



**Maddie's Fund**

***Innovative Fostering: Saving More Dogs with Behavioral Challenges***

Webcast Transcript

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*[Beginning of Audio]*

*Jessie Collins:* Good evening, everyone. Thank you for being here tonight for our webcast, "Innovative Fostering: Saving More Dogs with Behavioral Challenges." I'm Jessie Collins, education specialist with Maddie's Fund.

Our presenter tonight is Kristen Auerbach. Kristen Auerbach is currently the deputy chief animal services officer at the Austin Animal Center in Austin, Texas, a national leader in no-kill animal sheltering. Previously, Kristen served as the assistant director at the Fairfax County Animal Shelter in Virginia, where she helped overturn pit bull adoption restrictions, doubled the adoptions, and cut euthanasia in half, bringing Fairfax County to no-kill. During her tenure, she implemented dog playgroups, a comprehensive in-shelter enrichment program, and life-saving foster programs. Kristen regularly presents in rights on subjects such as breed-labeling, reducing foster intake, innovative foster care, and social media. She is giving a fantastic presentation for all of us tonight, so get ready.

Before we start, let's talk about a few housekeeping items. Please take a look at the left side of your screen, where you'll see a Q&A window. That's where you can ask questions throughout the presentation. There is a certificate of attendance for attending this live event, which you can access in the Resource widget at the bottom of the page. If you need help with your connection during the presentation, you can click the Help widget at the bottom of your screen. This presentation will be available On Demand within 24 hours, should you wish to view it again. If you're interested in this program, or in implementing this program, please put your contact information in the Q&A box. Kristen, thank you for being here tonight.

*Kristen Auerbach:* Thank you so much. Hi everybody, and thank you all for attending. Really excited to be here tonight talking about a little study that we did in my time in Fairfax County, Virginia. This study started out as a way to just sort of track what happened when we started to try to save more lives of adult dogs – adult medium and large dogs – that had some common behavioral challenges to shelter in. We really just wanted to track the data to see what would happen, and to follow these dogs through foster and adoption.

And so, it's really exciting that this study has now – it was first presented at the National Council on Pet Population, and this is exciting for animal welfare administrators, 2015 research symposiums, and we had a half an hour to talk about it. And since then, it's been presented at various regional and national conferences, most recently at Best Friends, and it's been written about by the ASPCA, the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. It's been featured in BarkPost and it's forthcoming in *Best Friends* magazine.

So, this little, tiny study we did has already reached thousands, so it's really exciting to be here tonight, talking about it. This presentation has two parts. We're going to talk about the study that we did in Fairfax, saving dogs with behavioral challenges, and in the second part, I'm going to tell you how you can start a similar program at your shelter. If you are a rescue or an animal shelter person who is more interested in cats, everything I'm going to talk about tonight is totally relevant to also saving more lives of cats in your shelter.

Just a little bit about me: I'm here in Austin now, but I actually started my career in animal welfare in the late 1990s in a shelter in Ohio, and I remember the experience as one that – to determine what dogs would live or die, someone would walk through the kennels every day, and they would look at the dog in the cage – and some of you will remember these times, and for some of you, this may still be reality. You would look at the dog, and if it would growl or give what some people call a "hard stare," that dog would get a big, red "E" written on its cage and at the end of the day, that dog would die. So, just based on looking at the dog in the kennel, life or death determinations were made.

And this is the late 1990s, and for many of us, that reality has changed; but I, needless to say, didn't last long in that environment. I left animal welfare after just a few months, went on to have a different career, and come back in 2013 to Fairfax County when the director of the shelter, Tawny Hammond, who's now the director here in Austin, promised me that I could work to save lives rather than end them. So, that's how I got to Fairfax County.

This story that I'm going to tell you – I mean, it's all true. The eyes are true; the stories of the dogs that were involved. And this story, like many, starts with a tragedy; a dog named Carmella. And she's the one – you can see her on the left – she's the one, she kind of has her mouth open and is looking right at us. That's the only picture we have of her.

But she was a dog that, shortly after I started working in Fairfax, she came into our shelter and she was friendly with people, friendly with other dogs, and she also resource guarded. So, on the temperament test that we gave her – many of you are familiar with the rubber hand that's used with wet food to test for resource guarding – she didn't just bite the hand, but she kind of exuberantly bit it and then rolled around on the ground with it. And in hindsight, she probably thought it was a toy but we saw it as resource guarding, and we had been told that that was a failure of the temperament test.

And so, we were really afraid to adopt her out, and we determined, based on the resource guarding portion of that test, that we were going to euthanize her. And so, she was euthanized, and as soon as we made that decision, as soon as we ended her life, the director and I felt that we had made a horrible mistake. And it was sort of in that moment that we said we had to do better, and we had to figure it out, and her collar still hangs on our director's door as a reminder to try to do better by the dogs.

Shortly after Carmella died, we read a study by the vet department of the ASPCA that food guarding is modifiable, and it may not appear in the home; it may be a shelter-based behavior. And so, it just confirmed what we knew that this is a great dog who didn't need to die.

So, I'm going to talk a little bit about Fairfax County and the kind of shelter it was. Fairfax County is an open-access, municipal shelter, and it fell under the police department in Fairfax County, Virginia, serving about 1.2 million people over 400 square miles, just outside of Washington, D.C. – so we bumped right up against Washington, D.C. Our average annual intake was between 4500 and 5000 animals, and in 2015 the shelter achieved 90 percent raw live outcomes, and that's noses, noses out live outcomes.

Prior to 2012, the shelter was saving about 75 percent, but there were still things happening; there were still dogs unnecessarily dying. The shelter was euthanizing for space and there were time limits for adoption, so if the shelter became full or an animal was there too long and didn't get adopted, it was at risk to be killed in the shelter.

We had pit bull adoption restrictions, so up to 80 percent of the pit bull dogs at any time were euthanized, and the restrictions were pretty extreme.

In order to adopt a pit bull dog or a dog labeled as pit bull, you had to be 25, own a home, undergo a background check, undergo a home visit, and agree to mandatory training. So, as you can imagine, even for the "ambassador dogs," it was really hard to get them adopted, because people could walk in and adopt a dog not labeled as a pit bull and take it home the same day. To adopt a dog labeled as a pit bull, it took two weeks, sometimes more, to take that dog home, because of the restrictions. So, those restrictions themselves ended a lot of lives.

And we were euthanizing dogs for common behavioral challenges, including failing the SAFER evaluation, and Dr. Emily Weiss of the ASPCA was actually the first person to write about this study, and Dr. Weiss has also said publicly that she's never intended that the SAFER be used to pull dogs, to decide who should live or die, but should rather be used as a tool to gather information about the dogs. But nonetheless, at our shelter, it was being used to decide which dogs lived or died.

About 25 percent of all dogs were dying, and if you can see on your screen, this is a sample outcomes list, and this is from a shelter in Maryland, but this is sort of what our outcomes lists look like. When we looked at justifications for euthanasia, we'd have categories that were kind of vague. "Aggressive to humans or other animals" could mean many, many things. Another one, "Feral, undersocialized or fearful" – that was a category we used all of those words to justify euthanasia. And we also had a category that we used quite often called "unhandled-able." And "unhandled-able" just meant that no one got that animal out of the cage.

So, I guess I want to ask a question: does your shelter or your community make euthanasia decisions based on the result of a standardized behavioral evaluation?

*Jessie Collins:* And the answers that you can choose from are: yes; no; yes, but only as part of a comprehensive evaluation process; not applicable; or I don't know. Please answer directly on your screen and not in the Q&A box.

And here are our answers. What do you think, Kristen?

*Kristen Auerbach:* That's really interesting, and it's really exciting to see how many *Nos* there are, and how many people say, "Yes, but only as part of a comprehensive evaluation process."

