal depending on whether the foster caregiver was currently active.

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[7] Post hoc analyses revealed that for foster team interest, foster caregivers' taking a break rating (3.60) is statistically significantly higher than that of ex-fosters but the difference between ex-fosters (3.44) and current fosters (3.34) is not statistically significant

[8] Post hoc analyses revealed that for overall reactions to foster teams, ex-fosters' rating (4.0) is not statistically significantly higher than that of foster caregivers taking a break (3.93), but is significantly higher than current fosters (3.84)

[9] Similar to the previous, post hoc analyses revealed that for overall reactions to foster teams, "every once in a while" foster caregivers' rating (3.99) is not statistically significantly higher than one-time fosters' rating (3.98) but there is a statistically meaningful difference between the ratings of every once in a while fosters and frequent foster caregivers (3.72)

Phase 4, Chapter 5: Demographics

In the final section of our survey, we asked all respondents to answer a series of demographic questions. We've been referring to how these demographic variables are differently related to some of the outcomes throughout the report, but here we present the demographic results **across all three groups** to get an overall picture of what foster caregivers "look like."

1. **What is your age?**

	N	%
18-25	123	3.7%
26-45	1062	31.8%
46-65	1740	52.1%
66+	412	12.4%

➢ Over 50% of respondents were between 46-65, with another 30%+ falling between 26-45

2. **What is your current employment status?**

	N	%
Working full-time	1643	49.2%
Working part-time	482	14.4%
Retired	703	21.1%
Self-employed (please explain)	300	9.0%
Other (please explain)	209	6.3%

➢ Largest category of respondents work full-time (49.2%), with second most common category being retired (21.1%)
➢ For the "self-employed" respondents, the most common jobs listed were: business-owner, work from home, and animal trainer/groomer (mostly dogs)
➢ For the "other" responses, the most popular were: student, on disability, and stay at home parent/"homemaker"

3. *If employed full-time, part-time, or self-employed…***How satisfied are you with your current job?**

	N	%
Not at all satisfied	91	4.0%
A little satisfied	163	7.2%
Somewhat satisfied	401	17.6%
Satisfied	856	37.6%
Very satisfied	764	33.6%

➢ Of the respondents who work full-time, part-time or are self-employed, indicated they were either satisfied (37.6%) or very satisfied (33.6%) with their work outside of being a foster caregiver

4. **Which of the following best describes your gender identity?**

	N	%
Female	3186	95.7%
Male	107	3.2%
Transgender	3	0.1%
Prefer not to answer	34	1.0%

➢ More than 95% of respondents were female
➢ Though an over-representation of women is in line with the animal welfare industry, the potential bias is important to keep in mind when extrapolating from this report

5. **What is the highest degree or level of school that you have *completed*?**

	N	%
Some high school, no diploma	15	0.4%
High school graduate, diploma, or equivalent	175	5.3%
Some college credit, no degree	558	16.8%
Trade/technical/vocational training	165	5.0%
Associate's degree	326	9.8%
Bachelor's degree	1201	36.2%
Master's degree	611	18.4%
Professional degree	114	3.4%
Doctorate degree	155	4.7%

➢ 36.2% of respondents have completed a bachelor's degree, 18.4% have completed a Master's degree, and 16.8% have completed some college credit; the rest are mostly even split among the remaining categories (except "some high school no diploma")

6. Which of the following best describes your housing situation?

	N	%
Own	2643	79.8%
Rent	551	16.6%
Live with family or friends	119	3.6%

➢ Most foster caregivers in our sample own a home (79.8%)

7. How many humans live in your household (including yourself)?

	N	%
1-2	2454	74.1%
3-4	709	21.4%
5-6	132	4.0%
6+	18	0.5%

➢ Almost 75% of respondents only have 1-2 humans in their household

8. How many children live in your household?

	N	%
0	2626	79.2%
1-2	585	17.7%
3-4	95	2.9%
5+	7	0.2%

➢ 79.2% of respondents have 0 children, which is in line with the "total humans" data

9. **Do/did you have any personal pets while fostering? Please indicate the number of each type of personal pet below.**

	0	1-3	4-7	8+
Dogs	19.1%	64.2%	14.6%	2.1%
Cats	23.7%	47.7%	18.5%	6.5%
Birds	89.2%	8.5%	1.4%	0.4%
Pocket Pets (hamster, guinea pig, etc.)	89.7%	9.0%	1.0%	0.3%
Other	75.8%	15.2%	4.7%	4.4%

➢ The most common responses for personal pets were: 1-3 dogs (64.2%) and 1-3 cats (47.7%)
➢ Birds, pocket pets, and other animals were not as common; 75%+ report having 0 of these animals
  o For the "other" responses, the most popular animals were: fish, rabbits, chickens, horses, and snakes

The following questions were <u>optional</u>:
1. **Below are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with that statement applying to you.**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	No response N
Extraversion	3.08	1.02	1468
Agreeableness	3.98	0.68	1477
Emotional Stability	3.80	0.77	1466
Openness to Experiences	3.80	0.67	1464
Conscientiousness	4.27	0.64	1468

➢ With the exception of extraversion, all of these personality characteristics were above-average, especially agreeableness and conscientiousness

2. **The following statements are about working with pets (dogs and cats only). Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements.**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/dis	Agree	Strongly agree	% Favorable	Mean
Working with animals feels like my calling in life.	1.0%	4.2%	16.9%	35.3%	42.7%	78.0%	4.15
It sometimes feels like I was destined to work with animals.	1.1%	6.0%	18.2%	35.1%	39.7%	74.8%	4.06
Working with animals feels like my niche in life.	1.0%	4.7%	16.6%	37.4%	40.3%	77.7%	4.11
I am definitely an animal person.	0.5%	0.2%	1.8%	28.6%	69.0%	97.6%	4.65
My passion for animals goes back to my childhood.	1.7%	4.4%	6.9%	27.3%	59.8%	87.1%	4.39
I was meant to work with animals.	1.1%	4.1%	22.1%	32.1%	40.7%	72.8%	4.07

➢ These responses were all over 4.0 on a 5.0 scale
➢ When we computed an "overall animal calling" variable, the mean was 4.23

3. **What is your total household income?**

	N	%
Less than $25,000	235	7.7%
$25,000-$74.999	1182	38.9%
$75,000-$124,999	946	31.2%
$125,000-$174,999	387	12.7%
$175,000+	287	9.5%

➢ The two most common responses were $25,000-$74,999 (38.9%) and $75,000-$124,999 (31.2%)

Appendix A: References from Literature Search

Scholarly references
Buehler, C., Cox, M. E., & Cuddeback, G. (2003). Foster parents' perceptions of factors that promote or inhibit successful fostering. *Qualitative Social Work*, *2*, 61-83.

Conrad, D., & Kellar-Guenther, Y. (2006). Compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction among Colorado child protection workers. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *30*, 1071-1080.

Davis, R. (2013). Understanding Volunteerism in an Animal Shelter Environment: Improving Volunteer Retention.

MacGregor, T. E., Rodger, S., Cummings, A. L., & Leschied, A. W. (2006). The needs of foster parents: A qualitative study of motivation, support, and retention. *Qualitative Social Work*, *5*, 351-368.

Rodwell, M. K., & Biggerstaff, M. A. (1993). Strategies for recruitment and retention of foster families. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *15*, 403-419.

