

Give it up for...

Wendy Botto

Long, long before David Cameron dreamed up his vision of the Big Society, people have worked tirelessly – and for free – for the causes and communities that are important to them.

In this regular feature we will be talking to the hidden heroes working behind the scenes for various canine causes.



If you are interested in becoming a foster carer for Many Tears, visit [www.manytearsrescue.org](http://www.manytearsrescue.org) and click on the 'Foster for MTAR' link, or contact your nearest rescue shelter to offer your services.

Fostering rescue dogs can save precious lives, help find the dog's perfect match, and give pups the very best start in life, writes **Claire Horton-Bussey**



Left: Wendy with foster dog Blackie (now Freddie) who has now found a forever home. Below: Giovanna and Foxye-Botts with Merry who found an agility home with a junior handler. Inset: Parkie, now lives with Dawn Graham who has also become a Many Tears fosterer.

For many rescue organisations, short-term foster carers are their lifeblood - people to turn to when there's no available kennel space, when a dog is stressed in kennels and needs a home environment, to care for and socialise puppies or pregnant bitches, to look after the poorly, or simply to give a thorough assessment of a dog in order to find a perfect family match.

My own rescue, Madi, was born in the care of Many Tears Animal Rescue in south Wales, when her collie mum gave birth to a litter after being surrendered.

When I adopted Madi at 14 weeks, she hadn't spent three months in a kennel. As soon as she could leave mum, she was off to a foster carer, who lived in a busy house with dogs, kids and cats - perfect preparation for when Madi came to me, with my own hectic home of dogs, kids and cats!

I will always be grateful to the foster carer, Fiona Barnard, who gave Madi such an excellent start in life, just as many hundreds of others are grateful to their own dogs' fosterers.

Many Tears has a fantastic army of 200 foster carers across the country - and one such person is Wendy Botto from Didcot, Oxfordshire.

A keen agility competitor, Wendy learned of Many Tears from a friend who was a home-checker for the rescue.

Wendy initially fundraised for Many Tears and eventually decided to apply to foster.



Wendy filled in an application form, giving all relevant details of her family and dog experience, confirming that her own dog, Ernie, was neutered, that she had a secure garden, and that all the family were on board with the decision.

Like many fosterers, Wendy fell at the first hurdle, joining the ranks of 'failed fosterer' by falling completely in love with her first foster dog.

"Foxye-Botts was a feisty little terrier, who was in a bit of a mess," remembers Wendy. "She had already been in a home and was returned. She came to me, I fell in love, and she fitted in so well, so I adopted her!

"I thought, 'Oh, I've blown it now', but four months later, I thought I'd try again. You quickly realise that you can't keep every one! I lost count at 50, but it's probably near 100 dogs I've fostered since."

Because of her agility experience, Wendy usually gets the active dogs that need to do something - and is often approached by people in

the agility world who want a suitable dog.

Wendy frequently has puppies - and 11-year-old daughter Giovanna has been very mature about seeing them come and go. "There have been some that she's become really attached to," Wendy explains, "but she's used to it now. She meets the new owners and they send updates, so we can see how they are getting on."

Wendy's most rewarding experience has been judging at a show and seeing one of her former foster pups competing in the ring.

"It was fantastic - I cheered so much! How could I not be biased? I had tears streaming down my face, to see what a lovely life they had."

The only downside, Giovanna says, is poo! Having puppy after puppy means endless housetraining and the occasional accident, though they all soon learn to be clean. Wendy feared there would be many sleepless nights, too, but she's very pleased that they quickly settle to sleep in a crate by her bed.

Many Tears can't speak more highly of its foster team.

Founder Sylvia Van Atta says, "Our wonderful fosterers are absolutely invaluable to the rescue centre: without them we would not know if a dog is suitable for homing with children or cats, for instance. They introduce the rescue dogs to living in a home and what we would consider normal household sights and sounds, like the vacuum cleaner or the washing machine. They often start the process of learning to walk on a lead and housetraining.

"Without our fosterers, we would not be able to home the 2,500 dogs that we are able to help every year." ●