I want to stop now and ask you all another question. So, we're going to ask you – you can use the green thumbs up for "Yes" and the red for "No." How many of you, if you take the dog just sitting beside your feet right now, or the dog that's on your couch or the dog that's at home waiting for you – how many of you are completely confident that that dog, your dog

at home, if it went to a shelter tomorrow and was in a kennel for three to ten days and then was brought out for a five-minute temperament test or a ten-minute temperament test – how many of you are confident that your dog at home would make it out of that shelter alive if its temperament was judged on that evaluation, after it had been in a kennel three to ten days?

This is a question that I often ask when I do this presentation when we first start, and we find the vast majority of people, just like I'm starting to see here – we've got 120 of you are saying "No" and 36 are saying "Yes." Sixty-seven percent of you are saying you are not confident that your pet at home would make it out of the shelter alive based on this. And this has been confirmed through a recent study by Gary Patronek and Janis Bradley – some of you may be familiar with this – that it may be true that canine behavior evaluations in animal shelters are no more predictive than simply flipping a coin. And so, what we ended up saying in Fairfax was that we had to do something else beyond an evaluation to determine life or death outcomes for our dogs.

What did our numbers look like? Okay, beginning in 2013, we made some really significant changes, and this is where our story really begins. We stopped euthanizing for space or time limits, so dogs had as long as they needed to find a home, whether it was three weeks or three months or even longer, and we worked toward ending euthanasia based on perceived breed.

It actually took us a year to overturn the breed restrictions for pit bull adopters, but we did work on ending that right away, and we stopped euthanizing any dogs for failing a standardized behavior evaluation. So, we just use that as a piece of information, as Dr. Weiss intended, to help us gather more information about the dog. And we began implementing enrichment, playgroups and an adult dog foster program. So, as you can see, between 2012 and 2015, there was a significant increase in dog adoptions.

And corresponding with that, we saw a significant decrease in euthanasia of dogs. Beginning in 2012, we started to decrease the number of dogs that were being euthanized.

Most significantly is this picture here. You can see how devastating those restrictions on pit bull adoptions were. Even in 2013, despite our best efforts at marketing and changing the way that we talked about pit bull dogs, or dogs identified as pit bulls, we still were only able to adopt out 46. And then the numbers went way up in 2014 and 2015. In 2015, we were actually the first open-access shelter in our part of the country to pull dogs from other shelters.

So, we started pulling in dogs identified as pit bulls from Prince George's County, and many of you are probably familiar with Prince George's – they have a full ban on pit bulls, so they have to leave the county in order to live. So, we started actually pulling those dogs into our program, which made our numbers of dogs labeled as pit bulls adopted even higher. When I look at this chart I'm both happy but also profoundly sad, because you can see in the white, blank space the number of lives that were needlessly lost.

We knew at the time when we were saving more lives, and if we go back to this chart of the adoptions, as we were doing that, as we were saving particularly more medium and large dogs, that we also needed to be tracking our data and finding out what was going on with those dogs. And so, that was part of the reason for the study.

In addition to the foster program, which we're going to talk about in just a minute, we also started a number of other enrichment programs. We started a field trip "power hour" fostering – we just let any of our volunteers and fosters take any of our dogs, any of our available dogs, out of the shelter, even if it was just for an hour, whether it was to get ice cream like this dog you see here, or it was to go for a car ride or a trip to the park.

We also started weekend overnight fostering. We were closed two days a week, and it was so maddening to see the dogs sitting there. And some of you know this feeling – your shelter's closed; no one can come and adopt them. We just started sending all the dogs to foster homes, whether it was for one night or the whole weekend, and those dogs came back and time and time again, they were so much more adoptable upon their return. So, every weekend those dogs would leave until they got adopted.

We started kennel enrichment, doing stuffed kongs and all kinds of different things – trio parties are my personal favorite. And we started off-leash dog walking led by volunteers. We let our volunteers start helping other volunteers take dogs on walks, just to get them out of the shelter more. And we also started group field trips. One of our favorites was we would take the dogs to a horse cross-country – of course, it is northern Virginia – and just let them all jump the fences and take great pictures, and then get those dogs adopted.

Another program that must be specifically mentioned is that we implemented Aimee Sadler's Dogs Playing for Life shelter dog playgroups in our shelter. We use playgroups to assess and evaluate dogs, and also just for daily exercise and enrichment. And then this program really formed the foundation to be able to send dogs to foster.

*Jessie Collins:* It looks like we've reached our next poll question, and the question is: which of the following programs are currently happening at your shelter. Select all that apply: playgroups; field trips or short-term outings with fosters or volunteers; overnights with foster families; daily kennel enrichment; or daily kennel breaks. Please answer the question directly on your screen and not in the Q&A box.

And here are our answers, Kristen.

*Kristen Auerbach:* Wow, this is pretty cool, everybody. Forty-four percent are doing playgroups. I hope Aimee Sadler is tuned in tonight – I think she'd be really, really excited to see that; I'll be sure to share that with her. Thirty-nine percent on field trips – great. Short-term outings – that's amazing.

I remember when we started that. People were like, "You can't let the dogs leave the shelter for an hour." So, it's really cool. Overnights with foster families, 36 percent – wow. Daily kennel enrichment, 56. This is great. Good work, everyone who has implemented those programs.

Okay, cool. *[Interruption in audio, 0:18:38]* So, despite all of this – we have shelter dog playgroups, we have the kennel enrichment, we're getting the dogs out. Despite all this, there's still a group of dogs that are at risk in our shelter, and I think many of this is going to resonate with so many of you, because I think this is the challenge over and over again. You've got dogs with some pretty common behavioral challenges, right? Jumpy/mouthy, leash reactive, barrier reactive – you've got those dogs in your shelter. You have no specialized behavior staff, no rescue placement options.

When I remember my time in Fairfax and the several years that I was there, I think we sent one pit bull dog to one rescue group one time, and it came back a week later. We simply did not have rescue placement options for any dogs with behavioral challenges, regardless of their breed or perceived breed. Our rescues really only took behavioral ambassador dogs. So, even kind of behavioral challenges were a reason that we could not send dogs to rescue.

So, the dogs would be there; they'd be sitting there; we can't put them on the adoption floor. And then we started to have concerns from our staff, from our volunteers, from our animal control officers, saying, "This dog's getting worse in the shelter; it's declining." The language around it is "He's going kennel-crazy; it's getting stressed and the dog is getting worse," and the behavior starts to decline. Fewer people are handling the dog; it's getting out less; the behavior is going downhill – and that often leads to the death of that dog. And this is still a huge, unsolved puzzle for our industry, because these dogs often cannot be helped in the shelter

environment.

That's where the study comes in. We decided that we were going to try to help those dogs. This group of dogs that's at risk because of this vicious circle were the group of dogs that we decided we really wanted to try to start saving, and that's where the study comes in. That's Bully – you're going to see a lot more of him, and I'm going to tell you a little bit about him – but that's Bully in his foster home.

But really, the study itself begins with a dog named Patty. That's Patty – she's the cutest dog in the world, right? Patty comes into our shelter, and she is just a myriad of behavioral issues. She's reactive in the kennel, she's barking at everyone and every dog that walks by. She's so stressed that her eyes were completely bloodshot, and she was trembling in her kennel. She was really hard to get in and out; hard to handle getting in and out of the kennel. Once she got outside, she did this thing where she would just jump up and kind of cling onto the person, the handler. She didn't use her mouth, but that can be really unsettling for someone and certainly not something that makes a dog what we think of as adoptable.

We really didn't know what to do with Patty. Aimee Sadler actually was at our shelter when Patty was there. We evaluated her in playgroups, and she was fairly social with other dogs, although she was so stressed that she wasn't really interested in playing. And she was really jumpy and just nervous and upset. And over time – we had Patty for a couple of months – and over time, her behavior just kept going downhill, so much that most of the volunteers really didn't want to handle her and she was getting out less and less, and it came to the point where we put her name on a euthanasia list.

