

Saving with Soul Pet Rescue Policies, Guidelines and Helpful Help



Our Mission

“To Make Miracles Happen for homeless dogs and cats in the Northwest Florida Panhandle without regard to age, breed, size, color or health. We strive to keep our adoption fees reasonable so that we can pull animals adopters or other rescues might overlook. Our goal is to help local shelters avoid euthanasia by keeping kennel space open. We provide safe and loving temporary homes for the animals we save, while we work hard to find them their forever homes through adoption.”

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Saving with Soul Pet Rescue

Policies, Guidelines and Helpful Help

Welcome to Saving with Soul Pet Rescue! You are now officially what we call a “Miracle Maker” which means that you are a member of the SWS team who “Makes Miracles Happen Every Day” for NW Florida homeless dogs and cats.

This manual was created to help you better understand what it means to be a Miracle Maker, whether you are a foster, volunteer, supporter, transporter or just an enthusiastic cheerleader. Or all of these! Please know that we can never say it enough – WE APPRECIATE YOU AND ARE GRATEFUL YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO SPEND YOUR TIME WITH US. We want you to enjoy yourself so you will tell all your friends...so they will choose to be Miracle Makers too.

Our History

Saving with Soul began its Miracle-Making at the Walton County Animal Shelter in Defuniak Springs way back in early 2012, starting with just a handful of shelter volunteers. From 2012 until 2017, we worked exclusively with Walton County and helped take their euthanasia rate (for dogs) from 70% down to less than 15%. We learned a lot during our tenure with Walton County about how shelters work, and more importantly, what it takes to save lives.

In 2017, Walton County asked us not-so-politely to leave. I’ll spare you the gory details, but just know that it was a painful moment in our history; one those of us who were around at the time won’t soon forget. But we got up, shook ourselves off and officially became Saving with Soul Pet Rescue, Inc. and the rest is history! Or, rather, history in the making.

Since that fateful day in early 2017, Saving with Soul has saved more than 2,000 dogs and cats, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

And here’s how we do that.

Saving with Soul Guiding Principles

Our Approach to Adoption

Saving with Soul's stated mission is to help shelters avoid euthanasia by keeping kennel spaces open. We do this with an aggressive foster and adoption program, with the goal of saving at least 100 animals per month.

Speaking of numbers, Saving with Soul has been accused of being "all about the numbers." That we only care about bragging rights to the number of animals we save. And that "if you can fog a mirror, you can adopt from SWS."

Well, yes... and no.

Yes, we DO take pride in our "numbers!" We ARE thrilled that we save more than 1,000 animals a year because every "number saved" IS a life spared.

And yes, we do take a progressive approach to adoptions. If you have volunteered with other rescues, you might be surprised to learn that we are relatively easy to adopt from in comparison. We adopt animals straight from events - we don't require home checks, vet reference checks or a first-born child prior to approving applications. We do landlord verifications in many cases but in general, our philosophy is that most adopters are decent people who just want to adopt a pet. Unless there are obvious red flags or the adoption is simply not a good fit, we will probably approve the adoption.

Sure, we get the heebie-jeebies about potential adopters sometimes, and occasionally someone is clearly an idiot, but most of the time, most of the people who apply to adopt an animal are decent human beings.

That's not to say that we don't deny applications. Of course we do. But we follow ASPCA and HSUS guidelines regarding "open adoption" and credit a big part of our success to doing so. Questions or concerns about this? ASK!

How Do We Choose Who We Save?

Saving with Soul makes shelter runs weekly where we visit area shelters to rescue as many dogs and cats as we are able. Sometimes that's just one or two; sometimes it's 10 or more. It all depends on what animals are available for rescue and how many foster homes have openings.

We pride ourselves that we don't cherry-pick shelter animals – we are not breed- or size-specific and we like to say, "as long as the dog or cat is NICE, we can save him or her!" Young, old, big, small, pretty or even ugly – we love nice dogs and cats. However, we do not knowingly take on aggressive animals or animals who need to be an only pet.

We aren't afraid of skin issues, heartworms or "senioritis;" in fact, we have specific funds established to care for special needs dogs and cats.