Non-scholarly references
Foster parent turnover: Why do foster parents leave the system?
http://www.qpiflorida.org/pages/Documents/qpi1/docs/Final%20Report%20Foster%20Parent%20Turnover_FINAL%201-13.pdf

Project Match: Promising practices in foster parent retention
http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/DR-Grantees/year-one/promising-practices-in-foster-parent-retention-leaflet.pdf

What to do about compassion fatigue
https://www.petfinder.com/pro/for-shelters/compassion-fatigue/

Appendix B: Copy of Pilot Survey

Below are some questions about your role as a foster caregiver, the organization you work/worked for, and the challenges you face/have faced as a foster caregiver. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability and remember that your answers are **confidential**—you will not be asked to enter your name and individual responses will never be shared with any specific organization. Instead, our intent is to better understand foster caregivers and the challenges they face as a collective.

The survey should only take you about 5 minutes to complete. At the end, you will be given the option to give your email address to be entered in a random drawing to win a $20 Visa gift card in exchange for your participation. There will be 5 winners.

1. Are you currently a foster caregiver?
   - Yes, I have a foster pet or I am waiting on a foster pet
   - I am taking a break from fostering
   - No, I am no longer a foster caregiver, but I was
   - No, I have never been a foster caregiver
   - None of these options fit my current foster caregiver status. Please explain your situation (text entry)

IF "YES, I HAVE A FOSTER PET OR AM WAITING ON A FOSTER PET"

The following will ask you questions about your experiences, challenges, and potential solutions as a foster caregiver.

**When answering these questions, please think of "my organization" or "this/the organization" as the organization (shelter, rescue group, etc.) that you are currently a foster caregiver for.

1. How do you characterize your level of foster service?
   - Seasonal foster caregiver (i.e. I foster at certain times of the year, like summer, but not others)
   - One-time foster caregiver (i.e. I am fostering a pet now but don't plan on fostering in the future)
   - Every-once-in-a-while foster caregiver (i.e. I foster a pet intermittently but not regularly)
   - Frequent foster caregiver (i.e. I provide foster care almost continuously or continuously, as long as there are pets available to foster)

2. In thinking about the last 12 months, how many of those days would you say you had more than **1 or more** foster pets in your home?
   - Most of the time: 81 to 100%
   - A majority of the time: 61 to 80%
   - Around half the time: 41 to 61%
   - Some of the time: 21 to 40%
   - A little of the time: 1 to 20%

3. Did you foster any **litters** of kittens or puppies over the last 12 months?
   - No
   - Yes

4. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many litters of pets did you foster?
   - _____ # of litters of kittens _____ total kittens in the litters (best guess)
   - _____ # of litters of puppies _____ total puppies in the litters (best guess)

5. Over the course of the last 12 months, **excluding litters**, how many pets did you foster?
   - # of kittens/cats
   - # of puppies/dogs
   - # of other animals

6. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many pets did you foster?
   - # of kittens/cats
   - # of puppies/dogs
   - # of other animals

7. What types of pets are you willing to provide foster care to (check all that apply)?
   - Healthy pets
   - Kittens or puppies under 9 weeks
   - Pets with medical issues/problems
   - Pets with behavior issues/problems
   - Pets suffering from behavioral deterioration in shelter
   - Other (please explain)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the training that you received from your organization.

If you did not receive any training, please select N/A.

8. I received adequate training on: basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - N/A

9. I received adequate training on: healthcare/medical topics (e.g., routine/preventative care, identifying and caring for medical problems, protocol for obtaining veterinary care)
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- N/A

10. I received adequate training on: adoption of pets (e.g., promoting pets, the process for adoptions)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - N/A

11. Do you have any other comments about the training you received from your organization?
    - (Text entry)

12. I feel connected to my organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

13. I feel supported by my organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

14. How likely are you to continue fostering with this organization in the future?
    - Very unlikely
    - Unlikely
    - Neither unlikely or likely
    - Likely
    - Very likely

15. IF VERY UNLIKELY OR UNLIKELY: Why are you very unlikely/unlikely to continue fostering with this organization?
    - (Text entry)

16. IF VERY LIKELY OR LIKELY: Why are you very likely/likely to continue fostering with this organization?
    - (Text entry)

17. IF VERY LIKELY OR LIKELY: What does your organization do/provide that makes you choose to foster pets for them?

18. People stop fostering for any number of reasons. Let's say a day comes that you decide to stop fostering. What do you think could lead you to make that decision?
    - (Text entry)

19. Is there anything your organization can do to prevent you from leaving/not fostering for them (either related to what you wrote above or in general)?
    - (Text entry)

20. In reflecting on why others you know have stopped fostering with this organization, why do you think they stopped? If you do not know any foster caregivers that have stopped fostering with this organization, please write N/A.
    - (Text entry)

21. What do you think the strengths of your organization are?
    - (Text entry)

22. What do you think the weaknesses of your organization are?
    - (Text entry)

23. What suggestions do you have for how your organization could improve their foster care program?
    - (Text entry)

IF "I AM TAKING A BREAK FROM FOSTERING"

The following will ask you questions about your experiences, challenges, and potential solutions as a foster caregiver.

**When answering these questions, please think of "this/the organization" as the organization (shelter, rescue group, etc.) that you are taking a break from.

1. How long have you been on a break from foster caregiving?
    - Less than 3 months
    - 4-6 months
    - 6 months-less than 1 year
    - 1-2 years
    - 2+ years

2. How would you characterize your level of foster service before your break?
    - Seasonal foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered at certain times of the year, like summer, but not others)
    - One-time foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered one time)
    - Every-once-in-a-while foster caregiver (i.e. I foster a pet intermittently but not regularly)

- Frequent foster caregiver (i.e. I provided foster care almost continuously or continuously, as long as there were pets available to foster)

3. In thinking about the 12 months before you took your break, how many of those days would you say you had more than **1 or more** foster pets in your home?
   - A little of the time: 1 to 20%
   - Some of the time: 21 to 40%
   - Around half the time: 41 to 61%
   - A majority of the time: 61 to 80%
   - Most of the time: 81 to 100%

4. Did you foster any **litters** of kittens or puppies over the last 12 months before your break?
   - No
   - Yes

5. Over the course of the 12 months before your break, how many litters of pets did you foster?
   - _____ # of litters of kittens _____ total kittens in the litters (best guess)
   - _____ # of litters of puppies _____ total puppies in the litters (best guess)

6. Over the course of the 12 months before your break, **excluding litters**, how many pets did you foster?
   - # of kittens/cats
   - # of puppies/dogs
   - # of other animals

7. Over the course of the 12 months before your break, how many pets did you foster?
   - # of kittens/cats
   - # of puppies/dogs
   - # of other animals

8. What types of pets were/are you willing to provide foster care to (check all that apply)?
   - Healthy pets
   - Kittens or puppies under 9 weeks
   - Pets with medical issues/problems
   - Pets with behavior issues/problems
   - Pets suffering from behavioral deterioration in shelter
   - Other (please explain)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the training that you received from your organization.

If you did not receive any training, please select N/A.

