



**Maddie's Fund**

## *A Foster Home for Every Pet*

Webcast Transcript

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*[Beginning of Audio]*

*Jessie:* Good evening, everyone. Thank you for being here tonight for our webcast, A Foster Home for Every Pet. I'm Jessie Guglielmo, education specialist with Maddie's Fund. Our speaker tonight is Kristen Auerbach, the Director of Animal Services for Pima Animal Care Center in Tucson, Arizona. Prior to this position, Kristen served as a deputy chief at the Austin Animal Center, as well as the assistant director at the Fairfax County Animal Shelter. While at these positions she helped to overturn pit bull adoption restrictions, implement dog play groups and create a comprehensive enrichment programs and lifesaving foster programs for all animals.

Kristen often writes and presents on topics such as breed labeling, reducing shelter intake, innovative foster basic solutions, social media and providing enrichment for shelter pets. Before we begin, let's go over a few housekeeping items. At the left side of your screen, you will see a Q&A window. This is where you can ask questions throughout the presentation. Please remember to get your questions in early as questions submitted late in the presentation may not be processed in enough time for a response. If you need help with your connection during your 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.

Finally, before I hand this presentation over to Kristen I want to let everyone here on this webcast know about Maddie's Fund's upcoming innovation grant cycle, which will be specifically open to the categories of innovative foster care and removing barriers to adoption. Now Kristen, thank you for being here tonight.

*Kristen:* Thank you so much, Jessie. Tonight's presentation is called A Foster Home for Every Pet, Innovative Foster Programs for Shelter Pets. And what we're going to talk about tonight is not just about foster programs,

but about how to start and implement them. So, thanks so much for joining me here. We're going to talk all about how from start to finish you implement a high-volume foster program that's capable of serving every pet in your care. My name is Kristen. I'm the Director at Pima Animal Care Center here in Tucson. Before that I was at the Austin Animal Center. And so, I'm going to be talking about a range of foster programs through Maddie's Fund. I've been able to work with about 60 different animal shelter foster coordinators over the past year helping them with their adult pet foster programs. And so, we'll take all that experience here tonight and tell you how to start your own high volume foster program.

We're going to start with a story tonight about a cat named Bitsy. And Bitsy was a resident of my current shelter. I had been here at Pima County for about two months. Bitsy is a cat many of you probably recognize a story like this. She came into care. She was an indoor "feral cat," nonsocial. And she was the longest stay resident despite being a very beautiful cat. She stayed in the shelter longer than any other cat, for eight months in fact. And so, she was getting – people were sharing about her on social media and what you see, the text you see on the side of the screen is the story that one of the volunteers told about her.

And it said she's looking for a home where she can sit on the window or not, bathe in sun puddles or not, look pretty on the couch where she can do whatever she likes. A home where she can just be a cat. And it says she may not ever become a lap cat, but we've been surprised before. And who has time to sit with a cat on their lap anyway? So, they were being funny and trying to market this cat that was truly unhandled-able in the shelter. She would have been called aggressive in the shelter, and even our best volunteers couldn't handle her. So, we got lucky. We found a lifesaver who agreed to take Bitsy. And there's Bitsy at home. And just like so many before and after pictures when we see animals in shelters versus in a home you can see the expression on her face is completely different, and that's clearly her lifesaver, an amazing cat advocate in our community.

So Bitsy's story brings us to some questions that a lot of people have been asking lately. Questions like, what if Bitsy instead of spending eight months in our care had been fast-tracked into a foster home right away? The day she arrived she had been made available for foster. And how much money – take away the humane issues – how much money would the county had saved if Bitsy had gone straight into a foster home instead of sitting in a small kennel for eight months? Those of us who work in animal shelters and rescues know that there's a cost of care so every animal that we care for costs \$15.00, \$20.00, \$40.00 a day.

And how many more pets we could have saved if we had had that empty kennel that Bitsy occupied for eight months? And finally, and probably most importantly, how much more humane could we have been to this cat if she had not had to have sat in a small kennel receiving really very little or no interaction every day for eight months. As we start off –

*Female:* Thank you Kristen. We just received our first poll question. Sorry about that, Kristen.

*Jessie:* That's okay. So, our first poll question is, what types of pets does your foster program currently serve? So, choose one of your following. You can answer on your screen and not in the Q&A box. We'll give you a few seconds here. Okay, and it looks like we have our results. What do you think, Kristen?

*Kristen:* Interesting. So, it looks like we have programs that are serving very young animals, neonatal animals, and programs that are serving healthy adult pets. And I just want to say that I know some of you who are coming are volunteers of your organizations and so as you answer these poll questions you can answer them sort of as representatives of your organization. But we can head to the next question.

*Jessie:* All right. So, our next poll question for everybody is, how many pets do you think one foster coordinator can send to foster each year? Is it 0 – 100, 101 – 300, 301 – 500, 501 – 750 or more than 750? Please again answer on your screen and not in the Q&A box. I also want to take this time to remind everybody to get their questions in early so that we have enough time to get a response for you at the end. And here are our results.

