

Stuck at Home, Americans Turn to Foster Pets for Companionship

Shelters across the United States are reporting upticks in foster applications as people seek out a friend to ride out the coronavirus crisis with.

By **Sandra E. Garcia**

March 19, 2020

When the Animal Care Centers of NYC put a call out on Friday for applications to its fostering program, it was looking to fill 200 available slots, a spokeswoman for the shelter said. Two thousand people applied.

“One of the reasons we found that people are unable to adopt pets in New York City is because they are never home,” the spokeswoman, Katy Hansen, said. “They say it is not fair to the animal, or they are not able to spend enough time with them.”

But as the global coronavirus outbreak has people preparing to spend more time at home over the coming weeks, some who have decided that they don’t want to quarantine alone are choosing to foster a pet for companionship.

Most Americans are being told to stay out of bars and restaurants, to steer clear of social gatherings, to work from home and to socially distance themselves from one another to avoid the spread of the highly contagious new coronavirus, which has killed more than 9,000 people worldwide.

In interviews this week, animal shelters across the nation reported a surge in interest in fostering pets.

Latest Updates: Coronavirus Outbreak

- [Americans get three more months to file tax returns.](#)
- [Negotiations set to begin on \\$1 trillion rescue plan, and lobbyists rush to get a piece.](#)
- [With Europe bracing for surge in cases, Spanish hospitals are increasingly overwhelmed.](#)

[See more updates](#)

More live coverage: [Markets](#) [U.S.](#) [New York](#)

“I think it is a combination of feeling lonely and having the time,” Ms. Hansen said.

KC Pet Project, a nonprofit animal shelter in Kansas City, Mo., has received 250 requests to foster pets since Monday, according to Tori Fugate, a spokeswoman for the shelter. Usually, getting 10 pets placed in foster homes is a good day for the organization.

“To have that many new people sign up is really a big spike,” she said.

Ms. Fugate said the shelter was asking for four- to six-week commitments. (The average is two to four weeks, she said.)

According to Ms. Hansen, fostering an animal is similar to dating someone.

“You are bringing a pet into your home and there is not a long-term commitment,” she said. “You are seeing how it would work.”

And whereas dating someone new during the current pandemic is risky, fostering a new pet offers companionship with minimal risk of transmission. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, the coronavirus is more readily transmitted via nonporous surfaces like metal and plastic than porous ones like pet fur, which tends to trap the virus.

In Dallas, it seems few were worried about contracting the virus from a pet. Since the Dallas Animal Services shelter solicited foster parents on its website on Friday, it has placed more than 100 pets in foster homes. During the same period last year, the shelter placed six dogs and 11 cats in foster homes.

“Who knows what is going to happen with the coronavirus impacting people being able to leave the house, so we put the call out,” said MeLissa Webber, assistant director of the Dallas shelter. “So many Dallas residents showed, I got choked up.”

A foster relationship helps not only people searching for a friend to adjust to a disorienting new normal; it can also help the pets themselves cope, according to Eileen Hanavan, director of the foster and engagement program at the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

“A lot of people are facing prolonged periods of time at home and inside,” she said. “They want companionship and to not feel alone during this unsettling time, and it is benefiting our animals directly.”

The environment at shelters usually keeps animals on edge, Ms. Hansen said, adding that placing an animal in a home is healthier and makes it more likely that it will ultimately be adopted.

“From a sheltering perspective, what fostering does for an animal is immeasurable, because when they are sheltered they are stressed, tired, and we don’t really know their true personality,” she said. “When you get them into a home, when they can sleep through the night, their true personality really comes out.”

Many shelters agree that the uptick in foster applicants can be attributed to people feeling restless during the pandemic and wanting to help, Ms. Hansen said.

For Rebecca Applebaum, a teacher who lives alone in Manhattan, fostering a litter of kittens from the A.S.P.C.A. has helped her keep a pace to her days at home.

“The routine of feeding them every day gives me structure,” Ms. Applebaum said. “With the pandemic situation, it is nice to have them.”

“They do their cute thing and I talk to them,” she added. “That has been really good.”

A quarantine is, by definition, isolating. To Ms. Hansen, it’s not surprising that many are choosing to offset those feelings with a kitten, puppy or rabbit.

“For people that are by themselves, having another heartbeat in the house makes it feel less lonely,” she said. “It’s a win-win.”