Local Focus

Saving with Soul has made the decision to rescue locally. We rarely take in animals from outside our area (which we loosely define as Okaloosa and Santa Rosa counties). We work with a select group of local shelters, ones who appreciate us and welcome us into their facilities. We have great relationships with our partner shelters and there is certainly no shortage of animals to save in these shelters alone. We feel that our local focus is another factor in the success we have achieved.

Private Dogs & Cats

About 25% of the dogs and cats we rescue are what we call "private." This means that the pet comes from an individual, not a shelter. We have a process for taking in private pets and the process must be followed in order for us to accept a private pet. Basically, we require that the pet's current owner or guardian fill out an application to be accepted into our program. There are a variety of factors that we consider when making the decision, including vetting status, behavior, health, adoptability and whether the current owner can help us with fostering or making a donation. You can read more about our rehoming program here: www.savewithsoul.com/rehome.

Stray Animals

Please note that we do not take in stray animals. There are legal requirements related to finding the animals' rightful owners and we don't have the resources to comply with them. Stray animals need to go to the shelter in the county where they were found because that's where the owner will go looking for them. There may be times where you find a stray and want to consider bringing him/her into the rescue – and that's fine – but only after the stray hold time is up at the shelter.

Out of Area Pets

As a general rule, SWS does not bring in animals from out of our immediate area. The primary reason for this is that one of the requirements we have for bringing a dog into the rescue is that we meet them first - we don't rescue animals from a picture and a description. In almost all cases WE MUST MEET THE ANIMAL FIRST!

Be Kind

We want Saving with Soul to be the rescue where, to borrow from Publix, "Adopting is a Pleasure" and of course, where "Volunteering is a Pleasure." A big part of that is that we are kind to our adopters and TO EACH OTHER.

Here's the thing... we are a group of more than 60 (mostly) women doing very emotional work. And you know what? There probably isn't a group of 60 (mostly) women on the planet who all like each other and get along great all the time. But we can be polite to each other, even if personal differences exist. Or, worst case, keep our distance. The goal is not that everyone loves each other, but that we appreciate everyone's contributions and strive to make everyone feel welcome (or at least, not UNwelcome).

If anyone makes you feel unwelcome, report them immediately and we'll give them a good beating 😊.

Seriously, rescue is a drama-filled business, but drama doesn't Make Miracles Happen. When you're feeling frustrated with someone in the group (and it WILL happen), please take a moment to breathe and to realize that we are all working toward a common goal and the best way to achieve that goal IS to work together.

About Volunteering

A lot of people think that the only way to help a rescue group is to foster animals. And yes, we LOVE our foster families and are always looking for more. But fostering isn't the only way to be a Miracle Maker. Nope, not at all!

If you have time on your hands, whether that's an hour a day, an hour a week or 40 hours a week, we have something you can do to help. We have our adoption events every Saturday which offer a great way to really dive in and get involved, but we also have week-day volunteer hours at our building in Ft. Walton Beach. Volunteers are welcome to join us on our shelter runs and/or help with transporting, or if you prefer to help out from home, we can probably find some administrative work for you to do.

Need community service hours? We qualify! And bring your friends!

About Fostering

Fostering a shelter animal means that you take a dog or cat into your home and let it live there with you until a permanent home is found. By fostering a shelter dog or cat, you actually save two lives... the animal you get out of the shelter AND the animal who is still there, but now has more time (due to the kennel you freed up) to find his or her own forever family.

As you can imagine, our foster families are the lifeblood of our Miracle-Making activities. Without fosters, we don't exist. Saving with Soul typically has more than 100 dogs and cats in the rescue and 95% of them are in private homes.

Fostering is a pretty amazing way to save lives but it's not for everyone. Fostering can be emotional. It can be frustrating. It can be heart-breaking. And yes, it can be expensive (think uncrated puppy versus new sofa). But our foster families keep coming back for more (thank God!) so there must be something positive about this whole fostering gig.

Obviously, foster families love animals and have a desire to help save them from euthanasia. And that's great! But that passion alone may not be enough to ensure that fostering is right for you, right now.

Is Fostering with Saving with Soul Right for Me...Right Now?