9. I received adequate training on: basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - N/A

10. I received adequate training on: healthcare/medical topics (e.g., routine/preventative care, identifying and caring for medical problems, protocol for obtaining veterinary care)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - N/A

11. I received adequate training on: adoption of pets (e.g., promoting pets, the process for adoptions)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - N/A

12. Do you have any other comments about the training you received from the organization?
    - (Text entry)

13. I felt connected to this organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

14. I felt supported by this organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

15. Why are you taking a break from foster caregiving?

- (Text entry)

16. How long do you anticipate your break from foster caregiving being?
    - Less than 3 months
    - 4-6 months
    - 6 months-less than 1 year
    - 1-2 years
    - 2+ years
    - I do not intend on returning to foster caregiving with this organization

17. How likely are you to foster another pet from **this** organization?
    - Very unlikely
    - Unlikely
    - Neither unlikely or likely
    - Likely
    - Very likely

18. IF VERY UNLIKELY OR UNLIKELY: Why are you very unlikely/unlikely to foster a pet from this organization?
    - (Text entry)

19. IF VERY LIKELY OR LIKELY: Why are you very likely/likely to foster a pet from this organization?
    - (Text entry)

20. How likely are you to foster another pet from **another** organization?
    - Very unlikely
    - Unlikely
    - Neither unlikely or likely
    - Likely
    - Very likely

21. Is there anything the organization can do to prevent you from leaving for good?
    - (Text entry)

22. What do you think the strengths of the organization are?
    - (Text entry)

23. What do you think the weaknesses of the organization are?
    - (Text entry)

24. What suggestions do you have for how the organization could improve their foster care program?
    - (Text entry)

IF "NO, I AM NO LONGER A FOSTER CAREGIVER BUT I WAS" (EX-FOSTER CAREGIVER)

The following will ask you questions about your experiences, challenges, and potential solutions you had as a foster caregiver.

**When answering these questions, please think about "the/this organization" as the last organization that you were a foster caregiver for.

1. How long has it been since you last provided foster care for the organization you most recently fostered for?
   - Less than 6 months ago
   - 6 months- less than 1 year ago
   - 1-2 years ago
   - 2+ years ago

2. How did you characterize your level of foster service?
   - Seasonal foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered at certain times of the year, like summer, but not others)
   - One-time foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered one time)
   - Every-once-in-a-while foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered a pet intermittently but not regularly)
   - Frequent foster caregiver (i.e. I provided foster care almost continuously or continuously, as long as there were pets available to foster)

3. In thinking about the last 12 months, how many of those days would you say you had more than **1 or more** foster pets in your home?
   - Most of the time: 81 to 100%
   - A majority of the time: 61 to 80%
   - Around half the time: 41 to 61%
   - Some of the time: 21 to 40%
   - A little of the time: 1 to 20%

4. Did you foster any **litters** of kittens or puppies over the last 12 months?
   - No
   - Yes

5. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many litters of pets did you foster?
   - _____ # of litters of kittens _____ total kittens in the litters (best guess)
   - _____ # of litters of puppies_____ total puppies in the litters (best guess)

6. Over the course of the last 12 months, **excluding litters**, how many pets did you foster?
   - # of kittens/cats
   - # of puppies/dogs
   - # of other animals

7. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many pets did you foster?
   - # of kittens/cats

- # of puppies/dogs
- # of other animals

8. What types of pets were you willing to provide foster care to (check all that apply)?
   - Healthy pets
   - Kittens or puppies under 9 weeks
   - Pets with medical issues/problems
   - Pets with behavior issues/problems
   - Pets suffering from behavioral deterioration in shelter
   - Other (please explain)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the training that you received from the organization.

If you did not receive any training, please select "no training was received on this topic"

9. I received adequate training on: basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - No training was received on this topic

10. I received adequate training on: healthcare/medical topics (e.g., routine/preventative care, identifying and caring for medical problems, protocol for obtaining veterinary care)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - No training was received on this topic

11. I received adequate training on: adoption of pets (e.g., promoting pets, the process for adoptions)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - No training was received on this topic

12. Do you have any other comments about the training you received from the organization?
    - (Text entry)

13. I felt connected to this organization.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

14. I felt supported by this organization.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

15. Why did you decide to stop fostering with this organization? Please list the reason(s) below.
   - (Text entry)

16. In reflecting on why others you know have stopped fostering with this organization, why do you think they stopped?
   - (Text entry)

17. Is there anything the organization could have done to prevent you from leaving (either related to what you wrote above or in general)?
   - (Text entry)

18. What do you think the strengths of the fostering organization were?
   - (Text entry)

19. What do you think the weaknesses of the fostering organization were?
   - (Text entry)

20. What suggestions do you have for how the organization could improve their foster care program?
   - (Text entry)

21. How likely are you to return to fostering with this organization in the future?
   - Very unlikely
   - Unlikely
   - Neither unlikely or likely
   - Likely
   - Very likely

22. How likely are you to foster for another organization in the future?
   - Very unlikely
   - Unlikely

- Neither unlikely or likely
- Likely
- Very likely

DEMOGRAPHICS—CURRENT, ON A BREAK, AND EX FOSTER CAREGIVERS

The following questions will ask you for some information about yourself—please remember, this information will not be used in conjunction with your responses for any sort of identification. Rather, we want to get an idea of who foster caregivers are as a large group.

1. What is your age?
   - 18-25
   - 26-45
   - 46-65
   - 66+
   - Prefer not to answer

2. What is your current employment status?
   - Working full-time
   - Working part-time
   - Unemployed
   - Retired
   - Other (please explain)
   - Prefer not to answer

3. Which of the following categories best describe(s) your gender identity? Please select any/all that apply.
   - Female
   - Male
   - Transgender
   - Prefer not to answer

4. Which of the following best describes your housing situation? Please select any/all that apply.
   - Own
   - Rent
   - Live with family, friends
   - Other (please explain)
   - Prefer not to answer

5. How many people (humans) live your home (including yourself?)
   - (Text entry)

6. Do/did you have any personal pets while fostering? Please select any/all that apply and indicate the number.
   - Dog(s) ___

- Cat(s) ___
- Bird(s) ___
- Pocket Pet(s) (hamster, guinea pig, mice, etc.) ___
- Other (please list)
- No, I don't/didn't have any pets when I fostered

Thank you for taking our survey about your foster caregiving experiences.

Would you be willing to take a future survey about foster caregiving in the next couple months? This will be a slightly larger scale survey where we will ask more detailed questions so we can really learn about the fostering experience as well as what foster organizations can do to improve the experience. If so, please enter your email address below. *Note that your email address will immediately be disconnected from your survey responses.

Would you be willing to take a future survey about foster caregiving in the next couple months? This will be a slightly larger scale survey where we will ask more detailed questions so we can really learn about the fostering experience as well as what foster organizations can do to improve the experience. If so, please enter your email address below. *Note that your email address will immediately be disconnected from your survey responses.

If you would like to be entered to win one of 5 $20 Visa gift cards for the survey you have just taken, please enter your email address below. *Note that your email address will immediately be disconnected from your survey responses.

Appendix C: Interviews with Foster Program Leaders

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today—I know how busy foster organization leaders can be!

I'm currently working in conjunction with Maddie's Fund, alongside my advisor Dr. Steven Rogelberg at UNC-Charlotte, to further understand foster caregiver turnover. Broadly, we're interested in the reasons for foster caregiver turnover, what organizations can to do prevent this turnover, and better understanding a "profile" of foster caregivers who leave organizations.

