

Julius, a pit bull mix, shows foster mom Vanessa Smith, of Cinnaminson, a little love.

NANCY ROKOS/PHOTOJOURNALIST

Fostering survival

Caring for rescued animals helps to save lives.

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CORRESPONDENT

When Vanessa Smith, of Cinnaminson, first met Julius at a shelter, he was dirty, limping and had infected bite wounds from dogfights all over his tan-and-white body, requiring a regimen of intravenous drugs.

The young, small pit bull mix was found by the Philadelphia police wandering the streets of Fishtown. He was slated to be euthanized in 24 hours.

That was a few weeks ago. These days, Julius is a lovable and loyal dog being fostered by Smith, who lives with her boyfriend and two dogs, Zoe and BlueBear.

Much has been written about the significance of rescuing animals from shelters (you'll save a life; it's a way to fight against puppy mills; it's a bargain), but unless you've fostered an animal, experts say little is understood about it.

Animal groups say temporarily opening up your home can free up much-needed shelter space, help to socialize a stressed animal, and provide extra nurturing to puppies and kittens, all of which make for easier transitions into permanent homes.

Volunteers tend to be folks who already own a pet. But fostering can also work for those who love animals but don't want the responsibility of raising a pet: Your kids have moved on; you're doing marathons around the country; you spend three months in Tuscany.

Another win for fostering is that the costs pertaining to the rescued animals are taken care of. Animal groups, which receive most of their capital through fundraising and donations, set foster families up with food, treats, bowls, leashes, crates and flea preventive. Medical expenses are also reimbursed.

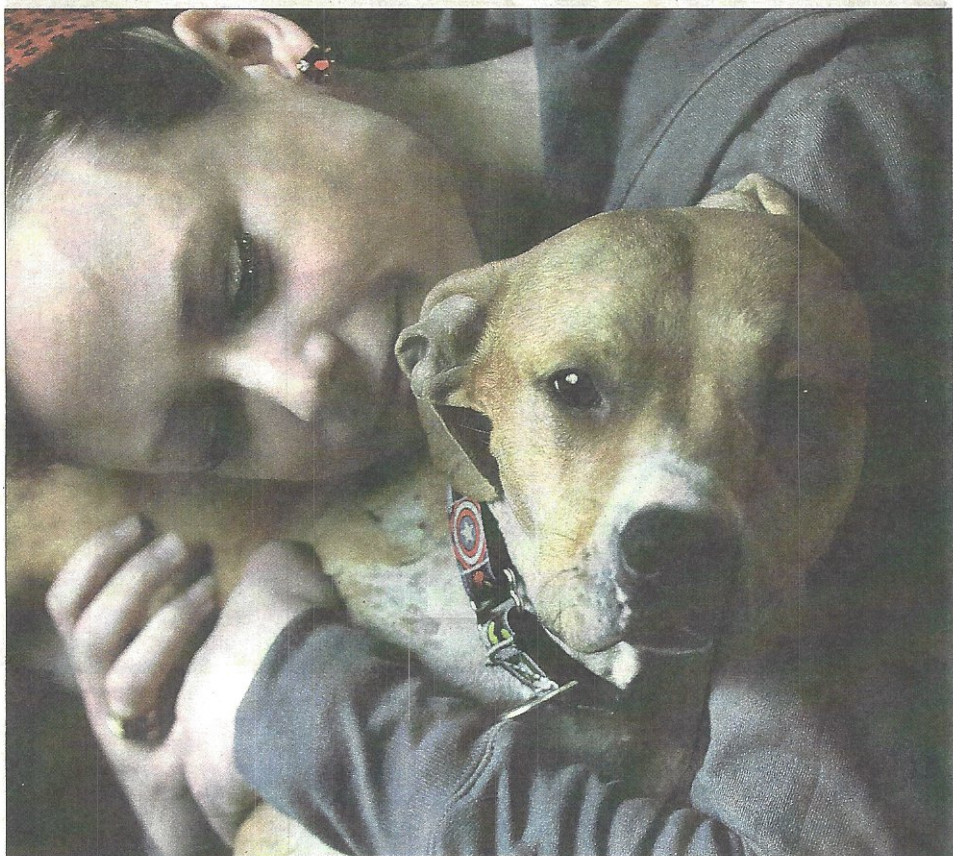


CARL KOSOLA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Blu, who has severe spinal damage after being shot in Georgia, is being fostered by Sherri Smith of One Love Animal Rescue.



NANCY ROKOS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Missy, a senior pit bull terrier mix, gives Kim Mangione a smooch. Mangione, founder of New Life Animal Rescue, has been fostering the dog for four years.