*Kristen:* Okay, so most people thought that one foster coordinator can send about 0 – 100 pets to foster each year and it looks like people were kind of divided on the other numbers, so that was really interesting. Which brings us to an example of a program that really changed my life. I think prior to going to the Austin Animal Center, where I served as the deputy director for two years, prior to going there I would have said I think a foster coordinator can probably serve about 500 animals a year. But Austin really changed my mind on that and subsequently I've had the opportunity to work with numerous communities that are saving thousands of animals through foster with just one foster coordinator.

As Austin Animal Center 2016, they achieved a 96.4 noses in, noses out save rate of animals with about 17 animals coming in the door. About 2,500 animals were sent to foster homes with just our one foster coordinator – 2,500. And just some more information on the way the foster program works. We had 1,100 active foster families. On an

average, here about 3,000 animals were going to foster. It was a little lower in 2016 because the intake was a little bit lower. And more than half of those animals are adopted directly from foster. They never come back to the shelter to be adopted. They go to foster and they're adopted – the fosters complete the adoption process. About 500 adult dogs go into foster each year.

And fosters provide their own food and supplies. And this is important. If you think about how many animals are in your care at any time, so for some of you that's 20, for others it's 2,000. At Austin, we doubled our capacity at any one time. If we had 700 animals in the shelter, we also had 700 in foster. So, we were literally able to double our kennel capacity. And so, that program there were a lot of lessons learned in that. But my journey on this began years before this. Some of you had seen the little study we did about sending dogs with behavioral challenges to foster homes and there is a Maddie's Fund webinar on that which I'll talk a little bit about.

But I'm going to run through really quickly the foster study that kind of sparked all of this work. If you want to learn more about this, it's on the Maddie's Fund site. The presentation is called Innovative Fostering Saving More Dogs with Behavioral Challenges. What is also important about this, if you go to that presentation it's everything I'm going to talk about tonight. So, links to the resources, the foster manuals, foster agreement, the guidelines, they're all there already on the Maddie's Fund site. So, head to that page if you want to get those resources after the presentation.

Prior to being in Austin, I was in Fairfax County, Virginia, which is a suburb of Washington, D.C. I got to the shelter at the end of 2012 when they were still killing for space, there were still time limits for adoption, and there were pit bull adoption restrictions and so about 80 percent of pit bull dogs were dying. And just because of their label. Dogs were dying for common behavioral challenges, so anything from hard staring, low growling, those were still reasons animals were dying. They were also dying for failing a SAFR evaluation, which importantly and Dr. Weiss has been a huge mentor, she lets everyone know she didn't design the test to be a calling tool, but that's really how it was being used at our shelter. It wasn't being used to help figure out what the best placement was as was intended. It was being used to decide which dogs lived or died.

The death rate for dogs was about 25% and you have down here a sample list. This is from another shelter. But dogs were dying in the shelter basically for being fearful. And that all changed with a dog named Carmella. Carmella is the dog on the left with her mouth open

kind of staring at the camera, and she was a dog that was with us for several months, an older female dog who was lovely, great with other dogs, we took her to adoption events. But we did a re-evaluation after she had been with us for a couple of months and she bit the hand, the rubber hand that people use to test dogs with. Some of you are familiar with this.

And at the time myself and the director, we were really worried. We thought that must mean she was unsafe and so we tested her a couple times. And she didn't just bite the hand, she kind of bit it exuberantly the way a dog would bite a toy they were excited about. But she continued to get seemingly more aggressive towards the hand and we really didn't know what to do at the time. And we didn't know how this test was to be used. And our animal control officers and our caretakers were saying this means she's dangerous. And we put that dog down.

The day we put that dog down, myself and the director knew we had made a terrible mistake and we knew there was something really wrong. And many of you have probably had this experience where you put a dog down and you end its life and you know that that wasn't the right thing and there had to have been something else to do, and that really started what turned into us moving forward to think about how to save more dogs that either don't do well on evaluations or don't do well in a shelter. And that led us to Patty, and Patty was a dog who was as bad as any dog you can imagine that doesn't do well in the shelter.

Patty would bite your feet when you tried to get her out of the kennel. She would jump on people and cling to them, kind of hang onto them, which is quite scary. She was barrier reactive towards people and animals. She barked at everyone and everything and she was kind of scary to walk because she was always trying – she had what we would have called really strong play drive. So, we were kind of out of options for Patty. On the say we were going to euthanize her one of our staff members said can I please take her home for the night. And we almost said no. We decided to say yeah, give it a try. And Patty walked one foot off of the shelter property, one foot, and turned into the laziest, most easy-going, easy-to-handle dogs. Her personality changed 100 percent and the contrast was stark. So, Patty ended up going home.

The picture on the left is her with the cat and her foster home. Turned out Patty really, really dug cats and the picture on the right is Patty in her eventual adoptive home. Patty was adopted to a family and that never would have been possible had we not gotten her to foster because we could not have put her on the adoption floor. And probably there's some of you sitting at home right now nodding your head saying yes, I

know that dog. I know that dog because Patty's story is the story of thousands and thousands of other homeless dogs.

But we really did have a problem and this is the cycle we had. We would have a dog that would come in that *[audio cuts out]* from the shelter, wouldn't do well with twenty-three-and-a-half hours of confinement. We wouldn't have any options because those dogs were often medium and large dogs. And then we would start to get concerns from people saying this animal isn't really safe to handle and it's going to bite someone and what do we do, we have a responsibility. And then that behavior declines over time because fewer and fewer people want to handle the dog. Well this problem, this cycle, we couldn't see a way out but we saw foster as a way out.