Thus far, we've conducted a literature search to see what research has been done on foster turnover and what scholars understand; we had a hard time finding academic literature on animal caregivers specifically, but we did find some broader literature on turnover and actually had some luck with human foster literature as well. This literature search informed the pilot survey we created to better get our arms around what is going on. In this pilot survey we were able to get 230+ responses and we asked them lots of open-ended questions about why they love fostering if they're currently a foster, what might force them to leave, why they did leave if they're an ex-foster, and we even found a lot of folks taking a break from fostering so we asked them more about their reasoning for that break.

While we did get a lot of useful information from our pilot survey, we are now turning to leaders of foster organizations like yourself to gather some additional insight. We hope that you'll be able to fill in some gaps that we have, add your opinion to what we think we're hearing, and ultimately inform our larger scale survey which we hope to create very soon from a synthesis of all of this information.

1. First, can you tell me a bit more about your organization and your role?

2. There are tons of reasons that people are foster caregivers. What do you think are the top reasons that your foster caregivers continue to foster?

3. What does your organization do to keep your foster caregivers active?

4. People stop fostering for any number of reasons. Can you tell me a bit about why you think you've had foster caregivers leave?

5. We had a surprising number of folks indicate that they are "just taking a break" from foster caregiving on our pilot survey. Do you have foster caregivers who take a break? If so, can you tell me a bit more about what that looks like?

6. Finally, how large of a role do you think training plays in whether or not foster caregivers turnover?

Appendix D: Copy of Full Survey

Below are some questions about your role as a foster caregiver, the organization you work/worked for, and the challenges you face/have faced as a foster caregiver. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability and remember that your answers are **confidential**—you will not be asked to enter your name and individual responses will never be shared with any specific organization. Instead, our intent is to better understand foster caregivers and the challenges they face as a collective.

The survey should take you about 15 minutes to complete. At the end, you will be given the option to give your email address to be entered in a random drawing to win one of 20 $25 Visa gift cards in exchange for your participation.

- Are you currently a foster caregiver?
- Yes, I have a foster pet or I am waiting on a foster pet
- I have decided to take a break from fostering
- No, I am no longer a foster caregiver, but I was
- No, I have never been a foster caregiver

IF "YES, I HAVE A FOSTER PET OR AM WAITING ON A FOSTER PET" (CURRENTLY FOSTER CAREGIVER):

The following will ask you questions about your experiences, challenges, and potential solutions as a foster caregiver.

**When answering these questions, please think of "my organization" or "this/the organization" as the organization (shelter, rescue group, etc.) that you are currently a foster caregiver for.

1. How do you characterize your level of foster service?
   - Seasonal foster caregiver (i.e. I foster at certain times of the year, like summer, but not others)
   - One-time foster caregiver (i.e. I am fostering a pet now but don't plan on fostering in the future)
   - Every-once-in-a-while foster caregiver (i.e. I foster a pet intermittently but not regularly)
   - Frequent foster caregiver (i.e. I provide foster care almost continuously or continuously, as long as there are pets available to foster)

2. In thinking about the last 12 months, how many of those days would you say you had more than **1 or more** foster pets in your home?
   - Most of the time: 81 to 100%
   - A majority of the time: 61 to 80%
   - Around half the time: 41 to 60%
   - Some of the time: 21 to 40%
   - A little of the time: 1 to 20%

3. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **litters of kittens** did you foster?
   - 0
   - 1-3
   - 4-6
   - 7-9
   - 10 or more

4. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **total kittens and/or adult cats** did you foster?
   - 1-10
   - 11-20
   - 21-30
   - 31 or more

5. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **litters of puppies** did you foster?
   - 0
   - 1-3
   - 4-6
   - 7-9
   - 10 or more

6. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **total puppies and/or adult dogs** did you foster?
   - 1-10
   - 11-20
   - 21-30
   - 31 or more

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the training that you received from your organization.

If you did not receive any training, please select "I did not receive training on this topic"

7. I received adequate training on: basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - I did not receive training on this topic

8. I received adequate training on: basic care and feeding (e.g. routine care, proper feeding techniques)
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I did not receive training on this topic

9. I received adequate training on: healthcare/medical topics (e.g., preventative care, identifying and caring for medical problems, common diseases, protocol for obtaining veterinary care)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - I did not receive training on this topic

10. I received adequate training on: adoption of pets (e.g., promoting pets, the process for adoptions)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - I did not receive training on this topic

11. I feel supported by my organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

12. Communication with volunteers seems to be good at this organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

13. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

14. I feel appreciated at this organization.
    - Strongly disagree

- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. I feel that my input is valued at the organization where I volunteer.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

16. I believe my organization has adequate financial resources ($$) to effectively run a foster program.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know

17. How likely are you to continue fostering with this organization in the future?
- Not at all likely
- A little likely
- Somewhat likely
- Likely
- Very likely

18. (IF LIKELY/VERY LIKELY) Why are you likely/very likely to continue fostering with this organization?
- I enjoy fostering
- I want to do what I can to save pets' lives
- I believe in my organization's mission
- I enjoy working with the staff members and/or the other volunteers
- I feel like fostering is the right thing to do
- My organization makes it easy to foster

19. (IF LIKELY/VERY LIKELY TO #23) What is the top reason that you are likely/very likely to continue fostering with this organization? (Please select one; if it's another reason, click "other" and please explain)
- I enjoy fostering
- I want to do what I can to save pets' lives
- I believe in my organization's mission
- I enjoy working with the staff members and/or the other volunteers
- I feel like fostering is the right thing to do
- My organization makes it easy to foster
- Other (please explain)

20. In your own words, if you were asked by your foster organization for 3 pieces of advice to improve retention of fosters, what would you say?
    - Open-ended

21. From some research we have done, we know that people stop fostering for any number of reasons. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that **you** might stop fostering because of the following reasons.
    - Schedule does not allow for foster caregiving
    - Cost
    - If I move
    - Too many "foster fails" (i.e. you've adopted too many of the animals yourself)
    - Lack of organizational support
    - Foster animal(s) incompatible with home pet(s)
    - Burnout
    - Destruction or damage to property
    - If I were to have a bad experience with a foster animal

22. What is the top reason that you might stop fostering (please select one; if it's another reason, click "other" and please explain)?
    - Schedule does not allow for foster caregiving
    - Cost
    - If I move
    - Too many "foster fails" (i.e. you've adopted too many of the animals yourself)
    - Lack of organizational support
    - Foster animal(s) incompatible with home pet(s)
    - Burnout
    - Too many sad outcomes
    - Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)
    - If I were to have a bad experience with a foster animal
    - Other (please explain)

23. We also know that there are a number of things that organizations can do to keep their foster caregivers from leaving. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following changes your organization could make could prevent you from leaving (if you were hypothetically considering leaving).
    - More training
    - Cover more of the cost
    - Improve communication
    - Decrease friction between volunteers and staff
    - Assist with "adopting out" the animals more/faster

24. What is the top change your organization could do to prevent you from hypothetically leaving (please select one; if it's something else, click "other" and please explain)?
    - More training
    - Cover more of the cost
    - Improve communication

- Decrease friction between volunteers and staff
- Assist with "adopting out" the animals more/faster
- Other (please explain)

