

Purina-Sponsored Research Unveils Dual Benefits of Animal Foster Care Programs

Studies Highlight Motivations of Foster Caregivers and Potential Health Benefits for Humans

ST. LOUIS, Aug. 6, 2024 /[PRNewswire](#)/ -- New research sponsored by Purina and conducted by Dr. Lauren Powell, Ph.D., a researcher and lecturer of Animal Welfare and Behavior at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, reveals compelling insights into the motivations of foster caregivers and the mutual benefits of foster care programs for both humans and shelter animals.

With more than 6 million animals entering the shelter system in the United States annually, many shelters have implemented foster care programs. These programs place animals in the homes of volunteers who provide temporary housing, reducing stress on the animals, and improving their chances of adoption. Dr. Powell's studies provide a deeper understanding of the motivations behind foster caregiving and explore the potential health benefits for humans.

In Dr. Powell's recently published research [Understanding the Motivations of Foster Caregivers at Animal Shelters](#), the motivations of foster caregivers were evaluated in an effort to improve the foster experience and retention rates.

Research Highlights:

Demographic Insights:

Foster caregiving is most common among younger individuals aged 18–29 years and 30–39 years with some differences in what motivates them to take on the role:

- **Ages 18-29:** This group is more likely to seek companionship, emotional support, and community connections through fostering. They often see fostering as a preliminary step before adoption.
- **Ages 30-39:** In addition to seeking companionship and emotional support, this group values the additional physical activity that fostering requires and has a desire to care for a pet without the permanent responsibility of pet ownership.
- **Ages 50+:** This group of foster caregivers was less motivated by personal benefits than the above age groups and focused largely on the benefits for shelter animals.

Motivations by Pet Ownership Status & Pet Species:

- **Non-Pet Owners:** More likely to foster for companionship, emotional support, or to avoid the full-time responsibility of pet ownership.
- **Pet Owners:** May already receive the companionship and emotional support associated with pet ownership from their current pet, so they are not necessarily seeking those qualities.
- **Dog vs. Cat Foster Caregivers:** Dog foster caregivers are more likely to foster for companionship and exercise while cat foster caregivers have no such expectations.

Dr. Powell's research [A Prospective Study of Mental Wellbeing, Quality of Life, Human-Animal Attachment, and Grief Among Foster Caregivers at Animal Shelters](#), provides support for the continued expansion of foster care programs for the mutual benefit of caregivers and shelter animals.

Research Highlights:

Impacts of Fostering on Quality of Life and Wellbeing

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- While fostering did not significantly improve the mental wellbeing of participants, many reported self-perceived benefits in their overall quality of life: citing love, affection, and companionship from their foster animals as key factors.
- Though some caregivers experienced grief when their foster animal left, the majority adjusted well post-foster care.

Promising Retention Rates:

- A notable 86% of foster caregivers indicated a willingness to continue fostering in the future, highlighting the positive impact and sustainability of these programs.

Dr. Powell's research underscores the importance of understanding foster caregivers' motivations to better match foster animals with suitable caregivers, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and benefits of foster care programs. As part of the Purina Sponsorship for Human-Animal Bond Studies program scientists and pet experts at Purina provide up to \$30,000 in research per project to scientists seeking to study areas of the human-pet bond and improve our collective understanding of the healing power of pets.

With nearly 500 pet nutritionists, veterinarians, behaviorists and other credentialed pet experts on staff, Purina invests more than \$100 million in research each year. This research has led to countless groundbreaking innovations to help pets live, longer, healthier lives.

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Purina promotes responsible pet care through our scientific research, our products, and our support for pet-related organizations. Over the past five years, Purina has contributed more than \$150 million towards organizations that bring, and keep, people and pets together, as well as those that help our communities and environment thrive.

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