So, a period of about a year and a half we took 52 dogs with behavioral challenges, and these were all dogs that were use listed. They weren't just dogs that were a little bit – had one or two problems. They were the dogs that were really the most at risk in our care. And remember at the time we were still euthanizing about 20 percent – about 20 – 25 percent. So, we use just regular old foster families and we send dogs to foster for an average of a week to a month. And we just ask very simple questions. Would foster improve these dogs' behavior? Could they eventually be adopted in the homes, and could we do this safely?

Share some of the primary behavior problems of the dogs that went into the study, fear-based aggression was never one. Those are the dogs that are in the back of the kennel growling and you're not sure you can really get them out of the kennel. They might be doing low growling or hard staring or "wheel eyeing." We had some barrier reactives, dogs that had extreme stress, dogs that resource guarded in the shelter. So, these are the dogs that we were dealing with and we thought through the study, if we sent these dogs through foster we thought we probably saved some of them. We thought it might be five or it might be ten and what we didn't anticipate is that we would save 90 percent of the dogs that were listed for euthanasia. Ninety percent would go to foster homes. Their behavior would normalize and they would get adopted in the permanent homes. Since this chart has been made, the dog that was in foster and the dog that was with the rescue pit bull has been adopted as well.

The dogs stayed in foster an average of a week to a month with a couple of them staying longer just because of medical issues. One was undergoing heartworm treatment. And Hank's story is sort of illustrative of the dogs that were in the study. Hank came to us; he was owned by a person who became homeless and the day Hank was surrendered to the shelter him and his owner lay on the floor crying and it was probably for me the saddest thing I'd ever seen at an animal shelter because both dog

and human lay crying tears. And Hank went back to his kennel and for days just sort of moaned and cried missing his owner. And we didn't really know what to do. And anyone would come to Hank's kennel front and he would growl at them.

We decided to try to get Hank out of the shelter. We got him out of the kennel, we spent a couple of days with him and he kind of – he was able to be handled but he was so heartbroken. We sent him to a foster home and it turned out the only thing that could bring Hank back to life was this little boy you see in the picture here. And Hank and this little boy here loved to dress up in costumes and so you have a number of cute pictures from them. But what ultimately happened is that pictures like this and Hank normalizing in a foster home led to him getting his permanent home. And here's Hank after adoption and here's what Hank's adoptive dad 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. I don't know what I'd do without this dog. He sleeps with his arms around me. And he snores so loudly."

So, these were the kind of stories that were happening as we did the study and we knew that it wasn't just about lifesaving. This little study we did was really about something much bigger and it was about what pets mean to people and what people mean to animals and the responsibility that we have to our animals at this time in our animal welfare history. So, I always ask this question when I talk about this. What word did foster caregivers use more than any other to describe dogs in this study? People usually guess loving or sweet. It's actually not that. The word people use the most to describe dogs in the study was smart. Smart. And that makes a lot of sense because if you think about the smartest kid in school and how they would act under the stress of confinement, of course the dogs that people think are the smartest are going to have some of the biggest struggles being locked up in such an abnormal environment exposed to the stress of shelter life.

So, this leads us to Maddie's Fund, who became interested in the study, and said like many of us we did what we call a study wasn't really a study. It was us just sort of winging it. We wanted to turn this into an actual study because we wanted to know what happens when you take medium and large adult dogs, what happens when you take them out of the shelter and you put them in the foster homes. So, we're currently under conducting a study and each participating shelter is taking 30 medium and large dogs and putting them in foster homes, measuring their behavior, length of stay and their ultimate outcomes versus a controlled group of 30 dogs that stay in the shelter. The cities that are

participating, Louisville, Austin, New York City, Los Angeles, Tucson, Kansas City and Ventura County. These are big municipal shelters, big communities, because we wanted to say whatever happened here it's quite likely to happen in other places as well. These big cities are really representative of what we can expect to find in other places.

Some of the preliminary results of the study are already coming in. We're finding that dogs who'd been in foster for seven days are significantly happier, more content, pleased, and confident. They're described as sure, assertive, fearless, relaxed, calm and easygoing. And dogs who have been in foster for seven days are reported to be less anxious, less worried and show less of the following behaviors: panting, shaking and trembling, circling and jumping. And I'm sure that none of you listening are surprised to hear this. Foster is a more humane solution for housing our animals and has immediate results on their behavior in the homes they go to.

So, this study led us to ask questions kind of about all of our animals and to think about some of the assumptions we have about animal shelters in general. Traditional foster programs primarily have focused on really young animals, animals recovering from injury or illnesses. That's been the focus of foster programs and those animals medically needed to get out of animal shelters. And so, it makes sense that foster programs sort of had their bursts in those animals. There have been very few resources dedicated to fostering. We started asking our folks, why shelters don't have more than one foster coordinator when the payoff is so tremendous. And only a few select pets have been made available for fostering, so not every animal has been made available. There's also been lengthy training and onboarding that excludes people. If any of you have tried to foster for an organization where the wait time to get in is a month you can imagine how many lives you could have saved in that month while you're waiting to become a foster.