And one of our staff members came to us and said, "I want to take Patty out of the shelter just for a night. I just want to see if there's any difference in her behavior when she gets out of here." So, we said, "Okay, okay, you can take her out of the shelter for one night." Okay, so she's walking out of the shelter, and she steps one paw off of the shelter's property, and turns into the laziest, most "couch potato chill" dog you've ever met. It was like one paw out of the shelter environment.

Patty goes home that night, and she's with the staff member's three dogs, and the staff member sends us a picture of Patty laying on the bed with the three dogs, looking like the happiest dog in the world, looking like she looks in this picture right here. And we were really blown away. And so, we had a volunteer who said, "You know, if she's okay in the home, I can foster her for a little while." So, we said, "Absolutely." And here's Patty with her best friend the cat in her longer-term foster home – that's that picture on the left. Patty turned out to be extremely fond of cats. And on

the right you see Patty with her mom and dad, who eventually adopted her. And after a little time in a foster home, she did find her forever family and she is still happy and beloved in that home.

We went back later and read the notes on Patty, and what we didn't know about her – somehow, it had gotten lost in the notes – that actually Patty came in to us after she had been locked in a hot car. And animal control had actually – our department had actually had to break her out of the hot car so that she didn't die in it. And it made a lot of sense to us that she would be very traumatized by that experience, and some of the behavior that we saw in the shelter might very well be related to what she had gone through.

And it made us think that we needed to learn the stories of these dogs, and we also needed to start an actual foster program to save more of them, because without rescue placement options, if they couldn't be put on the adoption floor, these dogs were truly at risk of euthanasia. And that's how the study was borne.

Between May of 2013 to March of 2015, we took 52 medium and large shelter dogs of various breeds and types. These dogs didn't have any viable placement options because of their behavioral challenges in the shelter, and none of these dogs were severely aggressive towards people or animals. They were dogs that displayed kind of common behavioral issues, which I'm going to talk about, and that dog right there – you can see her leaping over the grade – that was her first day in foster where she went to one of our foster trainers, where she got to live on a farm and burn off a little energy, as you can see.

The foster families through the study – there were 16 foster families – and some families fostered one dog and some fostered several over the two-year period. The foster families all had to be people that knew what they were doing; they had to know the stakes. And they had to know that the dogs that they were taking home may be particularly at risk. The fosters knew they had to communicate very honestly with us about the behaviors that they saw in the home, and that some of their assessments could lead to the decision being made about that dog's final outcome. For the most part, the foster families were just regular people. Some of them were self-identified as trainers; others were not, they just wanted to help the dogs in the shelter. And they agreed to tell us everything, and they also agreed to help us find adopters for the dogs they fostered.

We had three very simple objectives, the first study. We wanted to know – could we place medium and large dogs with behavioral challenges in foster homes and see their behavior improve? We also wanted to know – could these same dogs, these dogs that were at risk of euthanasia,

eventually be adopted into permanent homes after going to foster? And could we do all this safely? As I mentioned in the beginning, we were under the police department, and we had a very strong public safety mission that was very, very important, and for tracking this data, it was part of making sure that we also fulfilled our duties of public safety.

We studied numerous things about the dogs. We tracked their ages; their behavioral issues; how long they were in foster; their final outcome; the reason they were euthanized if they were; if they were returned, we looked at why and what was their rate of return; and we looked at any behavioral challenges their foster or adopters experienced. And we also followed the status of the dogs 6-18 months after they were adopted. That's Sweet Jane right there that you see, and she was one of our longest-term fosters. I'll talk more about her in a little bit, too.

Oh, okay – wait, don't look at that, I'm going to go back one second. All right. If you have a guess – oh, and you're not going to be able to answer this, but guess in your head: what do you think the average age of the dogs in this study was? The average age of the dogs that were at risk of euthanasia because of behavioral challenges – that we put into foster homes.

If you guessed two, you would be correct. Most of the dogs in our study – 80 percent – were three years or under, and that makes sense, right? Because they're big all of a sudden, and rowdy, and they're not cute puppies anymore, and so, it made a lot of sense to us that most of the dogs were three and under, and not through those "terrible twos" – or they were young, energetic dogs. These two that you see on the right here – I can't remember which one was in the foster study – but the person that adopted that dog wanted a twin for their Labradoodle, so these were best friends and indistinguishable in every way, including their behavior.

Okay, so what were the behavioral issues? And this is one of the first questions that comes up when we talk about this. I will be the first to say that I am not a behaviorist; I am not a trainer. I am an average person who loves dogs and who works in an animal shelter, and what I have found in talking about this now, all over the country, is that the vast majority of shelters have people like me talking, sort of assessing and evaluating dogs, and so these categories were just based on what people like me – myself and our staff – were witnessing from the dogs in the shelter.

The most common behavior that we were identifying was fear-based aggression. These are the dogs that are in the back of the kennel, cowering, growling, maybe giving you a "hard stare" or what people used to call a "whale eye" – dogs that don't really want to be touched when they're in the kennel. So, that was the most common behavioral category.

The second one was just generalized kennel stress – dogs that were hard to get in and out of their kennels; jumpy/mouthy; difficult to leash up. In our shelter in Fairfax County, the walkways outside of the kennels are very, very narrow, so that kennel stress posed a lot of safety issues, because just trying to walk the dogs through the kennel area and get them in and out was more challenging than it needed to be, because of those narrow kennel rows.

The third category was barrier reactive, and this could be dogs that are very reactive either out of the gate or on the leash, and that was another significant issue because of having to walk them through these narrow kind of kennels. It made dogs that were reactive hard to show to adopters. Next one was resource guarding, followed by dogs that were dog selective. Again, I mentioned that we evaluated all the dogs in the study in playgroups, so we did know that. One dog had a fight, that while very minor was possibly intentional, so that was of concern. And another dog had a prey drive that made it hard to handle. It was just one of those dogs that was just so strong and really hard to walk around the yard because every squirrel and bird, it was lunging at.

Okay, I think we're up to another poll question – Jessie?

*Jessie Collins:* Thank you, Kristen. Before we jump into our next poll question, I just wanted to remind the audience that you can submit questions throughout the presentation through your Q&A window. So, now let's move on to the poll question: which of the following behaviors may put a dog at risk of euthanasia in your shelter? Select all that apply: fear-based aggression; kennel stress; barrier reactivity; resource guarding; dog selective; bite history; strong prey drive; not applicable; or I don't know.

Please answer the question directly on your screen and not in the Q&A box.

And it looks like we have our answers, Kristen.

*Kristen Auerbach:* Yeah, it's really interesting. That fear-based aggression is showing up as the 53 percent say that would put a dog at risk. That's significant, especially because those are often the dogs that don't ever get out of their kennel, and then they're also the dogs that we found that, by putting them in playgroups, we see completely different dogs most of the time. It looks like resource guarding was 42 percent, followed by kennel stress and barrier reactivity. This is great information to have, for everybody that's submitting these answers, as we continue to do this presentation throughout the country.

All right, so this brings us to another story that we want to share. This is

Buddy. Buddy came in as a stray. He exhibited kennel stress, barrier reactivity and extremely high energy. So, you know these dogs, they just come in and they're like a ball of energy; he was one of those. He was in a constant state of anxiety and frustration at the shelter, and he was really difficult to handle, particularly around other dogs.

And so, he was one of those dogs that we couldn't put him on the adoption floor. He was just so challenging to get in and out of the kennel. We would keep him in the back, but people were not excited to take him out, because he was pulling and hard to handle and he was a dog that really became at risk. Over the days, he just continued to decline and decline every day.

