

HOW DOES MICHIGAN WESTIE RESCUE WORK?

During the year 2003, Michigan was finally able to find enough foster space to foster almost all of our rescued Westies. Prior to that we had done only "referral" rescue. Following describes the way our Rescue effort works:

APPLICATIONS

- **INTERVIEWS:** Often the applicant calls first and we discuss their situation by phone and many applicants realize then that a Westie isn't the best dog for them. Many contact us via email and the same discussions take place. Usually, by the time we get the application, they have been lightly screened and many have been eliminated or self-eliminated through these interviews. If the application comes in directly and we have not had these interviews, they will usually occur as a result of the next steps or will occur when we call them to discuss the possibility of placing a specific dog with them.
- **HIGH LEVEL REVIEW OF APPLICATION:** When the application comes in, we review it for obvious problems (children in the home under the age of ten, no provisions made to fence or leash the dog when outside, no protection from the family swimming pool, etc.) If there are any concerns, we email, write or call them to ask for further clarification or to let them know that they do not qualify.
- **VET CHECKS:** One way we determine if a family will take good care of the new Westie is to do vet checks. If a person is not taking good medical care of their current pets, there is no reason to think they will do better with an adopted pet. Therefore, if the family has other pets, our application asks them to supply the name and number of their vet. We call the vet's office and check to be sure records of their current pets (or sometimes a recently deceased pet) reflect that they have been well taken care of and are up to date on their vaccinations, are neutered or spayed, etc. (We do check on cats as well as dogs.) If the vet check is not positive, this is often the end of the application although we do let them know our findings and ask them if they can explain the situation. There occasionally is a situation that can be rectified such as one where they realize that we asked for the records under their married name when the dog was actually still under their maiden name. Usually, they realize they have been caught and we never hear from them again.
- **OTHER REFERENCES:** If the family does not have a pet, we cannot do a vet check. In this case, we ask for two personal references. This is less revealing because people seldom give out a reference that would say anything bad but sometimes in a casual conversation you might learn of a situation that was not revealed on the application. (Sometimes it is a very positive piece of information and sometimes negative.)
- **LANDLORD PERMISSION:** If the home is rented rather than owned, we will require written permission from the landlord saying that a pet is allowed.
- **WAIT:** If all of these steps are followed and passed, we then add the application to our waiting list, send several informational items to the adopter to prepare them for the addition of a rescued Westie to their family and then they wait.

A DOG COMES INTO RESCUE

Normally, the dog will come in for foster care. Occasionally, we may be forced to board the dog until space opens up. We no longer place a dog through a method known as "referral". ("Referral" means that the rescue simply introduces the potential adopter and the owner.)

FOSTER CARE

This is now the method used by our Rescue. If there is an opening, the dog can move to us immediately but often we have to search for an opening and then get back to the owner. If at all possible, we ask the owner to deliver the dog along with all of his/her belongings.

- **CALL:** This call can be from the owner or from a shelter or vet clinic. If it is a shelter, you usually have to move the dog quickly. If it is a vet clinic, sometimes you can arrange to board the dog until you can find foster care. If it is an owner, they will usually keep the dog until you can place it. But occasionally this cannot happen. If the dog must come into foster care, we have the owner or guardian fill out and sign a Surrender Contract so that we have legal ownership of the dog. (Note: In some cases, the owner has died and the Executor of the Will has to go through probate and then can sign this Contract. In this case, we ask the Executor to board the dog until it is available for adoption. If we take it in, we ask the Executor to guarantee any expenses until the dog is available for adoption and would ask for a deposit to cover these costs.) There are times when we will not take the dog and will recommend that the owner or institution put the dog down. This can occur if the dog is too ill, not temperamentally suited to be placed or, rarely, too elderly. We sometimes simply don't have a foster home to take on the long-term care of a dog that might not be placeable at a later date. We assess each case individually, considering what is best for the dog and what we are capable of doing both financially and from a human resources perspective. There are times when we may be able to find another Rescue to take the dog.
- **ASSESSMENT:** While the dog is in foster care, we do our best to assess the dog's personality and health. If the dog turns out to be aggressive and it is not something we can work out, we will not place the dog. Due to liability issues and our own limitations, we will put this dog down. If we feel the dog can possibly be safely retrained, we may try to find another rescue more experienced with aggression. Other problems can usually be worked out while in foster care. We try to house break, teach basic manners, etc. We also take the dog to the vet. If we don't have proof of shots, we have to give all of the shots over again. We do the other routine items such as a fecal check, heartworm check and prevention, and usually do a dental. The vet examines the dog and we try to take care of any problems that might show up. If there are any long-term issues, they will be documented and explained to the potential adopters. Very often there are health