25. Have you been a foster caregiver at another organization before the one that you currently volunteer for?
- Yes
- No

26. (IF YES) How long were you a foster caregiver at the last organization you worked with?
- Less than 3 months
- 4-6 months
- 6 months-less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2+ years

27. (IF YES) Think about the last organization you were a foster caregiver for, before your current organization. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following reasons caused you to leave that organization.
- Schedule no longer allowed for foster caregiving
- Cost
- Moved away
- Too many "foster fails" (i.e. adopted too many of the animals yourself)
- Lack of organizational support
- Foster animal(s) were incompatible with home pet(s)
- Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)
- Bad experience with foster animal
- Burnout

28. (IF YES) What is the top reason that you left this previous organization (please select one; if it's something else, click "other" and please explain)?
- Schedule no longer allowed for foster caregiving
- Cost
- Moved away
- Too many "foster fails" (i.e. adopted too many of the animals yourself)
- Lack of organizational support
- Foster animal(s) were incompatible with home pet(s)
- Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)
- Bad experience with foster animal
- Burnout
- Other (please explain)

The following questions are about a new concept that we are exploring: "foster teams."

Foster teams are groups of volunteers working together to coordinate and implement all aspects of the care, marketing and adoption of foster pets (with the support of the organization of course). Here are a few more details:
- **The workload of fostering a pet is generally divided: approximately 4-6 people share the responsibilities instead of a single person/couple**
- **Volunteers are empowered to select roles based on skill and interest**
    - **Volunteers can spend more time doing tasks that interest them and less time doing the tasks that don't**
    - **You can support the fostering process, but do not necessarily have to house a pet if that is not of interest. For example, if you are talented at taking photos, you could be the team photographer. If you prefer to do adoption events, you can do adoption events, etc. Other roles include team coordinator, transport specialist, bio writer etc. There would also be a primary foster and a backup foster on the team in order to share the responsibility of housing the pet**
    - **While the team would have a volunteer team leader/coordinator, the team would work together to make this a positive and productive experience for the pet and the other members of the team**
    - **Team communication can be done in person, but will more likely occur via phone, email, and private social media type interfaces**
    - **Note, a shelter can have both a traditional foster program and a foster team program occurring at once – having one does not mean you can't have the other. Different volunteers could pick what most interests them**

The ultimate hope, but we would like your opinion, is that teams can help save more animals, result in less foster burnout, greater engagement of volunteers, and overall be a more satisfying experience for team members.

Now that you've read a bit about foster teams, please answer the following few questions.

29. What is your own overall reaction to the concept of foster teams?
- Dislike a great deal
- Dislike
- Neither like nor dislike
- Like
- Like a great deal

30. In your own words, please explain your response to your overall reaction to the concept of foster teams above.
- Open-ended

31. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I think this is a concept that could work well for some people/organizations

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

32. In your own words, please explain your response to whether foster teams could work for some people/organizations.
    - Open-ended

33. Would you have any interest in being on a foster team at some point?
    - Definitely not
    - Probably not
    - Might or might not
    - Probably yes
    - Definitely yes

34. In your own words, please explain your response to whether you would have interest in being on a foster team at some point.
    - Open-ended

35. In general, do you think the foster team concept could lead to more overall adoptions?
    - Definitely not
    - Probably not
    - Might or might not
    - Probably yes
    - Definitely yes

36. In general, do you think the foster team concept could lead to more people being involved in fostering?
    - Definitely not
    - Probably not
    - Might or might not
    - Probably yes
    - Definitely yes

37. In general, do you think the foster team concept could lead to more satisfaction among volunteers supporting fostering?
    - Definitely not
    - Probably not
    - Might or might not
    - Probably yes
    - Definitely yes

38. In general, do you think the foster team concept could lead to more retention of volunteers supporting fostering?
    - Definitely not

- Probably not
- Might or might not
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

39. In general, do you think the foster team concept could lead to happier and healthier pets?
    - Definitely not
    - Probably not
    - Might or might not
    - Probably yes
    - Definitely yes

IF "I AM TAKING A BREAK FROM FOSTERING"

The following will ask you questions about your experiences, challenges, and potential solutions as a foster caregiver.

**When answering these questions, please think of "this/the organization" as the organization (shelter, rescue group, etc.) that you are taking a break from.

1. How long have you been on a break from foster caregiving?
    - Less than 3 months
    - 4-6 months
    - 6 months-less than 1 year
    - 1-2 years
    - 2+ years

2. How would you characterize your level of foster service before your break?
    - Seasonal foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered at certain times of the year, like summer, but not others)
    - One-time foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered one time)
    - Every-once-in-a-while foster caregiver (i.e. I foster a pet intermittently but not regularly)
    - Frequent foster caregiver (i.e. I provided foster care almost continuously or continuously, as long as there were pets available to foster)

3. In thinking about the 12 months before you took your break, how many of those days would you say you had more than **1 or more** foster pets in your home?
    - A little of the time: 1 to 20%
    - Some of the time: 21 to 40%
    - Around half the time: 41 to 60%
    - A majority of the time: 61 to 80%
    - Most of the time: 81 to 100%

4. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **litters of kittens** did you foster?
    - 0

- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10 or more

5. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **total kittens and/or adult cats** did you foster?
    - 1-10
    - 11-20
    - 21-30
    - 31 or more

6. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **litters of puppies** did you foster?
    - 0
    - 1-3
    - 4-6
    - 7-9
    - 10 or more

7. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **total puppies and/or adult dogs** did you foster?
    - 1-10
    - 11-20
    - 21-30
    - 31 or more

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the training that you received from the organization.

If you did not receive any training, please select "I did not receive training on this topic."

8. I received adequate training on: basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - I did not receive training on this topic

9. I received adequate training on: basic care and feeding (e.g. routine care, proper feeding techniques)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree

- Strongly agree
- I did not receive training on this topic

10. I received adequate training on: healthcare/medical topics (e.g., preventative care, identifying and caring for medical problems, common diseases, protocol for obtaining veterinary care)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - I did not receive training on this topic

11. I received adequate training on: adoption of pets (e.g., promoting pets, the process for adoptions)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - I did not receive training on this topic

12. I felt connected to this organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

13. I felt supported by this organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

14. Communication with volunteers seemed to be good at this organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

15. This organization had a great deal of personal meaning for me.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree

- Agree
- Strongly agree

16. I felt appreciated at this organization.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

17. I felt that my input is valued at the organization where I volunteered.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

18. I believe this organization had adequate financial resources ($$) to effectively run a foster program.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - Don't know

19. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following reasons have caused you to take a break from foster caregiving.
    - Current schedule does not allow for fostering/too busy (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.)
    - Focusing on my own pets
    - Bad experience with last foster animal
    - Last foster animal was a foster fail (i.e. you adopted the last animal you fostered)
    - Waiting for the "right" foster
    - Living situation does not allow for fostering right now (i.e. moving, remodeling)
    - Lack of organizational support
    - Cost
    - Too many sad outcomes
    - Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)

20. What is the top reason that you are taking a break from foster caregiving?
    - Current schedule does not allow for fostering/too busy (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.)
    - Focusing on my own pets
    - Bad experience with last foster animal

