FAQ: What are you going to keep from this pandemic?

The American Pets Alive webinar on April 20, 2020 hosted by Maddie’s Fund asked this question to over 300 attendees from all walks of sheltering life. Here’s the top six things participants said:

1. **Foster networks**

   Shelters across the country have successfully moved a record number of animals into foster instead of holding them in the shelter. The purpose behind this was to swiftly decrease the population to a) allow for fewer people to be in the shelter working to increase social distancing and b) to give shelters capacity to hold emergency surrenders from COVID-affected households. In some areas, adoption before spay-neuter is actually illegal; faced with this challenge some shelters have made all of their unaltered-pet adopters into new fosters until surgery can take place. Both municipal and non-profit shelters have been amazed and grateful at all of the folks coming forward to help, and hope to keep using these new fosters—and recruit more—in the future.

2. **Virtual meet and greets**

   Not only those in foster, animals on the adoption floor still are meeting prospective adopters via zoom and face-time. This allows adopters to see the animal as they are with familiar people, allows staff to show off the pets’ cute antics better than in a photo, and gives the adopters opportunity to ask questions about the animal to its daily caretakers. Shelters love being able to process adoptions electronically, without the hassle (and exposure risk) of foster pet returning to the shelter. Dr. Julie Levy recommended this post about a cat being adopted over facetime. Click here to view.

3. **Engaging the community regarding stray animals**

   With astonishing success, some municipalities are taking in only 25% of the stay animals taken in during the same time period last year. This is due to empowering community members to find owners, helping finders care for healthy strays, and an increase in social media and poster advertising on the parts of the shelters. Michelson Found Animals Foundation’s Gina Knepp says that emphasizing animal identification tags and simplifying the finding/reclaiming processes are key factors for this process going forward.

4. **Telehealth**

   Not only employed by veterinarians; foster care coordinators and veterinary technicians are getting in on the game- helping foster parents get the guidance they need, sometimes bypassing the need to come in or sometimes, to see a vet. Apps like Best Friends’ Vet Access give foster parents access to a veterinarian who can help triage their issues 24/7. In some states, veterinarians are now able to examine, diagnose, and prescribe medication to shelter pets via telemedicine appointments. Not only
does this increase foster parent access to these professionals, everyone maintains a safe social distance.

5. **Meeting community needs**

Shelters and community cat programs alike have been amazed at the generosity of their community members in stocking food and supply drives. Bags of dog food, cat food, and cat litter are being delivered by animal control officers to food banks, homes, and other central locations. Even though shelters are struggling financially too, many of their community members have even less. Creative ways to provide for these owners is keeping these pets in their homes.

6. **Our sense of community- engaging in the national conversation**

With webinars such as the weekly American Pets Alive zoom meeting with >300 participants on a regular Monday, to special event webinars that attract over 1000 people on Facebook live, this is a moment when people in our industry seem to all be engaged and talking together about creative solutions to a common crisis. The collective learning and discussions about working together and presenting a united front to our communities is especially heartening. Almost everyone feels the desire to keep this sort of engagement going—especially the part about talking to each other instead of *about* each other. Exactly how we do this is yet to be determined, but everyone sees that the need is clear.