Vanessa Smith snuggles with Julius. She has fostered dogs in the past, and also owns two.

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Rescue

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Foster families must pass screenings, the same as when adopting a pet. Organizations look for compatibility between foster parents and animals.

"I know some people are nervous about fostering. They wonder, 'What will the dog be like?' 'Will it be aggressive?' 'Will it get along with my other dogs?' But giving a dog a second chance at life is rewarding," said Smith, a nurse, who also fostered another dog. She works with the Cherry Hill-based Paw It 4ward Foundation.

"Julius is a great dog, and I think he knows that we saved him."

Sherri Smith (no relation to Vanessa), founder of the Mount Laurel nonprofit One Love Animal Rescue, said that the animal numbers in shelters are staggering and that caring for them can be an impossible task. Fostering eases the burden.

Nearly 8 million animals find themselves in shelters annually. Of those, nearly 3 million are euthanized, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Sherri Smith said the 25 foster families that currently work with her are just a "drop in the bucket" of the help that's needed. Throughout the year, she holds foster care seminars (one was April 7) to instruct potential volunteers. Pit bulls and other so-called "bully" breeds are the hardest to place.

Smith, whose day job is in marketing at a law firm, dreads the summer.

"It's the worst. People go on vacations and surrender their dogs instead of boarding them," she said. "We save them one at a time."

After Taryn Lloyd-Drayton's brother, Joey, died in 2008 from an undiagnosed cardiac arrhythmia, her father adopted three puppies from a shelter "to get himself out of bed" every day. They then decided to rescue 30 dogs and a three-legged cat from a high-kill shelter in the South, which was the beginning of their nonprofit, Joe Joe's Place, named in honor of Joey.

"We had a severe loss and came together," said Lloyd-Drayton, of Medford, noting that they find homes for about 250 animals annually.

None of this is cheap. Fundraising is the cornerstone of saving animals for rescue and foster-care operations. Lloyd-Drayton's first big fundraiser, a bowling event, raised \$8,000. She said she considers her foster volunteers family and expects everyone to help one another, as well as attend bowling and barbecue fundraisers wearing their Joe Joe's Place T-shirts or polo shirts. The main fundraiser will be May 7 at the Medford Lakes Country Club.

Getting too attached to the animals



Blu, who has been equipped with wheels to help him get around, kisses Sherri Smith, of Mount Laurel, his foster mom.

CARL KOSOLA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

they're fostering is one of the biggest reasons people give for not fostering.

"A disabled police officer who fostered for me ended up keeping an akita mix. But the good thing is the dog ended up becoming his service dog," Lloyd-Drayton said.

Kim Mangione, of New Life Animal Rescue in Evesham, has rescued over 400 dogs in four years. She and her family alone have fostered more than 200.

"The ones who tug at my heart

the most are the animals who've been abused," she said.

Mangione said people think they won't be able to foster because they aren't home during the day.

"But most of our foster parents work full time," she said.

When Kathy McGuire, of NJ Aid for Animals, moved to New Jersey in 2003, she couldn't believe all the stray dogs and cats running around in Camden. Out of her house in Winslow, she has

been rescuing and fostering animals for 12 years.

Boxer Bernard Hopkins and Los Angeles Angels centerfielder Mike Trout, a Millville native, have lent their celebrity to McGuire's neutering and spaying campaigns. Her group also runs free vaccination clinics in Camden each summer, sometimes inoculating 400 animals a day.

McGuire said she has had foster volunteers decide to keep the animals they were fostering. When that happens, it usually means the nonprofit loses the individual adoption fees of \$350 to \$400.

"And we might lose the foster home, too," she said.

But it's OK if it's in the best interests of the animal, as in the case of Emily, a blind pit bull who's in a foster-to-own arrangement.

Seven years ago, Emily was seized from a Philadelphia man, who was arrested for animal cruelty. Besides

being severely malnourished and neglected, Emily had to have her eyes surgically removed from untreated glaucoma.

As soon as Emily's emotional scars healed, McGuire said she found a loving environment with her foster mom, who wants to adopt her. Emily's progress has been heartening to McGuire, who said NJ Aid for Animals has agreed to pick up Emily's expenses until her foster mom completes her degree at a community college, when she'll be able to financially care for the dog.

In another twist, McGuire said one volunteer, who couldn't disentangle himself from the dog he was fostering but didn't want to adopt, sent disparaging emails to the dog's potential adopter. Eventually, a come-and-desist order had to be sent to the foster parent.

"It can become a sticky wicket when a foster parent falls in love with a dog and won't give it back," McGuire said.