

Zero euthanasia for Western Australia utilising foster care program

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Introduction

Saving Animals From Euthanasia or S.A.F.E was founded in Karratha in the Pilbara in February 2003. In only eight years S.A.F.E has developed branches and networks across the state. This has been an amazing journey and we have seen some great leaps forward in the Animal Rescue Industry.

S.A.F.E's vision is "To ensure that no companion animal succumbs to euthanasia purely through lack of somewhere to stay and that optimum quality of life is achieved for all companion animals." Today this vision has been simplified to "Zero Euthanasia" and "Quality of Life". Although we operate in WA we hold this vision for the whole of Australia and believe it's attainable if all sectors of the industry come together and co-operate to achieve it.

A large part of achieving this vision is to change attitudes and beliefs. To challenge the norm and create new standards, and to phase out caged care.

Part of "Quality of Life" for pets is not being sentenced to extended periods of time in a cage, often with a timeline on their heads solely based on available funds or available cage space. S.A.F.E has saved thousands of animals lives, the majority cats and dogs, with no facility whatsoever, no regular or ongoing funding, all through the passion of volunteers and the insight and awareness to tap into Foster Care - homes instead of cages.

S.A.F.E is working with Ranger Services across WA but there is still much more that we can do to progress in the development of a more consistent working relationship. Ranger Services play a pivotal role in the achievement of Zero Euthanasia across Australia and we are grateful for this opportunity to share our visions for the future with those who are in such an important role in making decisions about the future or lack of for the animals who are in our pounds.

S.A.F.E SAVING LIVES – CHALLENGING THE NORM

S.A.F.E is realistic about our world today. Just as human relationships are constantly changing and often for the better, so it is in our companion animal world. "A pet is for life" comes from the ideal rather than the realistic, just as "marriage is for life" is no longer a given. Change in financial position, accommodation, the birth of a child, or many other factors may contribute to the decision to rehome a pet.

Our society has created a stigma about relinquishing pets when circumstances change, often preventing people from taking action which would be of greatest benefit to the pet. Some abandon a pet instead of facing the potential guilt and possible interrogation from Rescue/Veterinary or Ranger Services. SAFE doesn't judge pet relinquishment but is more concerned about finding a solution and doing what is best for the pet.

Often we find that it is a circumstance forced relinquishment and we can take action and offer support to enable a very grateful owner to keep their pet, often proving behavioural help, temporary care or even transport to another state. The potential cost and logistics involved in preventing a forced relinquishment is very small in relation to the cost and logistics involved in taking on and rehoming the pet and by doing so we assist in a positive outcome for both people and their pets.

S.A.F.E focuses on matching pets and people for a long term adoption – not just moving pets on as soon as we can to free up space for another. When pets can be viewed or discussed at length by phone or photos or even videos, potential owners can get to know the pets personality, rather than visiting an institution to view animals in cages, where so often they are waiting on "Death Row". How better the choice adopters are likely to make knowing that any pet they view or enquire about is going to stay in a loved home until a well matched home is found - No more pity or guilt based decisions.

S.A.F.E wants all breeding to stop until supply and demand are a match with our pet companions. We want people to choose a rescue pet rather than purchase a pet from a breeder. There are so many reasons why a rescue pet is a better choice!

There are many ways in which S.A.F.E leads by innovation:

- The utilisation of air freight. With Australian Air Express sponsoring S.A.F.E, our pets can fly anywhere in the country at a reasonable cost. There are no boundaries as long as there is an airport that prospective adopters can access, our pets are not limited to the local area for rehoming.
- For difficult to rehome adult cats (only because there is such an abundance) S.A.F.E even has an in between foster adoption – not used often but it's always a possibility. People who don't want a succession of animals to foster they can take on a cat for that period and return it when they are no longer able to Foster Care.
- Public education to inspire desexing of all cats and dogs and providing support to reach this outcome. SAFE will find a way to ensure an undesexed pet is desexed no matter who covers the cost!
- In our world today with such advanced technology (computer networks) – just as humans find partners and friends through this forum so too do pets find homes. Through the innovative work of SAFE, Pet Rescue and other pet matching services and the support of Air Freight companies such as AAE, animals can be matched to owners across the country. There is also as much potential for websites to assist in matching animals to foster homes as they are already with permanent homes.

- SAFE pets not only stay in homes they often go on outings and family holidays to the beach, camping, etc. Just like a foster child they are a part of family activities. It's a far cry from sitting in a cage until a home can be found or maybe not if their time has run out!
- S.A.F.E works on preventing relinquishment by encouraging many sectors in the community not to take on a permanent pet but to Foster Care instead.

