

Becoming a Rescue Volunteer... A Growing Process

By Lani Scheman

The decision to volunteer for rescue is not a light one; there is usually a great deal of apprehension and hesitation based on the very real concern of "what am I getting myself into?" This is natural. Rescue is an emotional undertaking and without clear boundaries, both within yourself and around the actual volunteer duties you will be performing, you can feel overwhelmed. Remember, you control what you will or will not do, what you can and cannot do. Becoming involved does not mean a house full of wild Chesapeakes that you will be stuck with for months on end unless you let it!

If you feel that you want to contribute to rescue, you should ask yourself the same questions that you would for any volunteer job:

- How much time do I realistically have to give?
- What aspects of the volunteer duties needed suit me the best?
- Are there things that I cannot do or that I am not set up to do (such as fostering)?
- Do I have problems saying "no? If so, what can I do that will not put me in an awkward situation.

These are reasonable questions that will help you decide how you can contribute the best.

Because there are so many different types of needs, there is a way to fit into the network where you can make a contribution that works for everyone. Fostering is, of course, the volunteer work that takes the most time and resources. However, if you can help pick up or deliver dogs, do a shelter walkthrough once a week, or screen applicants, there may be a place for you.

When I first signed on as the Chesapeake representative for Seattle Purebred Dog Rescue, my anxiety level ran very high whenever I got that "dreaded" call from a shelter. I would panic and feel like I had to drop everything. I worried that I wouldn't be able to respond in time or gather my resources. I often felt overwhelmed. But all that changed. As I built relationships with shelter personnel I realized that, they too, want to save as many dogs as possible and they were flexible once the trust between us was built. As I built my network of foster homes, again with the trust that I would accept responsibility for every dog and work hard on its placement, I no longer had trouble finding foster care. And once I realized that other people are willing to help. in small ways ("can you pick this dog up from the vet?") I felt my sense of "I have to do it all" waning and being replaced with "gee, there are so many good hearted people out there". After a few months of experience, my anxiety level dropped significantly. I still feel the call to arms" when a rescue comes through but I no longer feel overwhelmed.

The shadow that falls over all of this is knowing that no rescue effort can save every dog. Some dogs are not suitable pets or you simply may not have the resources available every time. That too, is a milestone that must be crossed. To remember that everything you do to contribute to rescue is worthwhile is not a self-consoling cliché; it's the truth. Because most people do nothing at all, everything you do counts. If you would like to participate as a volunteer in Chesapeake rescue, please contact the regional rescue coordinator nearest you.