And simultaneously there's this recognition that animals in our shelters are incredibly stressed. Animal shelters as designed a hundred years ago were never designed to house animals for long amounts of time, and so we're just now learning even in the last decade what it means to keep an animal in a shelter for more than three to five days for a stray whole. Animals thankfully we're keeping so many more animals alive, but living in shelters we know we have many, many animals that are so stressed out by confinement. And you can see on these, these are two examples of animal spaces that I'm guessing many of you see these on a daily basis. This is a daily occurrence for those of us working in shelters. Just terrified animals who are so scared to be there and don't know what's going on.

Jessie, I'm going to turn this over to you for our next poll question.

*Jessie:* Thank you, Kristen. So, this is our next poll question for everybody. Do you believe it is possible to accurately assess the overall temperament of any pet in a shelter? Yes or no. I'll give you a few seconds to answer. All right, we'll go to the results.

*Kristen:* Wow. That put a big smile on my face. I think the answer to this question if we had asked it three years ago would look really different. 91.5 percent of our respondents are saying that no, they don't believe that's possible. And that is sort of the premise that we're starting from when we talk about the shelter behavior. It's always a dangerous thing to compare children to animals or people to animals. But when you think about putting a human child under the stress that we expect animals to tolerate in shelters, it isn't likely that human children would have the same behavior in a shelter that they would in a home. And certainly, if you locked me in a cage for 23 hours a day I wouldn't be in a very good mood when I came out. And that's sort of the assumption that we're starting with is that we can't know an animal in a shelter. We just have no idea.

And this leads us to assert that foster is the solution for the future of animal welfare. It is a key solution to changing what is happening with homeless pets. It's cheap or even free in some cases. In my last two communities, our fosters actually provide most of their own food and supplies. We do provide medical support, but for the day-to-day supplies our fosters are buying those. It's safe for people and pets. When I first started doing this people kept saying to me, isn't it unsafe to put adult dogs with behavioral challenges and foster homes and I argued then and I assert now that it is unsafe to keep pets experiencing behavioral decline in shelters. It's much safer to send them to foster homes where their behavior can normalize, we can get real life assessment of their behavior and they can be handled safely outside of the shelter walls.

Fostering is a humane solution for animals. It's so much more humane to have an animal sleeping on a couch than in a kennel. This dog you see here was one of the original foster study dogs and he was one of our behaviorally challenged dogs. He went on to have a long career, which he's still in the midst of as a foster dad himself, and you can see there that's one of his foster puppies behind him. So, this dog who is safely fostered is now paying it forward.

Foster increases adoptions and decreases length of stay and it builds capacity and engagement. For so long our shelters sort of lived in shame and silence and so many of us who worked in animal welfare felt that. We felt totally isolated from the public. We felt like they didn't

understand the kinds of things that we were facing, the sadness and tragedy that we saw on a daily basis. And fostering is a really fundamentally different way of engaging our communities. It's throwing open the doors and saying here's our communities, challenges, here's the animals that need you and it's letting people help.

This is Guy. Okay, so we copied in some notes directly from the shelter software system. This is a cat from Fairfax County and these are caretaker notes from the shelter. And you can read most of these but I'll go through a couple of them. Feral type behavior continues. Not able to handle. Not an adoption candidate. Cat was growling and hissing and lunging at me through the feral box. Continued to growl, hiss and lunge at me. Well this cat in most shelters even today outside of a shelter neuter return program or a brown cat program this cat is likely still going to lose its life.

And the work on cats is really a little bit behind. We really started our work with dogs and I recognize fully this is still a really dog-biased presentation and a dog-biased conversation, but foster is equally important for cats because this cat, Guy, had it not been for a foster lifesaver would have lost his life. And here's Guy in his foster home. Here's what his foster dad said. "Guy likes the dogs. Wants to be petted all the time. Last night, we had about 15 people over. He's been great with us, but I wasn't sure how he would do with strangers. I expected him to stay in the bedroom all night, but to our surprise, he spent most of the evening walking from guest to guest, soliciting attention and sitting on their laps. He was the life of the party."

There's an assumption about cats that often gets made that feral type behavior characterizes that cat. But we have so many cats that come into our shelters and our rescue groups that exhibit "feral type behavior" that we don't know if that translates into a home environment. And Guy's a great example of how that's not always true.

So, I'm going to talk briefly about some of the ways that foster can manifest in some of the kinds of foster programs that we've started that we're seeing around the country, and some of the ways that people are using fosters to save more animals. Power hour and field trip fostering. Well, this may be the most important program and it's going to take some research to show which programs had the biggest impact. But power hour and field trip fostering is important for reasons you may not realize. What it involves is, a volunteer, a foster, a staff member, even a member of the public coming and borrowing a dog, taking it out of the shelter for just an hour or maybe two hours. These started a couple of years ago. You might remember you started to hear about borrow a shelter dog, take it on a hike.

Or borrow a shelter dog, take it on a field trip. And a couple of shelters started experimenting with it letting members of the public, volunteers and fosters, take dogs out for just an hour or two to get them a simple break from the shelter. And we didn't anticipate that this would have such huge consequences, but it has. Why? It's easy. I don't know about you, but I'm a really busy person and the idea of taking home an animal for weeks or months to foster it or fostering it through adoption, it puts me off. I can't really conceive of how I'd fit that into my busy life. But if you ask me to take an animal out of the shelter for an hour I would jump at the chance because even I can fit that into my life. And for lots of people in the world we live in they're so busy that that initial commitment is an easy way to start fostering without having to commit to weeks or months, which a lot of people just don't have or they don't think they have.