FOSTER CARE – THE WAY FORWARD

In our human world, in the past, those who didn't fit into society or abide by its standards were locked away - placed into institutions! In our world today there has been a huge shift into de-institutionalization. We have taken this concept and applied it to our animal counterparts in the same manner. In recent years we have become aware that being placed in an institution does not benefit those restrained and isolated by it, it is actually damaging both physically and emotionally. The trend is now turning to home-based care, both for our fellow man & for our pets.

Facilities for quarantine and general assessment do need to exist, to ensure pets health and behaviour is appropriate for rehoming. These facilities are for short assessment stays only and most pets will not need to spend more than a day there. These facilities may be purpose built or at a trained and equipped Foster Carers own home.

S.A.F.E is well aware that Foster Care is utilised to an extent across the country, but nowhere near the degree in which it could be and is often utilized only for special needs pets while cages in an institution are still for the majority.

The potential for Foster Care is enormous and it is currently not reaching that potential. A huge percentage of homes could be utilised, even if only on the one occasion. As the awareness and understanding about what's involved in Foster Caring increases, more and more homes are being opened to save lives.

FOSTER CARE BENEFITS

Foster Caring has many benefits for all parties concerned. For the achievement of Zero Euthanasia it eliminates the need for a 'Death Row' and reduces relinquishments in several ways.

It provides the opportunity for anyone to find out what it is really like having a pet in their life. This greatly assists in less relinquishment of pets because there is a percent of new owners who had no idea what to expect from pet ownership or the time and responsibility it requires.

For potential owners a better understanding of individual pets characteristics can result in a personality and lifestyle match between pet and adopter which can result in a lasting adoption.

Foster Care programmes provide the opportunity for more people to contribute to animal welfare and feel part of a society who values the lives of this planets creatures. That all important "Feel Good Factor" for all parties involved in the Foster Care process.

<p>Main Benefits for Rescue Services</p> <p>Cost Effective Solution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No facility costs – set up, running, overheads • Foster Carers often volunteer to cover basic costs (ie food, worming, etc) <p>No "Death Row" as there is no limit to the number of potential Foster Carers.</p> <p>Less relinquishment due to better matches and more aware adopters.</p>	<p>Main Negatives for Rescue Services</p> <p>More co-ordinating and all the logistics involved.</p>
<p>Main Benefits for Carers</p> <p>Trial a pet – "Try before you buy"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allergies are rampant so a family can trial a pet in the household to ensure no one has allergies before committing to a long term adoption. • S.A.F.E allows trial adoptions with a pet people are specifically interested in. Then it can actually be tested rather than guessing if a dog will be ok with the family (both human & pet members) & vice-versa. <p>Parents can test children who want a pet to see if they will keep up their side of the care for the pet and not lose interest.</p> <p>People can have the joy of a pet in their life even if they are not able to commit to a pet long-term.</p>	<p>Main Negatives for Carers</p> <p>Potential Damage to property through Chewing or Digging.</p> <p>Potential risk of aggression or fearful behaviour towards people, other animals, strange noises, etc. Unfortunately we cannot test a pet with every situation it may face in its life but every pet is assessed and any abnormal behaviour is referred to a qualified behaviourist at the early stages.</p>

<p>Main Benefits for Adopters</p> <p>Potential owners can find out so much more about the pet to help them choose a good/lasting match when coming from a home as opposed to a cage.</p> <p>Same benefits as carers:</p> <p>Trial a pet – “Try before you buy”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allergies are rampant so a family can trial a pet in the household to ensure no one has allergies before committing to a long term adoption. • S.A.F.E allows trial adoptions with a pet people are specifically interested in. Then it can actually be tested rather than guessing if a dog will be ok with the family (both human & pet members) & vice-versa. <p>Parents can test children who want a pet to see if they will keep up their side of the care for the pet and not lose interest.</p>	<p>Main Negatives for Adopters</p> <p>Cannot view all available pets in one place.</p> <p>Cannot adopt on the day (impulse buy). Positive for the groups who would be left with the pet when later it is realized that the pet isn't suited and is then relinquished</p>
<p>Main Benefits for Ranger Services</p> <p>Cost Effective Solution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saves kennelling costs • Saves on euthanasia costs • Saves on staffing costs <p>Better Public Image due to more humane treatment of pets.</p> <p>Better Public Image due to increased rehoming rates.</p> <p>Increased staff morale due to less euthanasia.</p> <p>More registered dogs as people adopt from Services where it is ensured all adopted dogs are registered with their local Ranger Services.</p>	<p>Main Negatives for Ranger Services</p> <p>Potential for pet escape from less secure premise. A premises inspection prior to pet placement can minimise this occurrence.</p>

WHO WILL FOSTER?

Singles, couples, families. Temporary residents, permanent residents. Cat lovers, dog lovers, rabbit lovers. Young people, Old people. Workers, retirees. Home owners, renters.

