

# FAST HANDBOOK

Fostering Adoptions on the Streets of Tucson



# What is FAST?

Fostering Adoptions on the Streets of Tucson is an exciting program to help get our animals into their forever homes faster and with a lower return rate.

The new F.A.S.T program provides our experienced volunteers a chance to take the shelter dog's offsite for the day and walk them around the community. Volunteers may take the dogs for a hike at one of the many of Tucson's gorgeous trails or the dog and volunteer can spend an afternoon lounging on the couch of the volunteer's home. The idea is to get our dogs out of the shelter and onto the streets of the community showcasing their best behaviors. The volunteer will give a summarized description of their offsite experience, so the adoption team and behavior team can help paint a better picture of the dog's true personality when they return. The program has potential to benefit everyone involved if it is managed properly and the volunteers are trained prior to going offsite. It's about being proactive and creative in our life saving efforts vs sitting back and waiting!

Across America there are a lot of shelters that operate as a "foster only shelter" which houses their adoptable animals with a foster parent at all times. The idea behind it is that keeping a dog in a home and outside of a shelter allows the dog to destress and be presented at their lowest possible level of stress. Some studies have shown that if a shelter dog is in the care of a facility, within the first 72 hours the animal is under an amount of stress that they have never seen in their lifetime. This means that within a 72

hour period of time the animal starts to degrade in their mental wellbeing and their behavior starts to take a decline. The longer these animals are in the care of a facility means the level of degradation starts to become more and more prevalent and that's how potentially dangerous behaviors start to manifest and take control of a previously mentally fit dog. By allowing volunteers to take a dog offsite for even a half of a day, we allow a dog the chance to lower their cortisol (stress) levels and start to feel like their regular selves more. When the dog returns to the shelter it is calmer and can leave the dog more relaxed for the next few days.

The out of shelter experience the dogs receive can be the difference between a calm dog and a reactive dog. This can be considered "active information gathering" for adoption counselors trying to help paint a picture of the dogs true personality. The behavior information gathered can help behavior staff to specifically tailor behavior plans to each dog that goes offsite and the dog gets a chance to not be stressed out for an afternoon, so when they return to a shelter they can meet potential adopters with a more relaxed mind. There are always going to be liability concerns allowing our dogs offsite, but there needs to be a level of trust with the volunteers who are often times the ones whom are handling the animals the most.

# Benefits of FAST

We allow the dogs a chance to go offsite and lower their stress levels for when they return.

We give the dog a change to showcase their behaviors outside of the stressful shelter setting and to show potential adopters a “snapshot” of how that dog can fit into their lives.

It helps to promote the animal and the organization they are a part of.

The volunteers are given more opportunities to be with the dogs and it helps create a sense of accomplishment in their lives. This leads to more volunteer retention.

By seeing volunteers walking dogs in public, it can cause an individual to want to become a volunteer themselves.

It helps promote a sense of teamwork in the community between volunteers, community members and the animals they are walking around.

We can gather behavioral information about the dog outside of the shelter. This helps the adoption and behavior staff to paint a better picture of what that animal is like.

It helps us gather information that will help the behavior staff to create specific behavior plans for when the animal returns.

Photos and Videos of the dogs can be shot while out around town and these can be used to promote the animal.

As you can see, there are many reasons this is an amazing program! But the biggest reason is that it is great for the dogs!

## How to get started!

Dogs will be selected by HSSA staff that will be good matches for the FAST program. If there is a dog you would like to work with you may let us know and we will check with our behaviorist to confirm that the dog you are interested in will be a good match for the program.

Criteria for F.A.S.T Dogs:

- The Dog must be approved by the Behavior Team and Adoptions Staff prior to going offsite.
- The Dog must be in the shelter longer than 14 days. This allows the dog a chance to be adopted by the public and a chance for the behavior and medical teams to identify any specific needs the dog might need.
- The Dog cannot go into a home with another dog or a cat.
- The Dog must always be with the volunteer and not left alone.
- The Dog must be in a harness while offsite. Preferably in an “Adopt Me” vest.
- No Dog Parks are allowed

- Volunteers must take the F.A.S.T orientation prior to being approved for F.A.S.T
- Volunteers cannot take a dog that they are not the correct level to walk
  - Level 1 Volunteers can take Level 1 Dogs
  - Level 2 Volunteers can take level 1 Dogs AND Level 2 Dogs
- Volunteers must ask for their F.A.S.T Dog 48 Hours prior to taking the dog offsite
- Volunteers must sign the dog out with the Adoptions staff prior to taking the dog offsite
- Volunteers must leave a completed contact information form with the Adoptions Staff before taking the dog offsite.
- Volunteers must not bring the dogs to a dog park or any form of public dog day care
- Volunteers must transport the dogs in their own vehicle with a harness.
- Volunteers must return the dog before the end of the day
  - Unless they have agreed to temporary guardianship for 24 hours.
- Volunteers cannot introduce dogs to other dogs or children
  - This is difficult, but it is for the safety of the dog.
- The Volunteer must give a report of the dog's behavior while in their care.

- It can be a short paragraph or a detailed summary.
- Volunteers must leave a “I’m Out on F.A.S.T” tag on the dogs kennel.