So, Buddy ended up going to a foster home with one of our fairly regular fosters, and here's what his foster had to say: "Buddy was our fourth foster, and he became a foster failure. He come with the charm of a dog with zero manners, and we were smitten. Flash forward to today: he's taken several obedience classes; still has no manners, but now knows some pretty cool tricks and we couldn't be happier." And that's Alyssa – she's the one holding Buddy in that picture on the right. She and her partner adopted him. They were foster failures, and they love that dog so much – in fact, so much that they brought Buddy to one of our presentations on the subject where he sat at the table during the presentation, showing off how cute and adorable he is.

That's not the end of Buddy's story, though. Here's a couple of our favorite Buddy pics. He is a great dog, but he has a best friend who's also adopted from our shelter. And more importantly, Buddy has a job now: Buddy's job is to foster puppies, and to tend to be just as naughty as he is. He's a great foster dad, actually, and he brings up a point which we found over and over again: that so many of the dogs saved through this study aren't just leading lives, they're leading really meaningful lives, and Buddy's one of those dogs. He's a foster dad, he's a beloved pet, and he is his mom's very best friend.

All right. Some of the dogs, also – we had some secondary behavioral issues, because not all the dogs just had one primary issue. Some of them were just highly, highly energetic, which surprisingly, can really put a dog at risk of euthanasia in a shelter. And this is when we talked to different shelters about this; they admit that high energy is one of the hardest things to deal with in a shelter environment, because certainly the cure for high energy is not to lock a dog in a kennel. It just exacerbates and worsens it quite quickly.

Four were possibly dog aggressive – we knew they were dog selective, but we were concerned about their level of selectivity; two were dog selective;

two had fear of men; two were just very undersocialized; two had displayed separation anxiety, either in their previous home or in the shelter; and one displayed reactivity as a secondary issue.

Okay. This is probably, next to the live outcomes –and this is over a two-year period. This is probably one of the biggest surprises to people the first time that they see this. Most of the dogs weren't in foster very long, and when we ask the audience to guess how long do you think the dogs were in foster on average, most people would say, "Well, several months."

Actually, 88 percent of the dogs were in foster 30 days or less. Most of them were – more than half – were in foster about a month or less. This was a very adoption-focused program, so we didn't – I know so many of us have sent dogs to fostering, but they're like, "Please keep it, until I get the dog adopted." This was not that program. We put them in foster, and the foster families had definite expectations around helping those dogs find permanent homes. The dogs were there for further assessment and evaluation, and they were also there to be placed.

So, before I go to the next slide, I want to say that of the 52 dogs, all were considered for euthanasia based on the lack of viable placement options for the dogs. And so, when we started out on this study and we started to save these dogs, we said, "Well, we'll be happy if 20 percent of these dogs get out alive – that will be a great improvement." So, as we started to get the results in and we started to tabulate data near the end of the study period, and we figured out the actual live outcome rate, we were pretty amazed to find that it was above 90 percent. Only five of the dogs in the study were euthanized, and this chart actually needs to be updated because all of the dogs – the dog that was in foster and the one that was with the rescue group – those dogs have also now been adopted. So, we saved more than 90 percent of dogs that before foster, they didn't have a hope of getting out alive.

And not all of the dogs had to be adopted directly from the foster home. One of the other big surprises about the study for us was that 33 percent of the dogs were able to come back to the shelter, be put in a kennel, and be adopted directly from a kennel, when previously we couldn't have put them on the adoption floor. We were able to learn enough about them, learn how to manage their behaviors, and to bring them back to the shelter.

One of the things we did really often with these dogs is we would have their foster families bring them back while we were open, and then the dogs would go back home at night, and that allowed the dogs to be seen on the adoption floor but also allowed them to get out of the shelter to keep that stress level low, and so that when they did come back, they were much more adoptable on the floor.

We also expected a higher rate of return for the dogs, but actually we found that that was not the case. Six of the dogs were adopted and returned prior to going to foster homes. Three of the dogs – 6 percent – were sent to foster; they were adopted; they were returned because it wasn't a good fit; and then they were re-adopted. Two of the dogs were sent to foster, adopted, returned, and euthanized because of some behaviors that happened in the homes.

The return rate of dogs in our study was 9.6 percent, and the overall return rate of adopted dogs in our shelter was 13 percent, and part of this lower rate of return was that the fosters were really key. They were at the heart of getting the dogs adopted, so the fosters would meet with the families and they would do the adoption counseling. We also knew a lot more about the dogs in this program because they were in foster, so we were more likely to have successful adoptions with these dogs than we were with our average dogs.

That dog – I can never remember his name – but he was owned by a homeless gentleman, and the man went to jail and couldn't keep the dog, and he was in our shelter for quite a while. He's another high-energy; difficult to handle; really bad pulling on the leash; hard to get in and out of the kennel. He was sent to foster where he was one of our longest-term foster dogs, but it was because he was being treated for heartworm.

He was sent to a foster and he ended up getting adopted by this family, and I was – right before I left Virginia – I was walking in the woods, and I ran across these two. The little boy – and he has this big dog at the end of his leash, on a loose leash, and they're walking through the woods in their camo outfits, and I stopped and I said, "Hey, is that – I know that dog." He proceeded to tell me about his dog for the next 15 minutes, and his parents were right behind him, but it was a happy sight to see that dog in such a wonderful situation and wonderful family.

One of the things we wanted to do is we wanted to know: how did the fosters feel about their experiences? People imagine that people won't want to foster big, more challenging dogs. And one of the other most common questions we get is how did we find the fosters, and I'm going to talk more about that in a little bit. We actually met with a group of our fosters at the end of the study, and we asked them, "How did you feel about your experiences?" And they told us a few things. They said they felt really well-informed about the dogs' issues before taking them home. Full-disclosure in telling the families everything we knew about the dogs was so important, because we were able to help set them up for success, so they got all the medical and behavioral notes on the dogs before they took them home.

The families felt that they either didn't witness the behavior described to them, or that they saw the behavior diminish within a week, so the behavior either went away entirely – they never saw it – or they saw it diminish. And they said sometimes new behavioral issues emerged over time. What do you think the most common behavioral issue they saw is? If you think what that issue might have been and take a guess in your head – it was actually separation anxiety. More than any other issue we saw, the fosters reported that they saw separation anxiety in the dogs when they brought them home.

And the fosters felt that trainer support and someone to consult with was key. One thing that we always mention when we talk about the study is that we didn't actually have any funding to do it, and so we started to find all of these people coming out. Once they found out about the program, we had multiple trainers jumping on board asking how they can help, and we certainly took advantage of those people. I've shown you a couple pictures of them already, some of those folks, but we had numerous people who were self-identified/self-described as trainers who just offered to help. So, the fosters had someone they could call if they needed to, or they had someone to help them troubleshoot problems. That's Mogi here, that's one of the study dogs, and his mom Tina.

We also called our adopters 6-18 months to follow up; we asked them four questions. Okay, so any of you who work in shelters know that this is in general – adoption follow-ups this long after adoption is always a bit of a scary moment. We sometimes send the dogs out the door like, "Goodbye, have a good life." And so, to call and follow up, and you find out the nitty-gritty about the dog's doing in the home, and if the dog is doing well in the home. And so we were really committed to finding out how the dogs did long after they left our care, so we called our adopters and asked them some questions.

The first question we asked them was, "Is this dog still in your home?" And we were really excited that 96 percent of the respondents said, "Yes, the dog is still in my home." The dog on the right, Pillow – he's the one that you see looking out the door. That dog had – when he was with us – he had cancer that we felt was likely terminal, and so since going to his permanent home, his cancer is in remission, he's quite healthy, and his family sent us numerous pictures of the same pose of him looking out the door with his best friend behind him. That's his favorite spot, so he's doing really well, both behaviorally and physically/medically.

