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Can you offer a dog a holiday in your home?

A FROME-BASED dog-sitting service is preparing for the festive period by appealing for host families to take care of pet pooches while their owners go on holiday.

Barking Mad is an alternative to kennels and is the brainchild of dog lovers Stewart Collins and Tina O'Connor.

The pair interview pet owners who want to use the scheme and then use that information to match the dog with a suitable host home.

"As we race towards Christmas we are preparing for a very busy winter holiday period and need to extend our network of host families in Frome," said Mr Collins.

"We are therefore looking for more dog-loving families living in the town or local villages who are prepared to share their home with visiting dogs."

After being featured on a series of local television news programmes and winning accolades at top national pet award ceremonies, the demand for the dog sitting service has increased.

Mrs O'Connor said: "We have had an amazingly busy summer period, with our host families looking after a large number of dogs in their homes while our customers were away enjoying their holidays.

"The role of the host family is to look after visiting dogs in their own home, treating them as part of the family.

"Most importantly, host families show the dogs lots of love and affection during their stay.

"If we can find more people in the Frome area who are willing to become host families that would be great.

"There is not necessarily a typical host family, but certainly people with time on their hands - perhaps recently retired.

"Alternatively, they may be at home during the day and are fit and active with previous dog care experience, a secure garden and plenty of affection for canine visitors.

"It is important to remember that although the nearest host home may be

just around the corner, the people there may not be those best suited to care for a particular dog.

"Our main aim is to make sure that the right dog goes to the right host family."

Hosts get paid to cover the expense of having a dog and can also access round-the-clock help and support from either Ms O'Connor or Mr Collins.

Myrtle Taylor, of Rode, has played host to five dogs during the last year.

Mrs Taylor said: "I love the scheme as it is so much better than kennels.

"I fall in love with every dog I get and I treat them like they are a family member.

"I try my best to make it home from home for them.

"If they like to sleep on the bed, then they sleep on the bed.

"I have too many commitments to have a pet dog, but because I love dogs this is the perfect scheme for me.

"It is flexible and works around you, so I would fully recommend it to anyone."





WOOF: Myrtle Taylor, centre, of Rode is one of the hosts who will be helping take care of dogs, such as Harry, over Christmas for Stewart Collins and Tina O'Connor of Frome-based dog-sitting service **Barking Mad**

PICTURE: Gareth Hannam 41 F3255_2