

Cat and dog adoptions spike during the COVID-19 pandemic



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I SAW AN ARTICLE the other day in the Toronto Star saying that pet adoptions had increased quite a lot since the CDC declared COVID-19 a pandemic back in March of 2020. In fact, I was one of the people who adopted a pet during COVID-19; a beautiful senior cat named Jennifer Rose. I got her from Home Again Bancroft in Oct. 2020. She had tortoiseshell markings, piercing green eyes, a vocal personality and was quite an active cat for her age of nine years old. Jennifer Rose became my constant companion, following me around my apartment through the day, lying on my desk beside my computer when I was writing, curling up at my feet when I was watching Crave TV, and even coming with me in the car when I would go out to take photos or travel down to Wolfe Island to see my folks. And of course, at night, she'd curl up on my bed and her purring would lull me to sleep. She was an amazing cat and friend. Unfortunately, Jennifer Rose got sick last October, was obviously in pain and was diagnosed with untreatable kidney disease. Gutted, I made the decision to put her down, though as any pet owner will know, it was very hard, but the only humane and right thing to do to spare her any further suffering. Even though it still hurts and I miss her like crazy, I wouldn't trade a minute with this amazing little cat. She made the year I had her a complete joy and a little less lonely than it would have been otherwise with all the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions. Of course, aside from me, a lot of people have gone the same route and adopted a pet to keep them company during this pandemic. Humane Canada, previously known as the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies was founded in 1957 and is this country's federation of SPCAs and humane societies. They unite organizations that work with and care for animals to end animal cruelty, improve animal protection and promote the humane treatment of all animals. According to their 2020 report, shelter intakes for dogs and cats were down in 2020 versus the year before; 28 per cent for dogs and 25 per cent for cats. The median shelter capacity in 2020 was 37 per cent compared to 70 per cent in 2019,

while the median length of stay at shelters for cats was 12 days and nine days for dogs in 2020, versus 15 days for cats and 12 days for dogs in 2019. These last two statistics also reflect the increased use of foster home care for these dogs and cats, as COVID-19 restrictions made shelters pivot and use foster care more to care for the pets under their care. Home Again Bancroft was started up in 2009 by its president, Rosemary Dixon, and others to offer Bancroft an alternate animal rescue organization to HART that also includes cats. It has been a registered charitable organization for the past 10 years. Their mandate is to rescue surrendered, abandoned or homeless dogs and cats for people in the Bancroft area, foster them until they're ready to be adopted and subsidize the spay and neutering of pets in the greater Bancroft area who may not be able to otherwise afford to do so. Mary Freeman has been volunteering with Home Again Bancroft since 2013. She says that her statistics indicate that prices did not rise because of the pandemic, and Home Again holds with fair adoption fees based on age, desirability and breed or cross-breed, with a lean toward fair market price, which means a year over year increase. Freeman gives the example of puppy Rosie who was adopted in Dec. 2021 for \$650 and puppy Louis who was adopted for \$550 this week. She says that a litter of puppies in 2019 were \$450 each.

Pre-pandemic, Home Again's average canine adoption fee was \$410 for the 102 canines adopted during 2019. Post pandemic, Home Again's average canine adoption fee was \$423 for the 51 dogs adopted between March 13, 2020 and March 12, 2021. According to Freeman, they have seen a big difference in the quantity of canine adoptions. 102 dogs pre-pandemic and 51 dogs during the first 12 months of the pandemic. She notes that 102 and 51 are the canines that they charged for. Others were taken into palliative care, ran away or died, so there is no adoption fee associated with them. She reveals that this statistic reflects their difficulty in presenting dogs and puppies for adoption because we have to rely on fosters to show them in their own homes as Home Again has no shelter. Freeman says that with cats, in 2019, both kittens and cats were adopted for \$100 each, but on May 1, 2021, they increased the price of kittens to \$150 with no price increase for cats. She says this is because of the competitive fees charged by shelters, so they are still under-priced and lose money on each kitten adoption because they include a voucher for a free spay/neuter of kittens. She says they adopted out 131 felines during 2019, while post pandemic, they adopted out 100 cats during 2021. She says that to accommodate the large demand for kittens, she adopted them from her car when Pet Valu downtown was closed during pandemic shut-downs. The one statistic that really stands out for both felines and canines is the larger demand and resultant smaller supply of pets post pandemic versus pre pandemic. We used to wait weeks for someone to call about adopting a dog advertised on our website. Now we wait hours and calls are so numerous we change the status of the dog/puppy to 'adoption pending' within two days of advertising, and some never get advertised! Then we sort through the many applications to pick the best home. Kittens displayed at Pet Valu from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays are usually sold out in the first hour of their display, she says. Many websites like ours say no kittens available.