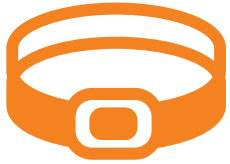# Best Friends supports return-to-home programs

Reuniting lost pets with their people is one of the most critical roles for shelters across the country. A robust **return-to-home** program includes everyone on the shelter's team. Animal services officers attempt to return pets to their homes before bringing them to the shelter. Shelter admissions staff scan stray pets for microchips. And volunteers or staff manage lost-and-found social media pages (with support from platforms like Petco Love Lost).

Here at Best Friends, we believe in the power of collaboration and robust return-to-home programs in communities. **Some of the key components to include in a successful return-to-home program are:**

- A foster-finder program with willing residents to keep pets in the neighborhoods where they were found

- A dedicated field services team that prioritizes return-to-home efforts in the community prior to bringing pets to the shelter

- Working with utility companies to track down pets' families based on their last known address (if the microchip contains outdated information)

- Encouraging a communication-first mentality when a loose pet is found, including surveying the surroundings to find the pet's person, talking to neighbors, and posting lost pet signage (if the pet's person can't be found)

- Waiving return-to-home fees and citations when applicable

- Hosting low-cost or free microchip clinics in the field and offering microchips at the shelter or in the field

- Including microchips and tags as a central component of the licensure program

- Allowing people to look for lost pets at the shelter anytime staff members are on-site, even if it's outside of normal business hours

- Ensuring proper training of call dispatchers so that return-to-home procedures are implemented at the first point of public contact

- Confirming that high-quality photos of found animals are posted online (e.g., to the shelter website, Petco Love Lost, Petfinder, social media, etc.) to support reunification efforts

RESOURCES

Return-to-Home (Owner) Playbook: By prioritizing efforts to locate pets' families and streamline the pet reunification process, agencies can ensure their limited resources are directed where they're needed most. The Return-to-Home Playbook is a comprehensive guide teaching organizations how to implement a vigorous return-to-home program of their own.

Field Return-to-Home Playbook: More and more agencies are empowering field officers to take an active role in lifesaving by leading efforts to reduce shelter admissions and keep pets with their families. This playbook offers a complete overview of field return-to-home strategies and provides practical guidance for launching an impactful field return-to-home program within your animal services agency.

Lifesaving Dispatch: Saving Lives Over the Phone: Call takers and dispatch staff are often the first point of contact between the community and the shelter. This free online course module will help you and your staff properly train to ensure the best outcomes for animals and people in your community.

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