- Last foster animal was a foster fail (i.e. you adopted the last animal you fostered)
- Waiting for the "right" foster
- Living situation does not allow for fostering right now (i.e. moving, remodeling)
- Lack of organizational support
- Cost
- Other (please explain)

21. How long do you anticipate your break from foster caregiving being?
    - Less than 3 months
    - 4-6 months
    - 6 months-less than 1 year
    - 1-2 years
    - 2+ years
    - I do not intend on returning to foster caregiving with this organization

22. How likely are you to foster another pet from **this** organization?
    - Not at all likely
    - A little likely
    - Somewhat likely
    - Likely
    - Very likely

23. How likely are you to foster another pet from **another** organization?
    - Not at all likely
    - A little likely
    - Somewhat likely
    - Likely
    - Very likely

24. In your own words, if you were asked by this foster organization for 3 pieces of advice to improve retention of fosters, what would you say?
    - Open-ended

25. We know that there are a number of things that organizations can do to keep their foster caregivers from leaving. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following changes the organization could make could prevent you from leaving for good?
    - More training
    - Cover more of the cost
    - Improve communication
    - Decrease friction between volunteers and staff
    - Assist with "adopting out" the animals more/faster

26. What is the top change the organization could make to prevent you from leaving for good?
    - More training

- Cover more of the cost
- Improve communication
- Decrease friction between volunteers and staff
- Assist with "adopting out" the animals more/faster
- Other (please explain)

27. Have you been a foster caregiver at another organization **before** the one that you currently taking a break from?
    - Yes
    - No

28. (IF YES) How long were you a foster caregiver at the last organization you worked with?
    - Less than 3 months
    - 4-6 months
    - 6 months-less than 1 year
    - 1-2 years
    - 2+ years

29. (IF YES) Think about the last organization you were a foster caregiver for (before the one you're on a break from). Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following reasons caused you to leave that organization.
    - Schedule no longer allowed for foster caregiving
    - Cost
    - Moved away
    - Too many "foster fails" (i.e. adopted too many of the animals yourself)
    - Lack of organizational support
    - Foster animal(s) were incompatible with home pet(s)
    - Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)
    - Bad experience with foster animal
    - Burnout

30. (IF YES) What is the top reason that you left this previous organization?
    - Schedule no longer allowed for foster caregiving
    - Cost
    - Moved away
    - Too many "foster fails" (i.e. adopted too many of the animals yourself)
    - Lack of organizational support
    - Foster animal(s) were incompatible with home pet(s)
    - Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)
    - Bad experience with foster animal
    - Burnout
    - Other (please explain)

IF "NO, I AM NO LONGER A FOSTER CAREGIVER BUT I WAS" (EX-FOSTER CAREGIVER)

The following will ask you questions about your experiences, challenges, and potential solutions you had as a foster caregiver.

**When answering these questions, please think about "the/this organization" as the last organization that you were a foster caregiver for.

1. How long has it been since you last provided foster care for the organization you most recently fostered for?
   - Less than 6 months ago
   - 6 months- less than 1 year ago
   - 1-2 years ago
   - 2+ years ago

2. How did you characterize your level of foster service?
   - Seasonal foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered at certain times of the year, like summer, but not others)
   - One-time foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered one time)
   - Every-once-in-a-while foster caregiver (i.e. I fostered a pet intermittently but not regularly)
   - Frequent foster caregiver (i.e. I provided foster care almost continuously or continuously, as long as there were pets available to foster)

3. In thinking about the last 12 months, how many of those days would you say you had more than **1 or more** foster pets in your home?
   - Most of the time: 81 to 100%
   - A majority of the time: 61 to 80%
   - Around half the time: 41 to 60%
   - Some of the time: 21 to 40%
   - A little of the time: 1 to 20%

4. In thinking about the 12 months before you took your break, how many of those days would you say you had more than **1 or more** foster pets in your home?
   - A little of the time: 1 to 20%
   - Some of the time: 21 to 40%
   - Around half the time: 41 to 61%
   - A majority of the time: 61 to 80%
   - Most of the time: 81 to 100%

5. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **litters of kittens** did you foster?
   - 0
   - 1-3
   - 4-6
   - 7-9
   - 10 or more

6. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **total kittens and/or adult cats** did you foster?

- 1-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31 or more

7. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **litters of puppies** did you foster?
    - 0
    - 1-3
    - 4-6
    - 7-9
    - 10 or more

8. Over the course of the last 12 months, how many **total puppies and/or adult dogs** did you foster?
    - 1-10
    - 11-20
    - 21-30
    - 31 or more

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the training that you received from the organization.

If you did not receive any training, please select "I did not receive training on this topic"

9. I received adequate training on: basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - I did not receive training on this topic

10. I received adequate training on: basic care and feeding (e.g. routine/preventative care and proper feeding techniques)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - I did not receive training on this topic

11. I received adequate training on: healthcare/medical topics (e.g., identifying and caring for medical problems, protocol for obtaining veterinary care)
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I did not receive training on this topic

12. I received adequate training on: adoption of pets (e.g., promoting pets, the process for adoptions)
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I did not receive training on this topic

13. I felt connected to this organization.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

14. I felt supported by this organization.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. Communication with volunteers seemed to be good at this organization.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

16. This organization had a great deal of personal meaning for me.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

17. I felt appreciated at this organization.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree

- Strongly agree

18. I felt that my input is valued at the organization where I volunteered.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

19. I believe the organization had adequate financial resources ($$) to effectively run a foster program.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
    - Don't know

20. In your own words, if you were asked by the foster organization for 3 pieces of advice to improve retention of fosters, what would you say?
    - Open-ended

21. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following reasons caused you to leave the organization?
    - Schedule did not allow for fostering/too busy (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.)
    - Was focusing on my own pets
    - Bad experience with last foster animal
    - Last foster animal was a foster fail (i.e. you adopted the last animal you fostered)
    - Living situation did not allow for fostering at the time (i.e. moving, remodeling)
    - Lack of organizational support
    - Cost
    - Too many sad outcomes
    - Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)

22. What is the top reason that you left this organization?
    - Schedule did not allow for fostering/too busy (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.)
    - Was focusing on my own pets
    - Bad experience with last foster animal
    - Last foster animal was a foster fail (i.e. you adopted the last animal you fostered)
    - Living situation did not allow for fostering at the time (i.e. moving, remodeling)
    - Lack of organizational support
    - Cost
    - Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)

- Other (please explain)

23. We know that there are a number of things that organizations can do to keep their foster caregivers from leaving. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following changes the organization could have made would have prevented you from leaving.
    - More training
    - Cover more of the cost
    - Improve communication
    - Decrease friction between volunteers and staff
    - Assist with "adopting out" the animals more/faster

24. What is the top change the organization could have made to prevent you from leaving?
    - More training
    - Cover more of the cost
    - Improve communication
    - Decrease friction between volunteers and staff
    - Assist with "adopting out" the animals more/faster
    - Other (please explain)

25. In your own words, if you were asked by this foster organization for 3 pieces of advice to improve retention of fosters, what would you say?

