Return-to-Home Programs:
Saving Lives by Reuniting Lost Pets with Their Families

Reuniting lost pets with their people is one of the most critical roles for shelters across the country. A solid return-to-home program encompasses everyone on the shelter's team. Animal control officers return lost pets in the field (instead of bringing them to a shelter); intake staff scan stray pets for microchips; volunteers manage lost-and-found social media pages and support given by platforms like Petco's Love Lost. Best Friends Animal Society endorses collaborative and robust return-to-home programs.

WHAT DOES A RETURN-TO-HOME PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

- Equip animal control officers to support return-to-home programs in the field.

- Host low-cost or free microchip clinics in the community and offer microchipping to the public as a service at shelters.

- Develop foster-finder programs to keep pets in the neighborhoods where they were found until their owners can be located. Allowing finders of stray animals to temporarily foster the animals until owners can be located keeps animals in their community and relieves stress in the shelter population.

- Use technology to allow community members to search for their lost pets online and place a hold on the animal if found, so they can reclaim the animal before the pet is adopted by someone else.

- Allow the waiver of return-to-home (redemption) fees and citations when they present barriers to reunification of pets with their people.

- Allow owners to look for their lost pets anytime shelter staff are on-site, not just during normal business hours.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF RETURN-TO-HOME PROGRAMS?

- Greater sense of community

- Increased lifesaving of animals through reunification

- More efficient use of shelter resources

- Better relationship between animal control officers and their community

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