We also asked them, "Did you experience any challenges?" We wanted to know: what were they facing? And we were really surprised to find out that they were facing the same challenges that pretty much all of our

adopters face. They said things like, "Well, barks a lot and digs and pulls too much." "Needs training and will run away off leash but so loving." Someone said, "Afraid of cars. Wants to chase them, but scared." Another person said, "Sometimes he's a bit naughty and chews on things." And you can read the rest of the answer, but these are pretty mundane issues that people were reporting to us. It was much less exciting than we thought it would be.

We also asked them, "Would you re-adopt this dog?" The vast majority of people said, "Yes, of course we'd re-adopt this dog." A few people said no, they wouldn't. One person said, "No, not knowing what we know now, but we love Mindy and have no intention of giving her up." Mindy was a dog that ended up having separation anxiety and other forms of anxiety. Someone said, "Yes, in a heartbeat." Someone else said, "No, we love her very much, but we wouldn't adopt a young dog again because of the need for exercise and training," and they didn't say a dog with behavioral challenges, they said, "We wouldn't adopt a young dog again." Someone said, "Oh yeah, he's perfect – absolutely." And another person said, "I love him now, but in the beginning I would have opted for another dog if I had known about his skin allergies."

So, again, fairly common answers. And we do adoption follow-ups for most of our dogs, and these are the same answers that we find on our dogs not identified as dogs having behavioral challenges. We didn't find any variation between this group of dogs and other dogs that we do adoption follow-up on.

We also asked them, "Is there something we could have done to offer you more support? Could we have made your adoption experience better?" The adopters said, "Yes;" they would've liked some basic training, some training opportunities after adoption. They would have appreciated training support immediately following the adoption and someone to help them troubleshoot any issues that they had. And this is the same answer we get when we ask everyone this. Most adopters, when you ask them if there's a way we could have provided more support, they're going to give you a similar answer.

Some other observations that came out of the study: 6 of the 51 dogs were adopted by their foster family, so we got a 10 percent rate of foster fails. And there have been studies that show that people that foster dogs with medical challenges are more likely to adopt them, and we found the same may be actually true for people who foster dogs with behavioral challenges. The dog that you see there is Bully – I showed you him in the beginning when I told you that was him in his foster home, and this is Bully with his adoptive brother. And I'm going to tell you a little bit – I'm mentioning this and I'm going to tell you a story about him in just a

minute.

Okay. The other thing is we asked foster families, "Tell us one word to describe your foster dog, like what is one word to describe the dogs that you fostered through this program?" And so, you can take another second and guess: what do you think the number one word they used is? People usually when they guess they say things like sweetheart; lovable; good. The answer is actually "smart." When we asked fosters what word describes your foster dogs in this program, the word they gave us time and time again was "smart" or "highly intelligent."

And that was really striking to us, that they answered that way, because it makes sense that of course, dogs that are highly intelligent; that are smart; that need stimulation; would have a harder time in the shelter; would be more likely to display some behavioral challenges in the shelter; because they're bored and they're stressed by their experience because their brains aren't being stimulated.

Another observation is in most cases, the foster families actually met with the potential adopters, and I mentioned this before, but we really empowered the fosters to be the ones to decide what was the best placement for the dogs in their care. They came to know the dogs really well, and so we entrusted them to make that decision for the dogs. So, they would conduct visits, they would help conduct dog-to-dogs visits if the adopters had pets, and they were a really key part of the adoption process. We felt all along that the fosters were in a better position to make good matches, and if you go by our return data, that would seem to be true – that they had a lower rate of return than the average dogs in our shelter.

We also feel that it was really significant that there were dogs helping dogs. Playgroups were so important to this program, because we really wanted to evaluate dogs in a more normal environment, and the best way to do that was in shelter dog playgroups, so following Aimee Sadler's Dogs Playing For Life model, we evaluated all the dogs in the program in playgroups, and they helped us see the dogs in an environment that was a bit more normal, especially, I think, that poll question earlier "dogs that displace fear-based aggressive behavior" – for those dogs, playgroup was often the only thing that we needed to do, because we saw a completely different side of those dogs once they went in a playgroup.

All the dogs in the study were evaluated with other dogs off leash. We also did on-leash evaluations, but we didn't do them to sort of measure dogs' aggression or dogs' selectivity. We only used on-leash evaluations to look at leash reactivity. I can't remember – if you look at the dog in the bottom photo – I can't actually remember which one is the foster dog, but this was life for many of our foster dogs: going home and hanging out

with other adopted, permanent resident shelter dogs until they found their home, and as you can imagine, that photo at the bottom – we use that for marketing – that got that dog adopted– that got that dog adopted right away.

When families can see that's how a dog is at home, they're so much faster to adopt them. And we would often take photos like that and stick them right on the kennels when the dogs did come back. People just need to know the dogs will normalize at home; to be willing to take that leap of faith and bring that dog home.

Okay, so we've come full circle to our study objectives. We wanted to know: could we place and medium and large dogs with behavioral challenges in foster homes and see their behavior improve? And we believe that yes, the study shows with certainty that we did see their behavior improve when they went into foster homes. We wanted to know: could these dogs eventually be adopted into permanent homes? And yes, more than 90 percent of the dogs were adopted into permanent homes. And could we do all this safely? We found that yes, we could do this as a program that was safe for both people and the animals involved.

So, moving on to the second part of this presentation – how do you do this yourself? Because it sounds great, right? But it can also be a pretty big undertaking, and so I'm going to give you some tools tonight to just get started thinking about how you might run something like this at your shelter or rescue.

First of all, you need program materials, and we have at the end – I've included a bunch of supplemental materials. So, I think everything I'm referencing here is included as supplemental materials, so feel free to use any of that for reference.

You need to have a training manual for your fosters that clearly lays out expectations. You need to have a written, initialed and signed foster agreement. We have one included in the supplemental documents that's now been vetted through several attorneys in two different cities, so please feel free to review and use any of the language from that. You need resources for common behaviors to help your fosters and your adopters, a quick one-page guide, and you need to have clearly-written policies and procedures so that your fosters understand the criteria you're looking for, when they should bring a dog back, and when they should contact you, et cetera.

The foster families should all receive signed copies of foster agreements for every dog. All medical and behavioral notes – the best thing we can do for fosters and adopters is to arm them with as much information as we

can; resources and tip sheets; 24/7 contact information for assistance anytime they need it; and the foster feedback form. That's something we forget a lot of the time, but that was a requirement for our fosters – they had to fill out that foster feedback form, because that was what gave us the information that we would eventually need to save these dogs' lives. Remember, many of them came back to the shelter to be adopted, so that feedback form was really, really important.

And that dog that's staring at you right now, that's Sweet Jane – I showed you a picture of her earlier. She was truly one of the most challenging dogs. She was afraid of men; she also had that fear-based aggressive behavior; and really, she would just growl when she was nervous – that was her main behavior – but that was really unsettling for adopters. Sweet Jane was actually adopted by a couple, and the man who adopted her was undergoing cancer treatment. And she has been his steadfast, by-his-side companion as he's undergoing treatment for cancer and has helped him tremendously through that really difficult period.

So, building capacity is one of the first things you need to do, and I'll talk a little bit more about that. But one of the changes we made immediately – and I hope that everyone will do this; it's such a no-brainer – all of our volunteers became fosters and all our fosters became volunteers. So, we just took our volunteers and we said, "Now you can foster, too," and we took all our fosters and said, "Now you can volunteer, too." We automatically doubled the capacity of each of those programs.

So, all of a sudden, if we had 500 volunteers and 500 fosters, now we had 1000 volunteers and 1000 foster families. And the people most likely to foster the medium and large adult dogs are the volunteers; those are the people that are connecting with them. They're coming into the shelter every day and they're connecting with those dogs already. We empowered those people to take those dogs home and foster them.