- Do you have reliable transportation?
- Are you able to commit to attending at least two Saturday adoption events per month (No? You can still foster – ask!)
- Do all members of your household support your desire to foster?
- If you rent your home, does your lease allow you to foster animals?
- Are you able to provide basic requirements for a fostered pet? (e.g. food, food bowls, a leash, etc.)
- Would your fostered pet be left alone for more than 8 hours a day?
- Are you on Facebook and willing to join and participate in a private SWS discussion group?

We may be biased but we believe Saving with Soul is among the best rescues to foster for in the Florida Panhandle. Not only do we hold weekly adoption events 52 weeks a year, but we also have an extremely supportive group of more than 100 volunteers with strong leadership. If we determine together that fostering with us is a good fit for you, we will do our best to ensure that you have a great experience... and that you tell all your friends about us!

What Is Expected of Me as a SWS Foster Family?

- Be responsive to inquiries from potential adopters
- Be reasonably available to arrange meet & greets with potential adopters
- Commit to attending at least two adoption events per month (Can't do it? Talk to us!)
- Be understanding of your foster pet's mistakes as they adjust to your home
- Be honest in the promotion of your foster pet
- Be polite and courteous to potential adopters and to other members of the rescue group
- Be willing to pitch in and help other foster families when possible

As your foster pet's caretaker, you have significant input on who is (or is not) approved for adoption. If you feel that an adopter isn't appropriate, you have full veto power. We trust our foster families to want only the best for the pets in their care.

How Do My Fosters Get Adopted?

Foster families have (almost) full authority to approve or deny adoption applications for their fostered pets. However, for your first few adoptions, please contact someone in management to handle the paperwork and payment.

We have an online application that can be completed before the potential adopter meets the animal, or they can do it afterwards but under no circumstances may an adopter take possession of an animal prior to completing the application and it being approved. NO EXCEPTIONS.

Fosters may do as much research as they see fit to approve an adopter. We don't require home visits, but if you want to do one, go for it. We do highly encourage landlord verifications, especially with large breeds, and if the adopter rents, we will usually (politely) deny the adoption of a pitbull, bulldog or other

restricted breed. Facebook-stalking is encouraged, and we can ask the local shelter (in Okaloosa and Santa Rosa counties) to do a name and address check for us.

Our application gives us the right to rescind an approval within 3 business days of adoption if we find something out about the adopter that makes us nervous. Thankfully that has only happened once.

We also require the adoption fee to be paid. It can be done online or in cash. We can take credit cards if arrangements are made with someone at SWS who can process the payment.

If your fostered pet is not yet sterilized and/or needs further vaccinations, we have additional paperwork that must be done. We do charge a refundable spay/neuter deposit for unsterilized pets.

Out of Area Adoptions

We've had some bad experiences adopting to people out of the area so in general, we will keep our adoptions reasonably local unless the adopter is someone we know personally. It's just a bit odd when someone is willing to travel several hours to adopt a "regular dog" or, if the dog is a super-premium type, we can easily find a local adopter. This isn't written in stone, but if we do want to consider an unknown out-of-area adopter, we will do a thorough background check before approval.

Long-Term Fosters

Occasionally, we bring pets into the rescue who, for whatever reason, are not highly adoptable, or even, rarely, adoptable at all. It's usually unintentional in that we discover their issues only after we have committed to them. It happens. Although we are often surprised that a dog or cat we have deemed unadoptable suddenly gets themselves adopted!

These situations are evaluated on a case by case basis to determine the best solution for all involved. Sometimes the foster family decides to keep the pet. But sometimes, especially in the case of aggression, a difficult decision must be made. Saving with Soul can't take on unreasonable liability by adopting out animals we know to be dangerous, so if the foster family chooses not to keep the animal, we must consider euthanasia.

But let's not dwell on that since it happens so rarely.

Our general policy going forward for long-term fosters is that if a pet has been in foster care for six months, we need to have a frank discussion with the foster to determine what's going on. Let's figure it out!

