

Spring 2014

The
**VIRGINIA
MARYLAND**

DOG

Volume 5 • Issue 1

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"Tori" & "Lotto" are Seeking a
Forever Home through BRAG
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A Dog has Gone Missing – Now What?

By Anne Wills

Imagine a typical scenario: a pet owner has released their pet into the yard only to find out the pet is missing. Panic sets in. The pet owner has to figure out what to do.

Dogs Finding Dogs is a charity that has been using its search-and-rescue dogs to help find missing pets for more than seven years. Clients need to be guided through an immediate action plan when a pet is missing.

Here are the basic steps to follow when a pet is missing.

First, try to calm down. A clear head is needed. Efforts have to be directed towards being proactive and determined.

Do a quick spot-check in the neighborhood. Do not spend hours driving around. That is wasting time. Dogs Finding Dogs suggests using a phone calling alert for your pet. The group endorses Findtoto.com. This alert will immediately call every house and business in the pet owner's area, issuing a missing pet alert for the dog.

There is a description field in the alert. This is a wildcard field. **Anything the pet owner puts into this field will be communicated to those who receive the calls.** Trackers use this to tell people that a dog is blind, sick, or to give other information. Pet owners should use this to their advantage.

The second and most important task is to make flyers. The flyers should include the words "Lost Dog," and a picture, phone number and any reward information. Use standard 8-and-a-half-sized paper. Put the papers into clear, plastic sheet protectors. Use brightly colored duct tape, which helps to attract the eye to the flyer. Do not cram many words onto the flyer. The flyer needs to be read from a car.

Start from your house and place a flyer at every intersection located within a two-mile radius from your house. If a road is long, put one or two fliers on a light pole. If the pet owner lives in an apartment complex, put fliers on the dumpsters—be sure to check with the property manager first.

Pet owners can also make smaller fliers. Hand these smaller fliers to people on the street. This method is secondary.

Pet owners should also distribute fliers to nearby veterinarians.

Next, **pet owners should use the Internet.** Place a notice on Craigslist, under the "Lost and Found" section. Re-post the notice every two to three days. Next, place notices on the lost-and-found pet pages on Facebook. If the pet owner has a community e-mail list-serve, send a message at that website.

Next, **call every nearby shelter and place a lost-pet report.** Do not rely on any shelter to call the pet owner or tell the pet owner what animals are located at the shelter. Find out the number of strays that are held at the shelter. In Maryland, strays are held at a shelter for three days. Go look for yourself. When pet owners talk to shelter officials, owners should ask about any animals that were found deceased in the owner's neighborhood. This question needs to be asked.

Next, **pet owners should set up their yard in case the dog comes back.** Dogs travel more at night than during the day. Set a bowl of food in the front and in the back of the home. Take flour and place the flour around the food—so when the pet comes to the food, the pet leaves a footprint. Leave something that smells like the pet owner at the feeding stations. Take bath towels, wipe down every person in the house, cut those towels into strips, and make trails from the home. Familiar smells, and food, show the dog where the owner wants them to be so the owner can find them.

Groups like Dogs Finding Dogs can offer help and consultation. These organizations can also provide search teams to follow a dog's footsteps.

When these basic steps are used, the success rate increase to the 90-percentile range. Pet owners should remain calm and focused. Pet owners should not fill their minds with bad thoughts. Dogs can be found. 🐾