



Equine welfare organizations follow the lead of small animal re-homing successes.□

by Kim F. Miller

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a boom in dog and cat adoptions from shelters throughout the country. Horses haven't been so fortunate. Being a bigger money, time, labor and land undertaking than a small animal, horses face harder times now and likely well beyond the pandemic's effect on human health.

But the news isn't all dire.

Sunday, April 26 was the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' designated Help A Horse Day and this year its focal point was The Right Horse Initiative. This relatively new ASPCA program embodies positive trends in the equine industry coming together for the good of the horse. The Right Horse campaign encourages those able to foster or adopt a horse in need, opening up spaces at shelters where more horses may be surrendered or wind up due to COVID-19 related economic hardships.

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Emphasizing adoptions and fostering is the crux of the program, following the example of small animal welfare groups dating back about 15 years. “If I can keep 10 horses forever, I can help 10 horses,” says ASPCA Vice President of Equine Welfare Dr. Emily Weiss. “If I can take in 10 horses and get them re-homed, I can help a lot more horses.”

“The world is a different place for equines now,” Dr. Weiss says when comparing the COVID-19 impact to that of the recession that started in 2008. “Back then, we heard a lot about places where horses could find a safe refuge, but much less in the way of re-homing. Today there is much more sophisticated support and much more coordination of industry support.”

To help individuals more easily connect with horses in need of temporary foster homes, the ASPCA is updating its online adoption platform, MyRightHorse.org, to spotlight horses available for fostering. The site, previously focused solely on encouraging adoption, now includes a re-branded homepage, opportunities to inquire about specific horses and resources about fostering.

Those unable to foster or adopt are encouraged to get involved by sharing an available horse from MyRightHorse.org on their social media channels to help spread the word and find a home.



Lost In Transition

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The language surrounding horses in need has helped prompt a positive sea change. While the term "unwanted" still lingers, it's been emphatically replaced with "in transition" wherever possible. A major example is the multi-organizational effort, spearheaded by the American Horse Council, and originally called The Unwanted Horse Coalition. Last year, its name was changed to The United Horse Coalition.

Again, small animal welfare trends led the way. "We found with cats and dogs, about 15 years ago, that shelters were not the place to go for an adoptable animal," Dr. Weiss explains. "Somehow those animals were considered 'broken.' With horses, we found that people thought of horses in shelters as somehow different from the horse in their backyard. The vast majority of them are not any different. Instead, we think of them as 'lost in transition' because they are transitioning between careers or homes."



"There are horses that need to be 'rescued,'" she clarifies. "They have medical issues, have been the victims of cruelty or are at the end of their lives." These horses need to live out their lives in the specialized care of a suitable rescue or shelter. The majority of horses in need, however, are well suited to being transitioned to new homes and jobs. "Most horses coming through shelters are ready for their next adventure," Dr. Weiss says.

The Thoroughbred Incentive Program, Retired Racehorse Project and the BLM and Mustang Heritage Foundation's Mustang Makeovers are among the industry and breed-specific programs leading the way in popularizing and proving the merits of transitioning horses into new lives. "Efforts like these have provided the runway for what we are doing," Dr. Weiss reports. "These are organizations committed to supporting their horses beyond their sport. It's an exciting time for these horses in transition and those who could be at risk."

Organizations' willingness to set aside philosophical differences and come together for equine

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welfare has also played a big part, she continues. The United Horse Coalition and the The Right Horse program both reflect groups “setting aside our differences” to work together. Laws regarding horse slaughter and the Horse Racing Integrity Act are among the “big emotional” topics on which participating members may passionately disagree, yet progress for horses in transition is possible by focusing on points of agreement. Even as the wider political culture seems more divided than ever, horse welfare advocates are finding and positively exploiting their common ground.



Right Horse Partners

The ASPCA program works with horse helping organizations in two phases, the first of which is the “Warm Up Ring.” In this phase, facilities must meet 13 vetting criteria, then are visited by a Right Horse rep for a site visit before onboarding as a partner program.

Right Horse Partners in California include:

- Love This Horse Equine Rescue in Acton - www.lovetthishorsearabianrescue.org
- Hope For Horses in Galt - www.horse4horses.com
- The Monty Roberts Institute in Solvang - www.MontyRoberts.com

Prospective Partners in the Warm-Up Ring include:

- Win Home Place in Canyon Country - www.winhomeplace.org
- Saffyre Sanctuary, Inc. in Sylmar - www.saffyresanctuary.org

The Gallop welcomes news, tips and photos. Contact Kim F. Miller at kimfmiller1@mac.com.