And we look for certain characteristics in foster families. I mentioned this in the beginning – our foster families had to know the stakes. But what we found is that that's true for all of our fosters. As the program progressed, we stopped kind of treating it as so special and different, and we really used the same criteria for all of our fosters. Because truly, in even the most life-saving shelter in America, dogs' and cats' lives are still at risk, and so we did make that clear to all of our foster families, that what they witnessed, what they observed in the home – that was information that we really needed to make determinations about those animals and their outcomes.

We managed expectations and we communicated often. It's not enough to wait to get called when there's a crisis; we were really proactive about our

communication with fosters and adopters. Because animals' lives are on the line, it was important that we were checking in every three days, every week at the most. We were checking in with our fosters just to make sure that things were going okay. I'd share this picture and people always give me a hard time that I'd do and they'd go, "Oh no, you shouldn't be modeling that." And I'm certainly not intending to model that, but that dog kissing that little boy is exactly what people do when they take home animals.

And so, we do our best to manage expectations. We do the stuff we can to stay in communication, and we try to offer ongoing training and support for people and give them all the tools they needed to be successful fosters and then adopters. We also provided avenues of support, so it wasn't just you took home a foster dog and you had to get it adopted. No – we made our program a community of people saving these dogs' lives. So, our volunteers started a foster club and walking group for foster families and adopters, where they could get together and work on behavioral challenges in a group setting, especially for reactive dogs; this was invaluable. We had free/low-cost training groups for our foster families, and this was done with our volunteer trainers' support.

We had a social media support group. We started in – and this is another thing I hope that all shelters will have. We had an internal – and we have one here in Austin as well – an internal group for staff, volunteers and fosters. It's a closed group. We had 600 members, and that group was there for constant, ongoing 24-hour support, and it was so life-saving and so important, and it was so great that if you have a question, "Oh, my dog is doing this," or if it's medical, "My kitten is looking a little under the weather," you can just do a post on that page and you'll get ten people responding.

And so, we empowered our volunteers and fosters and our staff to be experts in supporting each other for the animals. And the other thing that social media support group was used for is that our fosters were expected to be posting pictures/videos/stories throughout the animal's foster experience, and then our social media – our communication person – would pull that content and put that online, and that would be used to market those animals.

We had trainer support for troubleshooting. We had a volunteer mentor for hard decisions that had to be made. If we did determine that we were going to euthanize a dog, that was always a really, really hard decision for us and for the foster, and so we had volunteer support to help support people through that. We did home visits, if needed. We sent trainers into homes to help work on any kind of behaviors that were in the home, particularly for separation anxiety. We had a phone tree for emergencies,

and we followed up with our adopters. So, these are all avenues of support we had for fosters and adopters of these dogs.

Okay, so another poll question – Jessie, I'll turn it over to you.

*Jessie Collins:* Thank you, Kristen. It looks like we've reached our last poll question: which of the following do you have at your shelter? Select all that apply: social media group for volunteers, fosters and staff; free or low-cost training group; a foster club/support system; a dog walking club for volunteers and fosters; a foster hot line; not applicable; or I don't know. Remember to answer on your screen and not in the Q&A box.

It looks like we have our answers, Kristen – what do you think?

*Kristen Auerbach:* Wow – 62 percent have a social media group for volunteers, fosters and staff; that is so awesome. That is great; I'm so happy to see that. Free or low-cost training group, 21 percent. Foster club/support system. Dog walking club 9.8 percent, and a foster hot line – wow, that is really exciting about the social media groups. And those of you who have them know just how valuable they are. It's a huge group of people helping the animals in your shelter through social media, so that's great. Cool.

Okay. So, the other thing is to track your data. Tracking data was so important, because I think back now to when we did save these dogs, and it would have been great and exciting to save 47 out of 52 dogs. That would have felt like an accomplishment, and we would have been really proud of that. But because we just kept a simple Excel spreadsheet, and we're not research scientists, and we called this a "study" initially – it was really a pilot project.

But because we tracked our data, the impact that those 52 dogs and the 47 live outcomes will have now and in the future – it's so much higher. Those dogs will now do the work of saving so many other dogs, just simply because we tracked data. That part's really important, and in your supplemental documents, I included the Excel spreadsheet that we used to track our data.

We provided resources. If any of you are not familiar with this, you should be. The Center for Shelter Dogs, now through Tufts University, has an excellent resource for common behavioral challenges under Special Adoptions, and you can kind of see this – it's a bunch of PDFs. There are these one-pagers that are so great to give to your fosters and adopters that just tell you how to deal with some kind of common behaviors like jumpy/mouthy, fear of people – things like that. So, we print those out and give those, as appropriate, with all of our fosters and adopters now.

Okay, so this is Hank, and I call him Bully. His name in the shelter is Bully; his name is Hank now. And he's the one that I showed you in the beginning in his foster home. So, I'm going to tell you his story now. He was, in all of my time in animal welfare, the saddest I think I've ever been to see a dog come into the shelter.

His owner was also homeless, and he and Bully had been living in a truck, but the police started to get called on him, just because he was living in his truck, and people would see the dog with him and call the police. And so, he had to surrender Bully, and the day that he surrendered him, they took two of them. He lay on the floor with Bully and the two of them just lay there crying, both of them – both dog and human. And it was again, the saddest thing I've seen happen in any shelter I've worked in; it was heartbreaking.

Well, we took Bully back to the kennel, and for the next two weeks, he laid in his kennel, truly heartbroken. He cried – he sounded like a person when he cried – and he would growl anytime anybody came up to the kennel; he would just lay in the back and growl at them. And he was one of those dogs that if someone hadn't really noticed, he could've easily slipped through the cracks and been one of those dogs that died for this "fear-based aggression" or "unhandled-able" or any of these categories we use.

But we worked with him. Our volunteers really patiently sat by his kennel and eventually got him out, and we sent him to one of our really special foster families where he got to go live on a farm with a little boy, and he kind of came back to life through that experience. And over the couple weeks that he was there, we saw him kind of return to get over his heartbreak, and we saw that smile come back on his face.

He was able to be adopted by a couple who are absolutely head-over-heels in love with him, and Hank's dad, who is – you can see his head in this middle picture – he sent us this quotation. He said: "Hank is a once-in-a-lifetime dog. We have such a connection. He's the best thing that's happened to me in the last 20 years. And he's so smart. When I tell him we're going on a walk, he goes and gets his leash. He's not like a dog; he's like a human. And I don't know what I'd do without this dog. He sleeps with his arms around me, and he snores so loudly."

This particular family has children and grandchildren, and Hank loves kids, so he's always around the kids. And he's a beloved companion to his owners. And he's another dog that we keep coming across in this study when we looked at the dogs. I felt like it wasn't just that the people saved the dogs. The dogs ended up really saving the people, and giving back just as much to those humans that saved them as those humans gave to them.

When we talk about the dogs, we think about how worthwhile their lives are. We didn't just save them. Some of them are just like beloved pets, but others of them are doing meaningful work in the world. There's one dog, who I don't have a picture of, who is actually a therapy dog for depressed teenagers. He works at a school, and his owner is the guidance counselor at the school. And so he sits in her office all day, and when kids come to speak with her, he just comforts them. He's another example of a dog who's living a really meaningful, full life helping people.

People always wonder, "How are you going to find behavioral fosters – like how are you going to find people to take these dogs?" Okay, number one, start with your volunteers; let them start to foster the dog. They're the ones that are already connected with them.

But another lesson that is really important that came out of this work in Virginia is that you just need one person, and this is our one person here. I keep saying as I'm talking tonight, "We, we, we." Well, I'm actually talking about myself and Kelly, who's pictured here, and Kelly typically presents with me. Kelly was the first person to start taking dogs home that were identified as dogs with behavioral challenges, and what started happening is that Kelly would take the dogs home for a couple of days, and she'd post pictures and videos, and then suddenly, other people were like, "You know, I think I could take that dog. I think I could do this."