Another reason is that an hour or two, that's actually enough for many people to bond to an animal so much that they want to take it home on a longer-term basis. So, it's kind of a gateway into fostering. Somebody takes home a pet for an hour or two, they take it on a walk, they take it to get a hamburger, hold the onion, and they become bonded to that animal. And whether or not they take it longer-term foster or not, they become invested in that animal's outcome and it acts as sort of a protective shield around that pet. That person often does marketing, they might come and visit the animal routinely, they might tell their friends about it, they might get someone to adopt it, and they become invested in it. And so, field trip fostering, power hours is what we call them for dogs, and this is probably not true for cats because it takes cats a little bit longer to acclimate to a new environment, but for dogs it's potentially the most important program and it's one of the easiest ones to start if you're not sure you can take on a whole foster program. This one is an easy one to get going.

So, here's an example. This is the SPCA of Brazoria County and they came to a presentation I did where we talked about this. And they started something. They took it and made it way cooler than we ever did and they started something called the Longtimers Lunch Club. And what they did is they put their ten longest day dogs and they created this lunch club where people could come and just take a dog out to lunch. And by doing so within just two months – I think it was just two, two-and-a-half months of starting the program, all of those dogs, those longest stay dogs, many of them of whom had been there for over a year, they were all adopted into homes.

And when you think about that, many of them over a year, think about the kennel space that they got from that. Think about the cost savings

they achieved and think about the life saving they achieved in that these dogs who had been sitting in a kennel for that long, all it took was a little lunch. It's a little bit like the dating – there's a dating thing called It's Just Lunch. You just get a dog out for lunch. That's enough to form a bond that for all of these long-stay dogs ended up resulting in a permanent outcome and I checked in with them recently and they've done this two or three more times since then, since they've started it. So, this is just one example of the kind of programs we see popping up.

Overnights and weekends – so this is a really similar concept. Somebody checks out a dog and they take it just for a night or for weekends. People who work during the week have busy schedules. This is pretty easy for them to accomplish. They take a dog and this could be if you're in a more conservative place where they're not sure they want to open this to the public this is something you can just offer to your current volunteers. People most likely to take home your pets who've been there the longest are your volunteers, and I'll talk more about that in a little bit. But overnights and weekends just gets them out and gives them a break.

Number one question that comes up around this, isn't it heartbreaking to bring them back? Don't they get sad? Doesn't it break their heart? And I can't answer strongly enough, the answer is a resounding no. No. They come back and they're happier. They take naps and they're more ready to be adopted. The dogs are more presentable to adopters when they come back after an overnight. Their stress levels are lowered. We had seen nothing but tremendously positive results from sending pets home. And some of our dogs might go home with six or seven people before they get adopted and that's great because with every new family they go home with we learn something new about them and those get built into their notes and then we're able to tell their eventual adopters an awful lot about them that we wouldn't have been able to otherwise.

Another program, and I just want to say for those of you who joined us a little late, all the programs I'm describing to you are programs that either occurred, Fairfax County, a suburb outside of D.C., or my last shelter, Austin Animal Center, I've been in Pima County in Tucson, Arizona for the past two months. Many of these programs are part of our future, not our present. But we're going to be looking to build all of these as we move further in Pima County.

Long stay foster placement, so this is just the animals that really need to get out and not come back. And we're really clear there are some pets that cannot be in our shelter. That's T-Bone you see in back, the bigger of the brown dogs. He was owned by a gentleman who in the span of two months lost both his daughter and his wife to a disease and he subsequently lost his home. And T-Bone came to us and was truly

unhandled-able. He was a dog that was incredibly barrier reactive, would bite if someone entered the kennel, and he was with us for long months when we agonized over what to do with him. I at one point advocated ending his life and euthanizing him and Dr. Alex Jefferson of Boston Pets Life said no, we know this dog was fine in a home. We know he lived with children. We know he lived with other animals. This is shelter-based behavior.

And we kind of went back and forth and so we knew we couldn't safely place him with sort of your average foster. This was a special needs dog. We found a local trainer who agreed to take T-Bone on and he took T-Bone and his name is Roman. If you're watching, Roman, thank you. You're a lifesaver. Roman took T-Bone. He worked with him for a number of months and this is T-Bone adopted, living happily with another dog. This is one of several dogs T-Bone lived with and he is a model canine citizen now, which we never would have imagined and even I wouldn't have imagined. And he's an important reminder that some of our animals who really seem like lost causes, it's important to consider their life outside of the shelter and before they came in and it's thanks to Dr. Jefferson and Roman that T-Bone's alive today and doing so well.

Foster for fearful cats. So, we take cats that are afraid in the shelter. That's not a death sentence. They go to foster homes. So, you can see Jake, there's a cat named Jake. You can see him in the shelter and then after one day in a foster home, unhandled-able, "feral behavior" in the shelter and one day later you can see he's a completely different animal in a foster home.