Kennel Cough (dogs) & Upper Respiratory Infections (cats)

Kennel cough and other respiratory issues are a reality in rescue. Sometimes it seems that every pet we pull from a shelter comes down with kennel cough or URI even if they weren't coughing at the shelter. Is kennel cough/URI contagious to your pets? Yep. Fortunately, most of us have found that our own pets don't get it, but it is a possibility, even if your pets are vaccinated. The only way to avoid that happening

is to keep your fosters completely separated from your personal pets, and if you can do that - great! But for most of us, it's impractical or impossible.

So, just know that if you foster shelter animals, you will expose your own pets to kennel cough/URI.

Animals with any respiratory issues are NOT allowed at adoption events or on spay/neuter transport. Period. Not only is it contagious to the other pets in proximity, it makes us look as if we are trying to adopt out sick animals.

Costs of Fostering

Being a foster family is not free – there will be costs involved, although we will strive to keep those to a minimum. We can provide most items you will need, including food (when available), flea prevention and linens. You can borrow a crate from us with a small deposit.

Crates

We highly encourage you to crate your foster animal when you are not at home, or otherwise can't supervise him, to protect the foster, your pets and children and your property. If you do not have a crate, we will loan you one, but may require a refundable deposit.

If a foster animal is left outside while home alone, they must have shelter, food, water and be in a secure fenced yard. Tie outs and chains are not allowed.

Vet Care for Your Fosters

Saving with Soul works with a handful of veterinarians and vet clinics in our area. Most of these have agreed to discount their services and to be mindful of the financial realities of a non-profit rescue organization. We are SO grateful to these veterinarians for working with us – they all run busy practices and don't really "need" our business – they work with us due to a desire to help us keep Making Miracles Happen.

All vet care must go through our partner veterinarians. If you choose to take your foster pet to an outside clinic, you may be responsible for the charges. We are almost always able to get medical care for our pets in a timely manner, even though the local clinics are often booked out for weeks for their regular customers.

We have a single point of contact to schedule vet appointments – you will be advised of who that is once you begin fostering.

Emergency Vet Care

In general, Saving with Soul does not pay for services rendered at an emergency vet clinic due to the exorbitantly high cost of care. Thankfully, this is rarely an issue and we are lucky to have reasonably good access to our partner vets even on the weekends.

In case of emergency, you must contact SWS before seeking emergency care. If you can't reach anyone, post in our private Facebook group and ask for help. Or do both. We have an extremely knowledgeable group of volunteers who are always willing to pitch in.

If you take a foster to an emergency clinic without authorization, you will be responsible for the charges (and they require payment upon arrival).

Vacation Coverage

If you are going on vacation or otherwise need help watching your foster pet, there will almost always be someone ready, willing and able to take over. BUT WE NEED NOTICE! Please don't announce on Friday that you are leaving town on Saturday and need your fosters moved. A week's notice is appreciated; more, of course, is even better.

If you know someone personally who you would trust to watch your foster, that's fine. Just let us know. Maybe they would like to join our merry little group 😊.

Who Pays What?

When you foster for SWS, we can provide pretty much anything you need. Food (when available), treats, linens, flea and heartworm prevention, litter, crates (with deposit), collars, etc. Fosters typically provide their own bowls, leashes and bedding. We do not reimburse gasoline expenses in transporting fosters unless approved in advance.

What if I Fall in Love with my Foster?

It happens! And it's called a "foster failure" when a foster family decides to keep their foster dog or cat permanently. Here are our general guidelines for adopting your foster pet:

1. You must complete our application and pay the pet's regular adoption fee;
2. Although exceptions are made, we generally don't allow fosters to "fail" on their first foster pet. We prefer that foster families rehome at least three of their fostered pets before adopting a foster. Questions? Ask!

If you are concerned that you won't want to let your foster go when we've found a forever home for them, just know that it gets easier, especially after you 1) see the joy your foster brings to his or her new family, and 2) realize that now you can save another! But even if it does break your heart every time a foster leaves your home, isn't it worth a few tears to save a life?

Saving with Soul Adoption Events

Saving with Soul holds adoption events every week... yes, 52 weeks a year. Our adoption events are by far our best source of adoptions, not to mention a great time to hang out with a wonderful group of people.