And it started a kind of snowball effect, where because of that group social media page, other people started to jump in. Kelly provided the example, and she showed that this could be done, and she showed how different the dogs were in homes, and suddenly we didn't just have one of her, we had 15.

If you're watching, Kelly, thank you – you're amazing. Hey, I'm going to tell you a couple more quick stories. I'm going to try to finish up, because I know people have questions. This is Kaine. Those of you who work in shelters will be very familiar with this. This is Kaine in his kennel, and you've probably seen this dog walking by a million times. The staff observations: "I had to put him directly into his kennel. He lowers his head and I'm unable to evaluate him." Another one: "Growling at me during through-walk when I stopped to interact with him." And a third observation: "He was fearful and stayed toward the back of the kennel. Low growling." This dog could have easily died in many shelters.

So, here's Kaine in his foster home, and you can see the difference. This is a day into being in foster. You can see him in the kennel, and then you can see him in his foster home with his foster brother Stu on the left, waiting for a treat. And then you can see Kaine with his family; his adopters are so

happy that we saved his life. They sent us this Christmas card last year thanking us, and there's Kaine with his family. And his family is so happy that we got that Kaine's life was worth saving, and that our foster families and volunteers worked together to save it.

And this is another way – people don't often think of the program as doing this – but because we communicate open and honestly with our adopters, just as much as our fosters, we also engage our adopters into telling them the stories of these dogs, and where they've been, and what their experience was in foster, and how these just volunteers and foster families work together to save the dogs. And our adopters really appreciate the transparency and the honesty, but they also love hearing the dogs' stories.

We provided adopter support, and Kelly talks about how we really just – our fosters often provided our post adoption support. They were there at the other end of the phone, they were there for the families to call if they had questions, and the foster families could often show the adopters how to be successful and help them find solutions to common problems.

In the end, what was borne out of this little foster study for the community in Fairfax was a really comprehensive program to save dogs. Out of these few dogs that went into foster, they've developed this walking group. And this is a picture of the group here. Some of these dogs were adopted, some of these were fostered, and some of these are just shelter dogs that are out for a walk with people who decided to get them out for a shelter break, and this is called a "rescue crew."

These are just a few of the people who are part of being part of the solution to save more medium and large adult dogs. And the county and these programs all built upon one another. As soon as we started to empower fosters and volunteers to save dogs in one way, they started to brainstorm new ways to save more dogs and to create more programs to support that life-saving.

And I'm excited to say that in 2015, 40 percent of the dogs – the available, adoptable dogs in the shelter – went to foster at least once, and that could be for a day outing or an overnight outing, or a longer term. And 40 percent isn't high enough. It's really just the beginning. And in most shelters, this number wouldn't be nearly this high, but it should be. Every time we get them out is another chance to save their lives. Sometimes it only takes an hour, and if you remember Patty's story, the dog that kind of started the study, it was just one paw stepping out of the shelter that saved that dog's life.

So, as we've done this study and we've done similar work – so we're doing similar work here in Austin – we've thought a lot about what is next for

this type of work? And we have three kind of ideas about that. One is that we imagine and envision a reallocation of staff and other resources towards foster-based rather than shelter-based solutions. Every animal shelter needs to have a foster coordinator. Foster needs to be at the very top of the priority list when it comes to staffing, because that person is able to get animals out that if they stay in the shelter, will likely die in the shelter.

And also, we imagine a re-visioning of the role of foster programs in the larger animal welfare movement, so that foster isn't a program of the periphery – it's not a program just for puppies and kittens, which we still see in many shelters, or sick animals – it's a program that's accessible to all of the animals in our shelter that need to get out in order to have their lives saved. And we also see foster as one of several solutions to end the practice of killing fearful, traumatized and anxious animals because of shelter-based behavior.

This foster program isn't really revolutionary, and it probably should have happened a long time ago. We should have started – and certainly, it probably has been happening in some communities for a long time – but we should have and could have been doing this a long time ago to save more dogs. And so, we're really behind the times. This is just an expectation of where we're at for life-saving for our animals. And so, we see it much less as revolutionary or particularly exciting and more as something – just like day playgroups, just like kennel enrichment – to be a standard for animal shelters.

I want to just talk about a couple of takeaways, because as I close up, I think that the first one is that these programs, like playgroups, fostering – these are proven ways to save lives of medium and large adult dogs, and that these programs are really key to protecting the safety of people and animals in our community.

This foster-based program is simply a recognition that, in the midst of the trauma of impoundment and confinement and unfamiliarity, that we may not have the ability, in a shelter, to really know anything at all about the dogs in our care. And that at this moment in animal welfare, in this moment of achieving record life-saving ways, we're saving so many animals. We have a responsibility to do more than look at a traumatized, terrified animal in our shelter and make a life-and-death determination without doing as much due diligence as we possibly can to find out what that animal will be like outside of the shelter environment; to find out that animal's story.

We owe our animals, we owe our dogs more at this point, and foster is a free, easy, safe way to get that information to save more medium and large

adult dogs in our shelters.

As I sort of, in closing – as you think about the dog that is laying at your feet or on your bed or waiting for you at home right now, I think that for those that are working in animal welfare, it's my hope that we can put as much care and effort and rigor into making these life-and-death decisions for the dogs in our shelters as we would for those dogs in our homes, and that this program is a way to do that. It's a way to treat every dog as if it's just as important as the ones that we love as our companions and our friends and our pets.

So, I will turn it over to Jessie now for any questions that you have.

*Jessie Collins:* Thank you so much, Kristen; that was a wonderful presentation. Right before we start into the questions, which we do have a few minutes for, I just wanted to remind everybody that if you're interested in learning more about this program or implementing this program, please put your contact information into the Q&A box, and we'll make sure that that contact information gets to Kristen.

Okay, so let's go on to the first question. So, our first question is: our biggest challenge is placing dogs who, based on behavior in the shelter, cannot be placed with other dogs. These dogs stay with us for months to years, and we have a challenge of finding somewhere to place them. Did you place similar dogs? If yes, how?

*Kristen Auerbach:* Yeah, that's a great question. We did, and we gained that information about if those dogs were actually dog-aggressive or unable to safely interactive with other dogs – we gained that information in playgroups, so I would first wonder if you're doing playgroups and how you're making that determination if that the dog cannot be placed with other dogs. We see, over and over again, shelters that aren't doing playgroups or aren't allowing dogs to interact off-leash, making that determination, and then we don't really know that information. So, that would be the first thing I would say is that to ensure that all those dogs are being evaluated off-leash with other dogs, and then again, Aimee Sadler's Dogs Playing For Life has a safe, proven protocol for that.

And yeah, we certainly did, and yes, those dogs – dogs that are not social with other dogs – can be some of the most challenging and take longer to find homes for. Here in Austin, we last year saved a raw 96 percent of the animals of the 18,000 animals that came into the shelter last year. And many of those were dogs that were not social with other dogs, and they do require a special effort. And if those dogs are a challenge in your community, that's where you can assemble a volunteer team to problem-solve that particular problem through marketing and through identifying

possible placements for those dogs. But yeah, that's certainly a challenge that we still face, even here in Austin.

*Jessie Collins:* Thank you, Kristen. We're going to move on to our next question: do you feel 30 days is enough time to determine proper placement?

*Kristen Auerbach:* I think it depends on the individual dog. Yes, in general, and we often didn't even need that much time, because so many of the dogs just went to homes that normalized. So, they got out of the shelter and they were just normal, regular – like all the dogs that we placed in homes. So, I think it depends. For some dogs, it may be a bit longer, but in general, yeah, I think that 30 days is more than enough time for many dogs to determine proper placement. We also have very, very open return policies. We want people to bring dogs back to us if they're truly not working, but we also are going to do everything we can to provide support, resources and education, so that they can keep that dog and that's through that aggressive post-adoption follow-up program.