issues. Many times they are minor. Allergies and skin problems that are minor are not usually even considered a health issue since they are so common in Westies. We simply pass on that information. More serious allergies or skin problems are handled through the vet until we find a workable regimen for the owners to follow. Sometimes it is something simple like "dry eye" which requires drops or salve for the eyes. Sometimes it can be a more serious condition such as diabetes, Addison's or Cushing's. We work to stabilize the dog before we look for an adopter.

- **SEARCH:**When the dog is reasonably stable, we begin to search for a home. Again we look first at our list of applicants. If we don't find a suitable home among them, we begin to talk about the dog to other contacts, e.g., rescues, phone call contacts, vets, etc. We may put the dog's picture and story on Petfinder.com.
- **CONTACT:** We frequently have more than one home that seems suitable for a particular dog. We may interview multiple homes and this interview is often done first by phone and then in a face-to-face meeting with the dog present. After we have done these interviews, we will then choose the one that seems to be the best "fit" for the dog. We reserve the right to make this selection and will provide only general information back to the homes we do not choose. When we find a suitable home for the dog, we will either do a home check ourselves or find a reliable person to do the home check for us. When we have fostered the dog, we are now the dog's "advocate" and we are very careful about their placement.
- **PLACEMENT:**We use legal contracts when we place a dog that has been fostered. We make follow up calls on the dog once placed to be sure they are getting along well and to try to intervene if problems are developing. Sometimes we give advice; sometimes we refer them to a volunteer "trainer" or behaviorist who works with Westie Rescue. Within the Contract, we reserve the right to go into the home at any time to check on the dog.
- **THE "ELLEN" CLAUSE DOES APPLY:** If you adopt from us and can no longer care for that dog you will be legally obligated to return the dog to us. No SHELTER, No other RESCUE, No giveaway to a FRIEND or RELATIVE. NO SELLING THE DOG. If the dog isn't right for you, we want it back. We encourage you to make plans for the dog's care in the case of your illness or death and will honor your wishes BUT the new caregiver will be required to apply with us for the right to adopt the dog; we will screen the person just as we screened you. If they pass the screening, they will be given priority to adopt the dog. If they do not pass the screening, we will take the dog back and place with a family who does meet our requirements.

MISC. NOTES

FEES: Michigan does not charge adoption fees at this time. We try to keep solvent by accepting donations* and doing fundraising. We do request a donation* at the time of the application and hope for further donations* when a dog is placed and, in the future, a happy family often remembers us on holidays such as Christmas. We also ask for a \$25 donation* from the original owner of the dog. (*While we are applying for Federal Tax 501c3 status, at this time, this donation is not tax deductible.)

PAYMENTS: These dogs are being "placed" and not sold.

AKC PAPERS: These papers are confiscated by Rescue and are not passed on to the new owner. If the new owner wishes to compete in an AKC event (not Conformation), they can obtain papers for this purpose. Go to the AKC site and check on ILP/PAL papers or ask Rescue.

SPAY/NEUTER: All Rescues will be spayed or neutered. This will normally be done before placement. Rarely it may be done after placement on a Spay/Neuter Contract and with a "good faith deposit" to be returned when proof of altering is provided. The only exception to this is if the vet provides written documentation that it would be detrimental to the dog's health for it to be altered. This would be extremely rare and Rescue may ask to have their vet confirm the decision.

OTHER RESCUES/SHELTERS: When we learn of a Westie in another Rescue or safe shelter, we do not compete to get that Westie to our group. Unless we have a reason to feel the place they are in is not safe, we will simply offer to help that Rescue/Shelter find a placement for the dog. Usually we send a group email to all applicants who have listed an email address. We give the location of the dog, any information we have on it and the contact information. We will also mention the dog to appropriate callers as something they might want to check on. Normally, a Westie will place very quickly without our help unless the dog is older or has a health problem. Many shelters will not even contact us if they have a Westie they feel they can easily place. We do watch Petfinder daily for Westies who might be posted.