26. How likely are you to return to fostering with this organization in the future?
    - Not at all likely
    - A little likely
    - Somewhat likely
    - Likely
    - Very likely

27. How likely are you to foster for another organization in the future?
    - Not at all likely
    - A little likely
    - Somewhat likely
    - Likely
    - Very likely

DEMOGRAPHICS—CURRENT, ON A BREAK, AND EX FOSTER CAREGIVERS ALL ANSWER SAME DEMOS

The following questions will ask you for some information about yourself—please remember, this information will not be used in conjunction with your responses for any sort of identification. Rather, we want to get an idea of who foster caregivers are as a large group.

1. What is your age?

- 18-25
- 26-45
- 46-65
- 66+

2. What is your current employment status?
   - Working full-time
   - Working part-time
   - Unemployed
   - Retired
   - Self-employed (please explain)
   - Other (please explain)

3. (IF WORKING FULL-TIME OR WORKING PART TIME OR SELF-EMPLOYED IN #2) How satisfied are you with your current job?
   - Not at all satisfied
   - A little satisfied
   - Somewhat satisfied
   - Satisfied
   - Very satisfied

4. Which of the following categories best describe(s) your gender identity? Please select any/all that apply.
   - Female
   - Male
   - Transgender
   - Prefer not to answer

5. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
   - Some high school, no diploma
   - High school graduate, diploma, or equivalent
   - Some college credit, no degree
   - Trade/technical/vocational training
   - Associate degree
   - Bachelor's degree
   - Master's degree
   - Professional degree
   - Doctorate degree

6. Which of the following best describes your housing situation? Please select any/all that apply.
   - Own
   - Rent
   - Live with family, friends

7. How many people (humans) live your home (including yourself?)
   - 1-2

- 3-4
- 5-6
- 6+

8. How many children live in your household?
    - 0
    - 1-2
    - 3-4
    - 5+

The following questions are **optional**.

9. Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.
    - Extraverted, enthusiastic
    - Critical, quarrelsome
    - Dependable, self-disciplined
    - Anxious, easily upset
    - Open to new experiences, complex
    - Reserved, quiet
    - Sympathetic, warm
    - Disorganized, careless
    - Calm, emotionally stable
    - Conventional, uncreative

10. The following questions are about working with pets—more specifically **dogs and cats** only.
    - Working with animals feels like my calling in life.
    - It sometimes feels like I was destined to work with animals.
    - Working with animals feels like my niche in life.
    - I am definitely an animal person.
    - My passion for animals goes back to my childhood.
    - I was meant to work with animals.

11. What is your total household income?
    - Less than $25,000
    - $25,000 to $74,999
    - $75,000 to $124,999
    - $125,000 to $174,999
    - $175,000 or more

Thank you for taking our survey about your foster caregiving experiences.

If you would like to be entered to win one of 20 $25 Visa gift cards for the survey you have just taken, please enter your email address below. *Note that your email address will immediately be disconnected from your survey responses.

Appendix E: Correlations between training and other organizational attitudes with propensity to continue fostering

Ex-fosters

	Correlation (*r*) with likelihood to continue fostering with org
Training: Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	.28
Training: Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	.26
Training: Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	.27
Training: Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	.24
I feel **connected** to my organization.	.38
I feel **supported** by my organization.	.45
Communication with volunteers seems to be good at this organization.	.39
This organization has a great deal of **personal meaning** for me.	.39
I feel **appreciated** at this organization.	.43
I feel my **input is valued** at this organization.	.44
I feel this organization has **adequate financial resources** to effectively run a foster program.	.19

Note. All correlations are significant at the *p < .01* level; these are correlations for those that **did** receive fostering

Fosters Taking a Break

	Correlation (*r*) with likelihood to continue fostering with org
Training: Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	.28
Training: Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	.28
Training: Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	.32
Training: Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	.24
I feel **connected** to my organization.	.42
I feel **supported** by my organization.	.51
Communication with volunteers seems to be good at this organization.	.45
This organization has a great deal of **personal meaning** for me.	.37
I feel **appreciated** at this organization.	.50
I feel my **input is valued** at this organization.	.45

I feel this organization has **adequate financial resources** to effectively run a foster program.	.20

Note. All correlations are significant at the *p < .01* level; these are correlations for those that **did** receive fostering

Current Fosters

	Correlation (*r*) with likelihood to continue fostering with org
Training: Basic handling and behavior issues (e.g. house training, aggression, shy pets)	.29
Training: Basic care and feeding (routine care, proper care)	.27
Training: Healthcare/medical (preventative care, identifying/caring for medical problems)	.24
Training: Adoption of pets (promoting pets, the adoption process)	.22
I feel **connected** to my organization.	.50
I feel **supported** by my organization.	.49
Communication with volunteers seems to be good at this organization.	.39
This organization has a great deal of **personal meaning** for me.	.44
I feel **appreciated** at this organization.	.48
I feel my **input is valued** at this organization.	.47
I feel this organization has **adequate financial resources** to effectively run a foster program.	.19

Note. All correlations are significant at the *p < .01* level; these are correlations for those that **did** receive fostering

Appendix F: Volunteer History Questions

In our Phase 4 Final Survey, we included "within-person volunteer history questions"; that is, for those fosters who were taking a break and current fosters, we asked about if they had fostered with another organization and, if so, why they left that organization. We did not ask ex-fosters about this because we thought it would get too confusing to ask them about their previous organization for most of the survey and *then* also ask about their previous organization before that.

We thought that these data could serve as interesting points of comparison to begin to figure out if fosters are leaving organizations for the same reasons repeatedly. However, as will be evident below, we had a **very** large amount of missing data, along with lots of respondents who *did* answer choosing the "other" option.

Fosters Taking a Break

What is the top reason you left your previous organization? Please select one; if it's something else, click "other" and please explain.

	N	%
Current schedule does not allow for fostering (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.)	18	2.4%
Cost	4	.5%
Moved away	6	.8%
Too many **foster fails**	58	7.8%
Lack of **organizational support**	45	6.1%
Foster animal **incompatible** with home pet(s)	4	.5%
Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)	10	1.4%
Bad experience with foster animal	3	.4%
Burnout	76	10.3%
Other (please explain)	22	3.0%
No response/not applicable	493	66.7%
Total	739	100%

Current Fosters

	N	%
Current schedule does not allow for fostering (i.e. work schedule, personal schedule, etc.)	43	1.5%
Cost	27	1.0%
Moved away	202	7.2%
Too many **foster fails**	25	.9%
Lack of **organizational support**	331	11.8%
Foster animal **incompatible** with home pet(s)	9	.3%
Destruction or damage to property from foster animal(s)	28	1.0%
Bad experience with foster animal	8	.3%
Burnout	12	.4%
Other (please explain)	337	12.0%
No response/not applicable	1789	63.6%
Total	2811	100%

➢ For those who said other—across both categories—the most popular reasons were:
  o Saw more need with current organization
  o Foster disagreeing with organizational leadership and/or mission (e.g. issue with a leader, other org not "no kill," felt they were getting too far away from their mission)
  o Actually had a fair amount of respondents say that they did not *leave* the other organization, just no longer fostering with them
  o Location inconvenient

While it is tempting to draw conclusions from these data—that people are not leaving organizations for the same reason—the small sample size who *have* volunteered with another organization who actually answered these questions is just so small

Appendix G: Respondents' suggestions for increasing retention

As part of our final survey, we included an open-ended question that invited respondents to make suggestions for how to improve their organizations' retention of fosters. There were **not** any noticeable differences in the responses between groups; thus, we randomly selected 50 comments to include below.