We also had foster placement for dogs with known histories of aggression, and this is a different thing because I've been talking up to this point about shelter-based behavior. But foster for dogs with known histories is a bit different because we know that they had behavioral challenges outside of the shelter setting. And so, it's a little bit different program. But this dog here is a dog named Apple who came to us after she ran up to a jogger and bit her on the heel while she was running. And this is a dog that we knew we had to place really thoughtfully. But we thought that given the circumstances, it was a young dog less than a year old that was allowed to free-roam that was no more than 15 feet from her home and she ran out and nipped the jogger on the foot.

In many shelters, because we still use bite, we still use this idea of bite even though we know that bite measures potential rabies exposure. It doesn't measure the intent of the dog. It doesn't measure the severity. But that word bite still carries a death sentence in so many organizations. And so, we consider this a known history. We knew that Apple did have

a history that she was capable of going and non-seriously biting a person on the foot. But we placed her with a foster who was given – he's in this picture holding all the documentation about Apple. He has all the information and she went home for foster with him and eventually ended up being adopted and being a wonderful family pet for him.

But it's its own unique program that takes into account circumstances and treats all dogs the lesson from Animal Farm Foundation taught us years ago that all dogs are individuals. And so, we consider every dog, every case individually and we approach it much like you would casework with a person. Fostering during space crises. Euthanizing for space is still a reality in many places. Here in Pima County our intake is about 19,000 animals a year and we certainly get in situations where space is an issue and this was true in Austin as well.

And so, for space crises it's easy to say, you know what? These dogs have some behavior issues and the dogs with behavior issues are the ones that have been here a long time. Or the cats that are semi-feral or not social, they've got to go. And it is always during times of high volume that people are more likely to have a lower threshold for what animals they find adoptable. So, we made a commitment in Austin never to treat animals differently regardless of where we were at with space. And the way we did this was to send animals to foster during space crises. So, we had a flood in Austin at one point. It resulted in 60 dogs being housed in pop-up crates. There was nowhere for them to go. They were in pop-up kennels.

So, we took pictures of the pop-up kennels, we took pictures of the dogs and we said we don't care if you've ever fostered, anyone in our community, come on in. We'll send you home with a dog today and by the end of that day every single one of those dogs was in a foster home and that room was completely empty. And it was such a lesson for us in how much the community will help when you ask them to. About 25 percent of those dogs were adopted by their fosters and we were able to save virtually all the other ones. The ones that were not adopted were able to come back and eventually be adopted.

Rehabilitative foster. Some animals come into us with special medical problems and these aren't animals that necessarily need to go to a foster because of their medical issues. This dog here came in, you see in the first picture, she's actually covered in oil – motor oil – which is a way that people – it's sort of an old myth that you can treat mange with motor oil. And so here she is covered in motor oil. She has been roaming stray and you can see in her face she's traumatized. She was a survivor of a really hard situation. And she came to us and we could have left her in a

kennel. We could have left her in a kennel but boy was she rough looking even after we got her cleaned up. And she was the saddest dog.

She would have sat in our kennels for probably three to six months waiting for a home and nobody would have known her story. Instead what we did is we fast-tracked her into foster right away. We got her in a foster with someone who's really good at marketing. We got her cleaned up. And the pictures that you see on the right, you can almost not believe it's the same dog. And so, we were able to show the public both the picture of her covered in motor oil. We were able to tell the story of what happened to her and then show these bright, happy images of her in foster and she was adopted right away because of that into a wonderful home. Her outcome probably would have been adopted either way, but her story was told and she was adopted by someone that really connected with her through her story and that was only made possible by foster. And so, for a lot of animals, even if they don't medically need foster we'll fast-track them and especially if we feel that they've suffered some kind of trauma and would do better in a foster home than in a shelter.

I threw this in here because fospice programs, this is Blackie. He was a little dog that had been locked in a backyard his entire life. He was 12 years old. Never known the love of a family. He was a true backyard dog. He came to us lateral. He was near death – truly near death. And our vets were preparing to euthanize him when this volunteer foster, that's Brunie, she says let me take him home and let him die at home. Give him the dignity to die at home. And so, we sent her home, we gave her some pain medicine to keep him comfortable. We did a few tests to determine that he did have cancer and that his time was limited.

But Blackie went from near death to coming back to life and he lived for more than two months in this home. And in those two months he got to have his first Christmas in a house, his first New Year's, he wore a New Year's party hat. His story went viral and he ended up starring on Fox National Morning News. And his story taught the world about what fospice meant, which a lot of people didn't know, and fospice is taking home animals for foster that are at the end of their lives and just giving them the dignity of being loved by someone at the time they die and not having to die in a shelter. And the picture on the right is Blackie on his last day on his earth and he's there feeling the love of his foster mom. And that to us was a great gift to give this dog but it's also a key foster program. If we can prevent any dog from dying anonymously inside of a shelter, no matter what kind of humane end we can give that animal or that cat, no matter what kind of humane end we can provide it's nothing compared to what we can give pets if we can get them in foster homes, even at the end of their lives and even if that's a short time, it is

absolutely a worthy cause. And it's easy, it's inexpensive and it's a better solution.

In Austin, this lead – so what ended up happening is that volunteers self-organized, and they self-organized in all kinds of cool ways. They started a group called Desperate Housecats and that was a foster-based program for our most at-need cats. They stayed in the custody of our shelter, but they went into foster homes and those foster homes were managed by the Desperate Housecats group. We had Dogs Out Loud, and Dogs Out Loud handled the most behaviorally challenged pets and they were very organized, had volunteers, fosters, sort of being the line of defense for those type of dogs. And then Hard Luck Hounds was a group that attempted to find foster for the long-stay dogs. And all they did was work backwards off our long-stay list and found fostering. Combined, these groups have saved thousands of lives and gotten them into foster homes and gotten them out of shelter care. And they were all volunteer-led, all self-organized and they cost us nothing.

