



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

### **Live Webcast Audience Q&A**

**By Kristen Auerbach**

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**1) Q: How to do you draw the line between safe to foster and not?**

A: We evaluate every dog on a case-by-case basis. During the study period, we were moving from a 75% to 90% save rate. Dogs with severe aggression towards humans or animals were not program candidates. Dogs that were offensively aggressive towards humans were not candidates and nor were dogs who displayed unpredictable aggression. The dogs in the study displayed common behavioral challenges that we believed were related to the stress of confinement.

**2) Q: Where did you find the foster families, and how did you engage them and how do you KEEP them? Especially for dogs with aggressive behavior tendencies? Did you do any advertising or marketing for behavior dog fosterers?**

A: We recruited all of our fosters from our volunteer pool. The fosters were people who were already interacting with the dogs on a daily basis and requested to foster a particular dog. Once they started fostering for us, we would then reach out to them if we had a dog we believed would fit into their household.

**3) Q: What type of training do you provide to new/inexperienced fosters taking dogs with behavior issues? Individual counseling based on the particular dog they are taking home? Group training to cover multiple issues they may face and how to deal with them?**

A: We provide an initial orientation and specialized training for off site dog walking and handling challenging dogs. We also provided ongoing, weekly training and learning opportunities for all our fosters.

**4) Q: Do you extend the resources (training support, mentors, in-home evaluations) to owners of dogs having behavioral issues at home and considering surrender?**

A: We do not but that is certainly a 'next step' goal.

**5) Q: How could any of the programs be utilized by small, foster-based rescues?**

A: I think foster-based rescues are often afraid to take on any dogs with behavioral challenges. I'd like to see more small groups working to form agreements with shelters that they will take more challenging dogs on a trial basis to see if they will fit into their programs. One of the greatest challenges those of us in municipal shelters face is the lack of rescue placement options for dogs

with any behavioral issues at all. If foster-based rescues would open their doors to a few more of these dogs, even with a ‘can return’ guarantee, it would make a tremendous difference for shelters. There need to be specialized programs developed for this sort of thing and those programs need to be piloted, implemented, tracked and then replicated. There is so much more work to be done on the collaboration between rescues and shelters.

6) **Q: How many of your foster families in this program had children?**

A: About 1/3.

7) **Q: Were the shelter trainers able to participate or observe the initial evaluations?**

A: Not always. Our evaluations were primarily done through play groups.

8) **Q: How often, if at all, do you utilize medication with behaving modification? How many, if any, dogs were on behavioral modification drugs and were sent with a behavior mod plan?**

A: We did not use any medication for behavior modification.

9) **Q With adopters where the dog was no longer in the home, what happened to those dogs?**

A: They were rehomed with other families and one died from eating a whole corncob and not getting surgery in time.

10) **Q: How many fosters did not want to foster again?**

A: None that I’m aware of.

11) **Q: Do you ever do home visits before adoption as in the case of pitties? Do you have any suggestions for helping network Pit Bulls?**

A: We do not do home visits for any dogs nor would we advocate that. I defer to Animal Farm Foundation, who are the subject matter experts on this issue. Their website is [www.animalfarmfoundation.org](http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org)

12) **Q: The biggest negative at our shelter is that we do not do playgroups. How do you start this? We have a lot of dog-aggressive dogs.**

A: Well, we hear that a lot from shelters not doing playgroups – that they have dog aggressive dogs. I would argue, from experience, that you may know you have dog REACTIVE dogs, but if you are not play grouping, you simply don’t know if you have dog aggressive dogs. Certainly check out

Aimee Sadler's Dogs Playing for Life Program. As I said in the presentation, playgroups should be a standard in shelters and are the foundation for so many of our other programs.

**13) Q: I am curious if you found that dogs surrendered by owners were more reactive or had more challenges than dogs that came in as strays?**

A: We did not track this, but anecdotally I would say that we do not see a difference and that this would have to be measured community by community.

**14) Q: Were any of the dogs in the study cat aggressive?**

A: Per national best practices, we do not test dogs for cat aggression, although we do send all fosters and adopters home with safe introduction protocol. Any time there is a significant size difference between animals, the smaller animal will be more at risk of serious injuries.

**15) Q: Do you continue to maintain "study" statistics with other behaviorally challenged dogs (on an ongoing basis)?**

A: We're working on an expansion to six other shelters nationwide and yes we will be tracking the data from those shelters. What we want to learn now? Can this program be replicated?

**16) Q: What do you mean by the term "Dog Selective"?**

A: Dogs that may have preferences about what dogs they do or do not want to socialize with. Dogs that are friendly with some dogs, but you wouldn't want to take to a crowded dog park with unknown dogs of all personality types and play styles.