Dogs can be checked out between 11am and 3pm Monday-Saturday, 12pm and 2pm Sunday for FAST but will need to be returned to the main shelter by 5pm Monday-Saturday and 4pm Sunday.

You will be given a collar, leash and an Adopt Me vest for the dog to wear. Attached you will find a list of dog friendly places around Tucson. You will also be given Adoption Profiles, and the dog’s paperwork. In the folder you will also be given an incident and bite report in case a bite occurs.

Now you are ready to get out there and help a dog find a home!

When you take the dog out into the public there are some things you should keep in mind.

- The dog’s safety. Always be aware of your surroundings.
- The safety of the people in the area around you. While the dogs that are picked for this program are chosen carefully, any dog may react in a negative way if startled. Again, be aware of your surroundings.
- **Be honest!**
- That said, get out there and have fun!

You should think of yourself as the dog’s Matchmaker, Talent Agent and Cheerleader. You are the bridge from the shelter to a

forever home. Smile and be open to people who want to meet the dog.

Besides going out to places with the dog, here are some other ideas for promoting the dog.

- Social media-besides regular postings of your FAST dog, you can do a “Where in Tucson is...” and always tag the business where you are hanging out with your FAST dog!
- Blogging
- Write a bio that you can post around town.
- Be Creative!
- Use ‘We’ instead of ‘I’ when talking as you are representing HSSA as well as the dog.

## How to Handle a Bite

Despite our best efforts and being aware of our surroundings a bite could occur. When you take a dog out for FAST you will be given a folder that has several things you will need including an Accident Report and a Pima County Bite Report.

### **If a bite should occur STAY CALM!**

Remember if you are nervous or upset, the dog will pick up on that and it could cause the animal to react more as it gets more nervous.

**Get the dog away from the situation if possible.**

If possible, put the animal in a quiet place with no people. If this is not possible, make sure you keep an eye on the dog as we do not want the stress of the situation to cause any other problems.

**Do not admit fault. Even saying, “I’m sorry” can indicate fault.**

We do not want to admit fault on behalf of the HSSA. Try to remember that even saying “I’m sorry” can be perceived as admitting fault.

**Get the person medical attention, if needed.**

If the bite breaks skin, ask the victim if you can take a picture of the wound.

**Fill out the HSSA Accident Report as well as the Pima County Bite Report.**

Let them know that you have to fill out 2 reports, the HSSA Accident Report as well as the Pima County Bite Report. Please make sure that you fill out the forms. Do not allow the victim of the bite to fill out the forms. Often people do not want to wait for you to completely fill out these forms. If this is the case, please do everything you can to at least get the person’s name, phone number and also address if at all possible. HSSA staff will contact them later to get the additional information.

If the victim is concerned about the dogs future (this is often the case) let them know that when a bite occurs that draws blood it is Pima County law that the animal be quarantined for 10 days but a bite does not mean the end for the dog. We understand things happen.

If the bite does NOT draw blood you only need to fill out the HSSA Incident report. There is no need to fill out the Pima County Bite Report.

Once the reports are completed it is time to return to the shelter with your FAST dog. Your outing is now over.

# Meeting Other Dogs

As you are going to dog friendly locations you will likely be coming into contact with other dogs. Please do what you can to not allow your FAST dog to meet other dogs. Do not let your FAST dog approach other dogs, no matter how friendly they may seem to each other. If another person is allowing their dog to approach your FAST dog ask them nicely to please keep their dog at a distance. There is a protocol for dog to dog introductions that has been developed by our adoptions staff to keep all dogs safe when meeting for the first time. As a volunteer, you should not be doing introductions with other dogs.

If a fight should break out between your FAST dog and a dog belonging to a member of the public, separate the dogs safely without getting in between the dogs. Follow the steps outlined above in 'How to Handle a Bite.' As long as no blood was drawn **on a person** you will only need to fill out the HSSA Accident Report. Again, ask to take photos of any injuries.

Again, once the form(s) are completed your outing is now over and you must bring the dog back to the shelter.

If you meet someone that is interested in your FAST dog and has a dog or other family members that need to meet the dog please have them fill out an adoption profile and make arrangements to meet them at the Main Campus or at one of the stores to have staff do the formal introductions. We can hold a dog for them for up to 24 hours.

# PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

- Have the dog under YOUR supervision at all times
- Never leave children unattended with any dog
- Inform us if the dog bites anyone (you included) right away
- Keep the dog on leash at ALL times
- Do not take the dog to off-leash dog areas, dog parks, or do dog introductions while on your trip
- Pick up and return the dog at the agreed upon times
- Transport the dog in a safe manner by either being in a crate or safely restrained with a dog appropriate seatbelt in a back seat
- Report any behavior or medical concerns to your coordinator
- Keep the dog safe by providing adequate rest, shade, shelter and water
- Have a cell phone with you at all times that can be used to contact you

To aid in enrichment to our shelter canines we would like to run this program year-round however there are limitations during the summer months when temperatures are 90+

If you are taking an animal out for FAST during the summer months it is required that your vehicle have a working air conditioner

Dogs must be taken to facilities with A/C or outside mister system when temperatures reach above 85 degrees.

I have read and agree to abide by the above rules and guidelines.

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Volunteer Name (Please Print)

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Signature

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Date