If you do participate in an adoption event, here are some things to keep in mind:

- The events may begin as early as 8am or as late as 11am, and usually last into the mid-to-late afternoon. If your foster is adopted, you may leave the event, but we really hope you'll stay and help the rest of us.
- The critical periods where we need the most (wo)manpower are set-up and break-down. If at all possible, try to be there to help out first thing and/or at the end.
- While at the event, please represent Saving with Soul in a positive manner. Be nice, be polite and keep the four-letter words to a minimum. No smoking or eating in the immediate area of the event.
- If your foster is creating problems at the event (e.g. being overly aggressive through the kennel), we may ask you to take your foster home. Not all animals are good candidates for an event as stressful as these events can be and it's hard to know how your foster will react until the event itself. Please don't be offended by this – it's happened to all of us.
- If your foster is sick or in heat, do not bring them to an event.
- Please ensure your foster is clean and flea-free prior to an event.
- You must bring a leash and collar to the event (but you do not have to let the adopter have them).
- Even if you don't have a foster attending, you are welcome and encouraged to come. Our events are pretty big productions and we need all the help we can get. And bring your friends ☺

Saving with Soul Job Opportunities

Saving with Soul is primarily a volunteer-based organization in that the vast majority of work gets done by Miracle Makers who work for free. However, we do offer opportunities for compensation for the right person and situation. Here are our requirements to be considered for a compensated position:

1. The position is full-time– at least 30/hours a week, every week, and can't be reliably filled by volunteers; or
2. The position is less than 30/hours a week, but is considered mission critical and can't be reliably filled by volunteers;
3. The position "earns its keep" in that having the work done in the position financially justifies the compensation paid;

4. General volunteering, fostering and event attendance don't count toward the full-time requirement;
5. Applicants must be able to pass a drug test and are subject to random drug-testing;
6. Applicants must have private health insurance;
7. Applicants must have reliable transportation.

Frankly, SWS doesn't pay well and offers no employee benefits. So please don't quit your day job hoping to find work at SWS. But we are proud to be among the very few rescues in the area who do offer compensated positions!

The Trux Stop

In early 2019, Saving with Soul took a huge leap of faith and leased a building to help us expand our Miracle Making. Because the building is located on Truxton Avenue in Ft. Walton Beach, we have dubbed it The Trux Stop. The building is 500 square feet of office and 1500 square feet of warehouse, on a nice-sized fenced lot.

Currently The Trux Stop serves these purposes:

1. Serves as our office for the public
2. Houses cats and kittens
3. Temporarily houses dogs
4. Stores our yard sale and auction items
5. Other storage

As you can imagine, there are ALWAYS ways to help out at The Trux Stop. Kitten cuddling, poop-scooping, dishwashing, dog-walking, laundry... and the more you go, the more valuable you will be. Volunteer shifts are available during the week between 10am and 5pm. Community service hours happily signed off on!

Who's Who at Saving with Soul?

(and Who to Contact for What)

Saving with Soul has a strong leadership made up of a President, Vice President, Director of Feline Operations and a Building Manager. Three of these positions are full-time and are responsible for running the rescue day-to-day.

We also have a Board of Trustees who are responsible for overseeing the Big Picture of the rescue and offering their expertise.

We've come a long way since our early days of being just a rag-tag group of shelter volunteers!

Founder/President: Jennifer Hagedorn 850-356-2647

Vice President: Sheila Levo 850-503-4743

Director of Feline Operations: Diane Brown – 850-516-4970

Building Manager: Dawn Michael – 850-582-8446

- In general, for dog-related issues, contact Jennifer or Sheila
- For cat-related issues, contact Sheila or Diane
- To schedule medical appointments (dogs or cats), contact Sheila
- For Trux Stop issues, contact Dawn or Sheila
- For general questions, post in the private Facebook group

THANK YOU!

Thank you for reading this Guide all the way through! It is obviously a living document in that it will never be 100% complete and will always be subject to improvement. If you have suggestions for us related to this Guide, feel free to let us know.

Now, let's go Make Miracles Happen... TOGETHER!

Acknowledgement & Agreement

I have read this manual cover to cover. I understand, acknowledge and agree to all provisions within.

Name

Signature

Date