Open-ended Responses

In your own words, if you were asked by your foster organization for 3 pieces of advice to improve retention of fosters, what would you say?

1. Better communication of the fostering process (what to expect when receiving the foster, medical care, and where we are at in the adoption process) 2. Have a backup for the foster dog/cat in case the foster home does not work out 3. Try not to give another foster dog/cat back to back (ie the day the dog/cat goes on transport and ask if they can immediately take another foster. I think that fosters burnout faster.)
keep open communication, show appreciation and continue to advertise via social media, email etc. about the important need of fosters
Giving a little rest between adoption and new fosters.
I foster for multiple organizations and all have their strong points and their weaknesses. Communication with fosters is always key. Everyone gets busy and fosters can get lost in trying to get questions answered. Remember that fosters are doing this around their work, family, and other commitments so try to make things as simple for them as possible. Make sure to get the animals in foster exposure and encourage adopters to consider the foster animals, don't let them get forgotten
Nothing other than possibly offering local outreach pickup locations as the shelter is a long drive away for some people.
Offering of more opportunities for the foster pets to be seen in the community More specific training sessions on behavior issues
Don't overwhelm a foster with all duties (vet appointments, travel, medication) falling to that individual. I feel sad that some of my fosters did not get good homes, so better screening possibly. Appreciation is a good thing.
I can't think of anything, my organization is the best one I have ever worked with.
Providing reprieve fosters (short term basis) to have available during personal emergencies, time outs when you feel you just need a short break, or during vacation periods,etc. is very helpful. Providing a means to communicate with other fosters for guidance, suggestions etc. Having a director/manager/or other support means who are readily available to answer questions and/or make arrangements for vet care especially during emergency situations.
More organization would be very helpful. It is sometimes hectic when going into the office. If everyone was on the same page, that would be much more efficient. However, I understand that they are short-handed and organization isn't always possible.
Find a good foster fit for the family, do not overwhelm foster family with too many dogs, provide training support
Check in on fosters actively (don't wait for fosters to give reports or ask for help). Force breaks between fosters -- many encourage, but then there are so many dogs that need to be fostered, it is almost impossible to actually take a break. Avoid blaming fosters or adopters when things don't work out with a dog. Sometimes they've done their best and it's just not a good match.
Appreciation of fosters is VITAL.

continued support and assistance makes happy foster carers and happy dogs

Give more training on introductions of new pets, allow the caregiver to pick a foster kitten/cat rather than assigning if possible??

Provide more organized and structured support for fosters. Provide more standard information (and training) that fosters can refer to when necessary. Communicate more and better.

Would love to have had some training. I've had lots of pets through the years & I assume the organization thought I didn't need training. This is my 1st foster, shes 10 years old & blind. I've never had a special needs pet & this is why I needed training. When it's meant to be temporary, it should be. I was told a couple of weeks & it's been months! Don't put guilt trips on fosters about adopting.

More home visits from the foster home coordinator to foster homes to check in and provide moral, physical support.   Help monitor and follow up on health of fosters.   Continue to find and reach out for donations to support foster families.

Provide back-up fosters, make any animal profile updates in a timely manner, emphasize training for both the humans and the animal in their care

good communication with foster families (email/text/FB messages), simple thank yous when fostering is done, being able to follow up on how animal is doing in new home/when grown

It is difficult to say goodbye to an animal you have housed, cared for, and loved. Training and advice on how to handle this grief is needed.

Keep lines of communication open Offer support to the fosters Let the foster have input on what animals they would like to foster

I wouldn't have any. They are there to support their animals 100%. Not only do they provide food, toys and medical they also provide training to make them easier to place.

More training on behavioral issues to expect and how to address Reach out to fosters and check on how the Foster experience is going

Communication, Training, Appreciation.

Let foster families know what happened to their foster pet, and if/when possible, help initiate communication between foster family & adoptive family (i.e. an e-mail to say "foster puppy is doing great") Provide a form for foster family to fill out to give information to potential adopters to help facilitate the best possible adoptive situation

Training for fosters, a foster manual

Respect their feelings more Return messages promptly Basic instructions for beginners

Communication is key, cooperation with continuously changing situations in foster families, and understanding when fosters need a break from fostering.

Better match ups, breaks in between, more training

Communication is key. Don't assume all fosters have basic dog care knowledge Sometimes you have to spend money in order to make money and be able to care for more animals

Let them know that they have a support system in place. Also let them know that if for some reason they cannot keep their foster, that the rescue will quickly respond by getting a new foster.   Keep lines of communication open

Keep up what you are doing.

Really only one thing, and that's to have a better backup system and plan in place if the foster placement isn't working out due to aggression, anxiety, and other issues.

Answer all emails and phone calls

Stop making excuses for why you are not more supportive. Take responsibility for communicating with your foster.

Better training for new fosters in terms of bringing a pet home/what to expect, medical protocols & adoption. More assistance with advertising foster pets for adoption. Consider more than one foster coordinator for such a large organization OR correctly utilize key/experienced appointed volunteers to relieve work directly on foster coordinator which would improve response time for assistance & allow better (more detailed) communication.

Stress how vital it is to have fosters in order to save lives. Tell them up front that sometimes it hurts your heart but the rewards are immeasurable. Always insure them that they are not in this alone, that as a group we always have your back and they are free to call for help or guidance if needed.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate! There are times when I'm fostering, I feel like they've forgotten about me or that I even have their dog. Someone from the organization needs to touch base weekly to address any concerns the foster parents have. I had one foster dog for 6 months and only spoke with the national organization who owned it about 3 times. I was new at fostering and was very experienced with cats, but not dogs. It would have been nice to have more communication from them to see how everything was going.

Promote the animals more frequently. Start a page for foster humans to better promote the animals. If a foster human prefers "seniors" versus "puppies " don't try to guilt them into fostering anything else.

1. Make it easier to contact someone when there is an immediate serious medical problem. 2. Tell the Potential foster that it is a very emotional time when the foster animals have to be given back to be placed for adoption because You have grown to love them while they are in your care. 3. Tell the fosters how they are truly making a difference saving animals that would have died or been put to sleep and that their efforts are educating others about fostering.

They are doing their absolute best; no one could ask more than that!

I need help!! Would be nice to work in a team.

Have a faster process if a foster needs to move a dog.

Lots of support and appreciation. Freedom to say no without guilt at times. Positive attitude toward vets; not anger or frustration that is sometimes evident

No options for temp care except foster boarding and paying

respect their input, stay in open communication, offer full support

The current program is too much of a one size fits all approach. You put your name down and are expected to pick up right away when notified you are assigned a dog. Sometimes, a specific dog you see online makes you want to foster that specific dog. Some people have work schedules that change every week and so availability isn't always static. A little more personalization would be beneficial.

Help with fosters during vacations More help finding homes More advertising

prepare them for the emotional toll fostering takes. prepare them for the hard work of fostering. Fosters are not all fuzzy babies and even fuzzy babies are not always placed quickly. there is a lot of road running to vets, adoption events, getting supplies, etc.

Common themes:
➢ Increase/improve communication
➢ More training
➢ Better job trying to "fit the animal to the foster home"
➢ More appreciation and support (i.e. increase recognition, look for signs of burnout, check-in frequently)
➢ More flexible fostering options (i.e. backup fosters, foster teams)