So how do you do it? As I've been presenting this around the country and at major national conferences and through webcasts, some questions keep coming up. And so, in this question, we're going to address sort of how you start, what you need to be thinking about and we're going to talk about how to get the fosters that you need. Because one of the biggest challenges has been, where do these people come from? Who are these people who take these animals home? That's great for you, but what kind of place do you live in that everybody wants to foster these more challenging animals or just plain old adult pets?

So, the first question that we should all be asking is what do we mean when we say behavior in a shelter? Do we mean it has a known history of behavior? Because that's really one thing. The dog on the left there did have a known history of behavior, versus a dog that just has problematic shelter behavior. We need to start really thinking about those as two different things. And this isn't about deciding what animals live or die. This is about deciding how we manage the programs around those. So, animals with a known history, we know that they have some capacity outside of the shelter walls to potentially cause harm to a person or animal.

That needs to be treated one way versus problematic shelter behavior. And what we do is problematic shelter behavior, unless the animal is truly unhandled-able, we get them into a foster and we find out what's actually going on. And 9.9 times out of 10 what's going on is the animal is stressed, traumatized, afraid and most of our pets, so many of our pets we have to remember that they've likely just lost everything they know. They've lost families, they've lost homes, they've lost any normalcy they

know and so we really emphasize that when we think about behavior and shelter and we try to get them out to figure out what exactly is going on.

This gets talked about all the time, but we who work in rescue and shelter know that it is ever more true the expectation that our shelter pets act like teddy bears, that they are virtually perfect. That they don't ever pee on the floor, have a need, eat off the counter and that's making it harder for us to do our jobs. And now more than ever people live in closer proximity. They're busier than ever. Most of us can't get off our cellphones long enough to do a click and treat with our dog or pet our cat for a few minutes a day. And this is really a problem for our pets and it's a problem for the way that we are kind of thinking about shelter pets.

When we are looking at how to build a foster program there are some initial steps that have to be taken. And first is to know your data. I've gotten to travel around the country talking to shelter leadership at all levels. I am ever surprised at how many of us don't really have a handle on our data. And there's a reason for that. I mean I think a lot of us look at our data and it's painful. But it's important that we do it. So, some of the questions you need to be able to answer are what group has the longest length of stay. Is it adult cats? Is it kittens? Is it adult dogs? What is it? What are the size of those animals? We need to know that information.

We also need to know what pets are at risk for behavior. So, in my time in Fairfax, non-social cats were still at risk for behavior. In my time in Austin they weren't because we had Austin Pets Alive and a huge support network. But you need to know what animals are still dying in the name of behavior and what animals are being euthanized due to lack of space. So, what animals are still losing their lives? So, when we say this, we think lack of space means when you get crowded, who is at risk? When your shelter is crowded, is it adult cats? Is it adult dogs? What is it?

Number two is, it is critical that we start getting rid of some barriers to sending adult dogs and cats to foster homes. And so, when we think about adult pets going to foster homes, there's both internal barriers in our organization and then there's barriers that are sort of outside of us. And so, I think that brings us to our next poll question, Jessie.

*Jessie:* Thank you, Kristen. What are your barriers to sending adult dogs and cats to foster homes? Please check all that apply. Also, I do want to remind you to answer on your screen and not in the Q&A window. Remember that you can scroll down the page to see all the answers. Just

a few more seconds. All right, and I'll go onto the results. And here you go, Kristen. What do you think?

*Kristen:* Okay, so it looks like not available for foster 30 percent of you are saying the pets just aren't available for foster or that people don't know. Another 32 percent saying people don't know they can foster these pets. Let's see, it looks like 25 percent long wait/difficult process, not enough staff to manage the process, too many rules and restrictions. These are problems that we're finding in most organizations, and a lot of organizations don't even know that they have these problems, which makes it even more challenging.

Some of the common barriers we come across are background checks for fosters. If we are trusting the public to take home pets to adopt them forever, why are we not trusting them to take them home to foster? I've now personally been involved with a shelter, watching 2,500 animals go to foster in one year. We have no background checks and there were zero situations where we regretted sending an animal into a home. People foster because they want to help save lives. They foster because they have good intentions.

Another barrier is home visits. In many cases organizations require home visits for fosters. Long waits. Long wait times to become a foster. In the time you wait, how many lives could you have saved? Extensive training required, and this is true even for pets without – we certainly advocate for training for things like fostering a neonatal bottle baby kitten. That training is lifesaving. But for the majority of our pets, training simply isn't necessary. We can set people up in a one-on-one counseling session in exactly the same way we do with adoptions. If we will send a pet home to adoption, we will send it home to foster. There's no different rules apply.

Another barrier we see is limiting the number of pets who can go to foster. We proudly at Pima County, we just changed all of our adult dog kennel cards and every single one says available for foster. Every single kennel card says that. So, we're about to make that switch over for cats as well to make every single animal available for a foster home. Because after all, we want it to be a good match anyway. And so, if people want to foster for a week, two weeks prior to making that lifetime commitment, we want to help them do that.