*Jessie Collins:* Great – thank you, Kristen. Let's go on to our next question – we still have a few more. Did you run into any insurance and liability challenges in putting at-risk dogs into foster? How do you manage and mitigate the risk of putting fear-aggressive and resource guarding dogs in foster? Is there a level of these behaviors you allow/not allow?

*Kristen Auerbach:* Yeah, this is a great question – thank you for asking it. So, the first thing I'll say is as we move forward with the program, I don't know that we'll call this a "behavioral foster program," because it really isn't that. It's dogs that are having trouble in the shelter environment, and so when we think about dogs with more serious problems, dogs that might have problems that would make their behavior risky. Here in Austin we have Austin Pets Alive! and they have a very advanced, sophisticated behavioral rehabilitation program. So, we're really lucky here that we can take those dogs, they can go to Austin Pets Alive! and get behavioral rehabilitation. It's a key part of how we're saving so many lives here.

Remember, in Fairfax, we were saving up to 90 percent of the dogs at the highest point of the study, so there weren't any significant aggression issues for these dogs. So, we didn't see evidence of any additional risks. And this "liability" word comes up a lot. When you go to the supplemental documents and you see the foster contract we use, that has been vetted through several different attorneys, and it clearly spells out the expectations and the circumstances of the foster agreement. And so, we use that for all of our fosters.

And yes, there were levels of behaviors we did and did not allow, and we did have lines in the sand, and those were different in Fairfax where we

were saving 90 percent, than they are here in Austin. And I would say that the longer that we do these programs, we can't emphasize enough the importance of considering every situation individually.

So, while we did have some definite lines in the sand, in terms of harm caused to a person, in particular, we look at every situation and circumstances individually to determine the best outcome for that dog. And that means everything from calling back the previous owner to as much different kinds of assessment and evaluation as we can do in the shelter groups and playgroups. So, we do our due diligence to learn as much as we can. We think of ourselves like dog detectives when we're trying to determine individual outcomes.

*Jessie Collins:* Great, thank you for that answer. Let's move on to our next question: what type of training did you offer the foster families prior to taking home dogs?

*Kristen Auerbach:* Oh – okay, that's a great question. Yes. So, we provide the same basic training to all of our foster families of dogs. And so as we combine the foster and volunteer programs, we actually provide the same basic foundational training to fosters and volunteers. And all of our training was positive focus, and for the foster families that took home the more behaviorally-challenged dogs, we provided them individual training for those dogs. So, depending on what the issue was, we gave them training and ongoing support for that particular issue, so it just depended on kind of the issue that they were facing. And the training that we provided to the fosters throughout was positive-focus training, and also, they had troubleshooting, so we had volunteer trainers who would go into their home or provide consult through the process.

*Jessie Collins:* These are some great questions. We still have some time for a few more.

*Kristen Auerbach:* These are great questions – yeah. Yeah.

*Jessie Collins:* Hold on just a second – we'll bring you that. Just one more second, everybody; we'll get the next question up. Here we go: how do you find/recruit fosters who are capable of dealing with some of these behavioral challenges?

*Kristen Auerbach:* Yes, so I mentioned a couple things that I'll go back through really quickly and then add add a couple more. First, obviously, we used our volunteer corps. If we had 500 volunteers working with the dogs, those volunteers were the most likely to see those dogs and want to help them, so we used our existing resources. We weren't on social media saying, "Hey, we need fosters for these behaviorally challenged dogs." We were using our internal resources first, and then we were also having – those

people were acting as marketing and assistants to help recruit more, so seeing them be successful, seeing the transition of the dogs from their kennel behavior to their home behavior, and sharing that with our volunteers and fosters was all the recruitment we needed.

The other kind that I talk a lot about is that you don't need special people; you need people with some basic, general dog-handling skills, people who can walk a strong dog, but you don't really need people with any kind of special skillset. You need people that care about the dogs, that are upfront and honest, that communicate with you regularly, and understand the stakes of what they're doing. So, we didn't have an issue with recruitment, and I think that as we develop this program further and we think about doing external recruitment, we're going to think a lot about how to engage new fosters through very short-term fostering.

There's a program we did called "field trips," and this was something we let brand-new volunteers come in and take dogs on field trips. And through that experience, we recruited people – and we usually start them out with an older dog, and then maybe move to younger, more exuberant dogs. But those people who liked to take the dogs out on field trips, those are the kinds of people that we'll be looking to recruit eventually, for dogs that really need a kennel break. And as we move forward, we're really going to think of this as a program to simply get dogs who need to get out of the shelter a life-saving break from the shelter. That's really what this has evolved into.

*Jessie Collins:* Great – thank you. We still have about four minutes left, so here's our next question: we have a strong but very small group of foster families. Pets that need only a five to six week foster placement to ensure rescue get euthanized because we can't find fosters. How do we increase the number of foster families and educate the community?

*Kristen Auerbach:* Okay, this is a great question, because I think we put a lot of barriers into fostering. So here in Austin, it's not any harder to foster a dog than it is to adopt one. We tell them and people are like, "What?" We actually have the same application for fosters as we do for adopters. When we talk to people about foster programs, we find there are so many barriers in place. You have to fill out an application and then wait a month, and then maybe get called for a training, and then come in and then do some more sessions based on what kind of animal you want to foster in. And then the foster coordinator pairs you up with an animal they think that you'd be the best suited to.

We removed those barriers. Here in Austin, one of the programs we have – because we have periodic space crises based on seasonal problems and weather emergencies – we started this emergency foster program. And we

had a flood; we had 50 dogs in crates, and we said to the community, "Please, we need your help." And the community all came out, and we signed up 50 new fosters that day. They took home 50 of our regular old shelter dogs out of the shelter. They provided short-term foster, and that was a really important lesson for us, because it allowed us to start to strip away some of those barriers to people initially becoming fosters, to grow the program much more quickly, so that we just had a larger pool.

So, I would say that that's the most – we get this question a lot, and the most common thing is that we need to make it easier and faster for people to start fostering animals in general in our shelters. Because when we put barriers in place, every day it takes longer for a new foster family to come on board is another animal dying in your shelter because it couldn't get the foster.

*Jessie Collins:* Thank you, Kristen. It looks like we'll have time for just one more question: how do you convince staff that dogs can still be safe in a different environment?

*Kristen Auerbach:* Sure. Some of the biggest pushback that people get and people tell us about is from their own staff. This is a different way of doing things, and it's an evolution in our movement; animal welfare is evolving extremely rapidly. And I was just reading the other day that in the 1970s, national animal welfare leaders were saying, "We can save 40 percent of the animals." And in the '90s it was 60, and then 70 percent, and then with no-kill, initially it became 90 percent, and now we're setting the bar even higher for life-saving.

But in that increase in life-saving, we're also building up new, progressive programs. And just like saving barn cats or through TNR programs or through saving puppies with parvo, this is the same kind of program – it's targeting a group of animals in the shelter that's dying, and developing life-saving programs. And it's through your staff members seeing the successes of some of these dogs, that you'll change their minds. So, I go back to Kelly, who was our first brave foster mom who took home a medium to large dog with behavioral challenges. She was able to show so many staff and volunteers that it could be done, it could be done safely, and that we could save that dog's life for doing it.

*Jessie Collins:* Thank you so much, Kristen. And that will be the end of our event tonight. Again, thank you, Kristen, and all of you for your time tonight. Maddie's Fund supports initiatives and programs that save more pet lives, including foster care programs. We believe proper training and management for both staff, volunteers and the pets in their care are core to these programs.

Be sure to join on us October 27th for our next webcast, "Innovating Your

Volunteer Program."

More information on this webcast will be arriving in your inbox soon. This webcast will be available On Demand shortly, and we hope you will share this presentation on your social sites.

Thanks again for being here with us this evening, and goodnight.

*[End of audio.]*