



FOSTER PARENTS
SUPREME: LISA
KRAKOSKY AND
JEFF HIGBEE GIVE
ANIMALS LOTS
OF LOVE UNTIL
THEY CAN FIND
PERMANENT HOMES.

female name Stella, whom they picked up at Pet Alliance. “They brought her out to us in a little blanket. That’s the first time we got to meet her!” Chase says. “We took a leap of faith, but Pet Alliance was really supportive during the whole process.”

Although virtual adoptions make the best of an unfortunate situation, adoption numbers at Pet Alliance have dropped since the pandemic hit. Executive Director Steve Bardy attributes that to the closing of the shelter, which prevented people from dropping by for meet and greets. However, the Alliance has been allowing both virtual and by-appointment adoptions since May. So while you can’t come in to “just browse,” you can schedule to meet a specific dog or cat once you’ve checked out their online profile.

What has surged is the number of people stepping up to be pet foster parents, temporarily caring for animals in their homes and providing more attention and human interaction than typically found in shelters. Fostering can last a few days or stretch for months until the animal finds a permanent home.

“Fostering shot through the roof for most shelters,” Bardy says. “We had nearly 90 percent of animals in foster care because people wanted to help.” At Pet Rescue by Judy, animal advocate Kaley Anderson also noted a substantial increase in foster applications—50 to 100 per week when the pandemic started.

Lisa Krakosky and husband Jeff Higbee of Orlando are two of the many kind souls who have made a mission of fostering animals; they’ve been doing it since 2015. When the pandemic hit, they already had a house full of adopted fur babies—one dog and seven cats. The couple decided to add a group of fosters to that brood—18 of them to be exact, including the aforementioned Dulce and her puppies.

“Having foster animals during this time has provided a goal-oriented distraction

HAPPY TALES

In the midst of a pandemic, hearts melt, generous souls step up—and people find their forever friends.

BY LISA A. BEACH

WHEN THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic hit full force and Central Floridians were ordered to stay at home, one thing didn’t change: Thousands of dogs and cats cared for by animal shelters and rescue groups still needed forever homes.

Fortunately, many locals stepped up, through fostering and adoption, and happiness ensued—even in the time of coronavirus.

And it has continued, although adoption in many cases has gone virtual—with potential pet parents scrolling through an online lineup of animals, conducting meet-and-greets over Zoom, paying online, and arriving for curbside pickup.

Take Chloe Chase, a registered nurse at Orlando Health. She and boyfriend Travis Bradley had searched for a dog for a year. They started following the Instagram account of pet foster parents volunteering with Pet Alliance of Greater Orlando and discovered mom-to-be Dulce. The 5-year-old hound mix had given birth to eight pups after the pandemic took hold.

“We’d get notifications when they posted new pictures,” says Chase. She and Bradley had their eye on a pup named Fudge, but by the time they got on a Zoom call, Fudge had been adopted. “At that point, we knew we just wanted to rescue *any* dog from that litter.” So they moved quickly and chose an 8-week-old



HAPPY FAMILY:
CHLOE CHASE,
TRAVIS BRADLEY AND
THEIR PUP, STELLA

MORE ONLINE

Want to learn more about adopting or fostering? Go to the Happy Tales story at orlandomagazine.com for details and to check out a list of organizations eager to help you find your future best friends.

to the chaos going on in the world around us," says Krakosky. "They depend on us for survival from feeding and cleaning to socialization and snuggles. We help by caring for them until they're able and ready to find their forever home."

Adopting or fostering during a pandemic can have positive psychological effects. It's almost as if animals and people—both in dire straits—are helping to save each other.

"With this pandemic and the stress of not having much to do or many places to go, adopting or fostering gives us purpose and responsibility," says Caiti Bradbury, a licensed mental health counselor at the University of Central Florida. "It helps take away from our own problems and pain when we're caring for animals."

That's exactly what drew UCF students Madison Kaminski and her boyfriend, Christian Yapp-Shing, to adopt two kittens.

"I always had bad anxiety and depression, so having to stay home and not being able to do anything was bad for my mental health," Kaminski explains. A friend's cat recently had a litter, so she and Yapp-Shing adopted two kittens. "One of the cats, Miyako, is officially my emotional support animal now," says Kaminski. "The cats definitely made a big impact—I've been a lot more relaxed and less anxious."

MORE EXCELLENT ENDINGS

ADOPTER: JEN HANCOCK, ORLANDO. A lifelong cat lover, Hancock usually adopts harder-to-place older felines. But after her beloved 15-year-old cat Panda passed last December, Hancock didn't know if she was ready to open her heart again. Her two sons, Grayson and Weston, started begging for another cat—this time, a playful kitten. Fate stepped in when a friend posted a picture on Facebook of a kitten she had rescued. Hancock talked it over with her husband, Jon, and they decided to grant the boys their wish, bringing home little Leo. Both boys have taken responsibility for Leo, Hancock says. "It's a labor of love for them."

ADOPTERS: CHARLIE AND MEGAN BLUNT, DELTONA. Since his wife, Sandra, succumbed to cancer a few years ago, Charlie Blunt has been navigating life with his 15-year-old daughter, Megan. They had talked about getting a dog "someday," but finally acted during the pandemic. They met Apollo, a three-legged pit bull, at Pet Rescue by Judy. "As soon as I saw Apollo, I knew immediately I wanted to adopt him," recalls Megan. The shelter thought Apollo would never find a home because he didn't

really like people. Determined to win his heart, Megan volunteered at the rescue for three weeks before Apollo warmed up to her. Now, the two are inseparable. "Apollo doesn't leave Megan's side," says Charlie. "He sleeps with her and follows her everywhere around the house."

FOSTERS-TURNED-ADOPTERS: JOSH AND LAUREN POWERS, WINTER GARDEN. The Powers family had previously adopted two dogs through Pet Alliance, where Josh serves on the board. With everyone home during the pandemic, they decided to foster 2-year-old Jolene, rescued from an animal hoarding case. Jolene has only one functioning eye, was severely underweight, and had little human interaction. "We made a crate available to her as a safe space, but we had to convince her it was safe to eat, drink, and move around the house," says Josh. In the family's care, Jolene (middle dog in photo) gained 12 pounds and got comfortable around people. "We simply couldn't make her go through another transition," says Josh. "We adopted Jolene about a month after we started fostering her. She's now officially part of the Powers Pack!"