The list is endless, however there are target community members who are ideal to foster:

People in jobs that involve regular change of location. They are not always able to take a pet but can still have the joy of a pet in their current location for as long as they are there.

People who for a variety of reasons their future is uncertain so they can't make a commitment ie elderly people who may need to move to a new location

Young people. SAFE strongly discourages young people from adopting unless they are already established or have tied themselves with a partner, children or other pets. We encourage them to have the joy of a pet now, but still be free to travel to different locations in the future. Change of location is one of the main reasons pets are relinquished and is more likely with young people who have to rely on rental properties.

People wanting a pup when they have a child under 5 years old are often unaware of the difficulties of raising a pup at the same time as raising children. Managing the chewing and digging stages while being full time parent. Pups need regular training to curb the unruly teenager stage and most new mums are too busy. Another main reason for relinquishment is untrained puppies which become too hard to handle as they grow in size.

People from Overseas who will return to their country of origin. Often missing their own pets back home, fostering can fill that temporary void.

FOSTER CARER FAQ

<p>Isn't that second abandonment for the pet?</p>	<p>Pets adapt to new owners and new surroundings it would seem with more ease than their human counterparts. As long as they are loved and cared for and part of a 'pack' pets will adjust quickly. The trauma of abandonment comes from being insecure due to hunger, loneliness and/or abuse.</p>
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<p>I can't love & let go!</p>	<p>Have you ever baby-sat or pet-sat? Did you have trouble loving and letting go? If you answered yes to this, maybe foster caring is not for you. If you answered no, it is probably because you knew the child or pet had a good home to go to. We make every effort to ensure you are completely happy with your foster pets new owners and you and the adopters are encouraged to stay in contact.</p> <p>It is not a sad occasion but a joyous one when your foster pet finds their very own home. You know when your foster pet comes to you that you are providing temporary care, you are welcome to adopt if your foster pet becomes that special one. The satisfaction when you see your foster pet go to their new loving home is very uplifting and you then know you can take on another foster pet and save another life.</p>
<p>How will my children cope? Am I teaching my children that pets are a short term commitment?</p>	<p>Most children understand that a foster pet is only visiting and will mimic your feelings when the time comes for your foster pet to go to their new home. If you are happy and excited for your foster pet, your child will be too. Your child can learn from you about pet overpopulation and that foster caring is the best way to save lots of pets lives and also they can be taught the difference between foster caring and adopting.</p> <p>Children are often sheltered from change in their lives, which can have a severe impact when a major change does occur in their lives whether through death, location, relationships, friends, etc. We believe it is essential that children are armed with the skills to adjust to change.</p>
<p>How long will I be needed? What if I cannot keep caring for my foster pet?</p>	<p>Foster care may be needed for 1 day or for 1 year and anytime in between! When and how long you foster for is up to you. We have foster carers who only care on weekends and others only during school holidays. Some carers foster big dogs, some only old dogs and others only kittens.</p> <p>Pets can be moved from foster carer to foster carer. We can move pets on short notice but ask that you give us as much notice as possible. SAFE Karratha can move foster pets quickly, if we don't move them quickly enough or there is an emergency you can drop your foster pet to our office.</p>

<p>Can I adopt my foster pet?</p>	<p>If S.A.F.E and you agree it is a suitable match you may adopt your foster pet. It is not the aim of the program as when a pet is in foster care if this occurs we potentially lose a much valued Foster Carer. It is often stated that the deal is you can only adopt if you can find a carer to take your place!!</p>
<p>I don't think that the potential adopter is a good match for my foster pet, what can I do?</p>	<p>You are your foster pets guardian and you know your foster pet better than anyone. If you feel that a potential adopter is not a suitable match for your foster pet let us know asap. The decision who is to adopt has to have SAFE, foster carer and potential adopter in agreement.</p>
<p>Can I keep in touch with my foster pet after they are adopted?</p>	<p>S.A.F.E actively encourages this and also encourages Foster Carers and adopters to send us their Happy Outcome story for our website.</p>

SUMMARY

Gone are the days when euthanasia of rehomingable pets was considered a necessary evil. Today it is no longer acceptable and I believe that in the near future, the placing of pets into institutions will also be seen as something from the past.

There are no winners when pets are institutionalised, and with the benefits of Foster Care programmes far outweighing the negatives there is no excuse either. We can make pets rehoming a positive transition for our "best friends".

When we begin making maximum use of the Foster Care programme it will have a huge positive impact on us reaching Zero Euthanasia across the country while we are all currently working on the prevention of pet overpopulation.

Please contact me at S.A.F.E HQ if you would like any further information about our Foster Programme. Thank you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Sue founded the organization SAFE in Karratha 7 years ago. It is now across the state working towards its aim that no domestic animal (mostly cats and dogs) is euthanased due to lack of somewhere to stay.

