

COVID-19 Pandemic Strengthens Human-Animal Bond

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The human-animal bond has existed for much longer than most people realize. There is archeological evidence of domesticated wolves found in human settlements dating back at least 14,000 years ago. It is thought that as humans and animals both sought food, shelter, and safety, they found comfort in each other and cohabitated.¹

That bond has only gotten stronger over the years, and pets have played increasingly more prominent roles in contemporary households. The intense daily stressors that our society has placed on individuals has led to more recognized cases of depression and anxiety, and people are turning to domestic animals for relief. Studies have actually proven that owning a pet can actually reduce blood pressure and lower cholesterol levels.² Some pets are even being classified as “emotional support” animals.

Never has there been a greater need for emotional support in recent years than the present, during the pandemic of COVID-19. Since March of 2020, people have retreated into their homes, having much less human-to-human interaction and spending most of their days alone and in confinement. As many are now working, teaching, and learning remotely, their lives are revolving around their homes and immediate family. Those who didn't have time enough for pets before COVID-19 are now finding that they not only have the time, but also a need for some companionship from a pet.

As the Medical Director of Brandywine Valley SPCA (<https://bvspca.org/>), one of the largest shelter organizations in the Delaware Valley, I've experienced first-hand this intense shift toward increases in pet ownership in this area.

The BVSPCA was founded in 1929 in Chester County, Pennsylvania and expanded to all three counties in Delaware in 2016. For the past several months, there has been an incredible increase in the number of adoptions occurring at all of Brandywine Valley's shelters, more than we've historically ever seen. For example, since July, the adoption numbers have increased by an average of 381 per month- that's a 63% increase! It is now a normal occurrence to see lines forming outside of the shelters waiting for the doors to open each day. People who were too busy prior to the pandemic are now finding the time they need to acclimate a pet to their home. Those who anticipate not having time once returning to a regular routine have signed up to foster. I believe that this huge increase in adoption and fostering has a direct correlation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because of the large numbers of adoptions, the Brandywine Valley shelters are emptier than they've ever been. This has given us the opportunity to save even more animals' lives, by transporting in animals from areas with high euthanasia rates, such as Texas, Louisiana, and Georgia. Now, dogs and cats that were destined for euthanasia are getting a second chance at a good life in a loving home. Not only that, but there is now more room in the shelters to bring in animals from areas where hurricanes or natural disasters have recently hit. The BVSPCA aids these areas by transporting in animals who were currently in the shelters where the disaster occurred. This allows those shelters to be able to provide room for the animals found during the disaster- so that they may be able to again be reunited with their families in that area. This is a

win-win situation for all of the pets and people involved. Not only have we been able to place many animals into homes in our area, but we've also been able to assist local families who have been affected by the pandemic. By offering discounted medical care and free vaccines and pet food, many have been able to keep their current pets in their homes.

Despite the trying times we've all been experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic, the human-animal bond seemingly remains stronger than ever, and both the humans and the animals are benefitting. So, if you find yourself feeling as if you need some emotional support, a hobby, or just some companionship during this time, feel free to stop by a local shelter and find a new best friend!

References

1. Serpell, J. A. (2008). *In the company of animals: A study of human-animal relationships*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
2. Allen, K., Blascovich, J., & Mendes, W. B. (2002, September-October). Cardiovascular reactivity and the presence of pets, friends, and spouses: The truth about cats and dogs. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 64(5), 727–739. [PubMed](#)

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