Helping Animals Find Their Forever Homes

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Abstract

Animals in shelters and foster care face unique challenges. The goal of this project is to come up with a creative solution to the major problems the animals face. The main problems the shelters are facing are overpopulation and negative environments. The foster care takers are struggling with a lack of resources, which is anything from education to connecting to other foster care takers. After researching the main problems, the best solution was creating a website that provides solutions and can be accessed at any time.

*Keywords:* foster care takers, shelters, animals
Section 1: Introduction to your Capstone Project

I have three very energetic dogs, which means I am often going to pet stores to get new toys since they go through theirs so fast. Petco often sends me emails and most of the time I just ignore them, but one email I saw stuck out. The email was about fostering and how if every pet parent fosters one animal a year we can end unnecessary euthanasia by tomorrow. When it was time for me to brainstorm ideas for my project, this email came to mind. I wanted to help fosters and animals in shelters find their forever homes. One of my friends collects dog food donations each winter and last year he was able to donate seven thousand pounds of dog food to the Idaho Humane Society and it was an action that really stuck with me.

I started out researching problems that shelters and foster caretakers were dealing with. I had to create a way to help that fit my abilities and with limited time and skills, I thought that something online would be my best option. At first I wanted to make an infographic but that limited the amount of information I was able to provide, so with the help of feedback I decided a website would work the best. I took all the research I had previously done and created a page that would include why I was doing this, what the problems were, and information to help solve the problems. I sent the webpage to local foster groups and the Idaho Humane Society. I received feedback from two foster groups and have yet to hear back from IHS.

Section 2: Elements coming together

Innovative Approach

Animal shelters and foster caretakers have different needs based on their environment. The relationship between them is important because more people fostering means less animals in the shelter, and if the shelters are able to support the fosters then more adoptions will happen. I am using the perspectives of foster caretakers and the shelters to find solutions that fit both
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groups. The foster caretakers get a different look into how the animals will behave in a home setting while the shelters provide care and space for the animals to transition into homes. The easier fostering becomes the more potential there is for new foster caretakers. My approach is innovative because it is backed by research and it is the most I can do to help the animals because I do not have space for fosters at the time but will in the future. I think providing information and education in one spot will be able to help a wide range of people.

**Emotional Intelligence**

I have three dogs that I love dearly and my previous dogs were from the shelter. I knew that my love for animals could be something that I could really utilize and act on. I wanted my project to be focused on the animals, and less on myself. I want to increase self awareness for myself and others, and the website allows for me to do so because it provides information that might be new. The more we learn, the more we can foster empathy for those around us. The emotional intelligence of my audience plays into the delivery of the information. My audience has such an important role in animal’s lives, but they are lacking support from their community. My research is valuable to others because it provides more resources that can be utilized to help animals. My audience needs support and they need to know that what they are doing for the animals is a major accomplishment. If someone thinking about fostering can feel the support and empathy of the community they might be more inclined to foster.

**Creative Thinking**

I grew up in a creative household, my mom has always loved to paint and craft and my sister graduated with a degree in fine art. I found my creative side through photography and graphic design. Making a website will push my creativity forward and will be driven by my want to help animals around me. When doing research for my project I noticed that a lot of the
information was just in writing and it was challenging to get a visual of what improvements could be made. I think that creating a website will be unique because I can use multiple ways to explain information, like videos, graphics, and writing. This way it can be accessible for a wider audience. Which will hopefully mean that it has more of an impact. I also believe that my approach is unique because it helps both the shelters and the foster caretakers.

**Your Innovative Solution**

I wanted to create a website that could be continuously looked back on for tips or information. During the start of COVID-19 I saw how many people were getting into fostering but the numbers have started to decrease over this last year. The website can hopefully ease the stress of fostering and allow for the shelters to free up more room for incoming animals. I wanted to make sure that I had research to back the information I provided. I looked at different websites and blogs about what fosters and shelters need right now, I took those needs and came up with key information that could help both groups. Normally I would just link the ideas and let others navigate the information but I wanted to make sure that if I could understand the information then others would be able to. I think accessibility is a major issue that comes up during animal care, and I know I have had to google a lot of questions about my own animals.

**Section 3: Results**

On the last page of my website I created a survey to measure the impact of my project. I wanted to see what information stuck out the most and what the individual felt was most beneficial. I believe the first benefit stakeholders can get is more education. Education can help foster caretakers be better prepared and it can help shelters create better environments for the animals. One major improvement that both groups can do is better their environments including visuals and sounds. When an animal feels safe in their environment they are able to sleep better,
which reduces the amount of cortisol and leads to less behavioral problems. The second benefit is in the resources provided, this includes how to set up a home, what to do in case of medical emergencies, and how to handle animals during their decompression phase.

**Section 4: Conclusion**

My project hopefully has a positive impact on the stakeholders. There is a chance that some would have a negative reaction because they might feel that the information I provided is overstepping or comes across as blaming them. I would never wish for someone to see the project and think that they are doing something wrong or aren’t treating the animals with care because that is not what I believe at all. I just want to provide information for the community so we can do anything we can to help the animals find forever homes. My survey got three responses, the first stating that they liked the information but wished some areas could be expanded on. The second survey said that they enjoyed how the information was presented. The third said the website was well done. What I would do differently is spend more time editing the website. This was the first time I successfully made a website and I wish I could have made it more aesthetically pleasing. I think setting up the website differently would have made it easier to read, I was trying to go for more of a blog-like style but it was too challenging to create that.

**Section 5: References**

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Section 6: Appendix

Website

Survey Responses