Not letting fosters adopt, this is a rule I have never understood. Many organizations have this rule that you can't adopt your first foster, you can't adopt a foster. That certainly dissuades people from wanting to foster in the future. Too many rules and regulations on fostering that just confuse people and make it hard. They act as barriers. And then time

limits for how long animals can stay in foster. There's definitely, it can get challenging when a medical case is in foster for eight months and we get that. But that is far outside the norm. It's really rare. And so typically we just empower our fosters to complete the adoption and help them do that.

So, your fosters are everywhere. And if you don't have enough fosters it means you're not looking in the right places. This is this group of people. We opened on Christmas morning last year at Austin Animal Center and we opened to the public and we just invited people to come in and help us. We thought we'd get, I don't know, 50 people. We ended up with somewhere around 400 showing up on Christmas morning to help us. We just threw the doors open. Everybody walked dogs, they did cat socialization. This group of people took a bunch of old Amazon boxes and made treat boxes for our pets.

And when we had those people in the door we were handing them foster flyers, we were handing them adoption flyers, we were helping them, helping make it easy for them to transition because people who want to help you are everywhere. You just have to ask them. And most of us are so darn busy keeping the place afloat, keeping it moving, that we don't take the time to ask people for help. But if we just took that time we in the end save ourselves a lot. And so, your fosters are everywhere. What we encourage people to do is don't miss any opportunity to tell people how easy it is to foster in.

One quick example is if I could go back to this slide. Okay, so this dog came, I was walking through our medical trailer the other day and this family is on our adoption board. These are the three kids in the family. And the mom came up to me and she said I adopted a little dog with a broken leg from you years ago and that dog just passed away and we're here looking for another pet who really needs us to save its life. And I walked her to the medical trailer and introduced her to this little pup who was recovering from a really – it wasn't a broken leg, but a bad leg wound. And that dog saw them, and that dog was like I'm going home with you. And it was one of those meant to be, love at first sight moments.

Well she couldn't adopt it because it needed follow-up medical care, but we sent that dog home as a foster with her and so that is our approach is that we don't ever pass up an opportunity and she was not a foster. We processed her application on the spot and sent her home with that dog within an hour and a half. More ways to find fosters, these are really important. Number one, make all your volunteers fosters. If your volunteers are not already registered fosters, most of you probably use Volgistics for your volunteer software, if you do it's easy. Just make all

your volunteers fosters, all your fosters volunteers and send them all information about both of those things. You double your capacity right away by doing that.

Start power hours, start field trips, start a lunch club. Start little easy ways for people to begin to engage with your shelter or your rescue group. Just those little gestures will help bring more of your community in. Those people that come in for those things are also your volunteers, your donors and even potentially your staff one day. Process your foster applications on the spot. It should be no harder to become a foster than it is to become an adopter. If you do same-day adoptions, you should be doing same-day foster placement. Our application looks almost exactly the same to foster. All of our, and I'm speaking about Austin here, we're in the process of implementing this in Tucson, but all of our volunteer counselors were trained to process fosters as well, and it was no harder for them to process a foster than it was a volunteer.

This isn't challenging that assumption that somehow that foster process has to be unique or different or special. It doesn't. It should be the same process. Make sure you're using social media to tell people you need fosters and sending them to a link where you send them to an application where they're going to be contacted two months from now is not the answer. Hold events. Tell everybody to be at your organization Saturday morning and you'll send them home with a foster pet that day. That's the way to do it. Get people in the organization, get a pet into their hands quickly. And if you're a little leery, if you're in a community that says I don't know about that, start with your senior pets. Everybody's got nine or ten or a hundred older cats and dogs who are easy to handle sitting around who are taking longer to adopt.

If your leadership is a little leery about this, start with those pets and just have a list up front in your organization to say okay, here's this list of 25 senior dogs, 25 senior cats and some bunnies and they all need foster. And you can say to your first-time fosters let's start with one of these. And talk to local trainers. We ended up engaging for our harder animals, our animals with known behavior histories. We ended up engaging our local training community and had pretty amazing offers. Of course, we know that those people had to get paid, but we had so many local trainers just offering to help us. It was good for their business and it was good for us so we engaged local positive reinforcement trainers to come in and help us do classes with fosters. Foster some of our harder dogs and those people ended up really getting a lot of business out of that too, so it was a win-win. All right, Jessie.

*Jessie:* And we're at our next poll question. So, what foster programs do you currently have or want to start? Please check all that apply. Again, you

can scroll down your screen if you don't see all answers at once and answer on the screen and not in the Q&A window. And as this is our last poll question, I also wanted to remind everybody if you do have any questions make sure to get them in now or very soon so we can hopefully process them in enough time to answer them. So now I'm going to go ahead and move onto the results. And here you go, Kristen. What are you thinking?

*Kristen:* Wow, cool. Wow, this is so cool. So, three years ago if we had asked this question, there wouldn't have even been a consciousness about what a lot of these were I think. It's so amazing to me and for many of you this is probably true, too, how quickly we're evolving as a field and how really sky's the limit. Things are rapidly changing. But this is really exciting. 50 percent want to or have started field trip fostering, 57 percent overnight and weekend/sleepovers, 81 percent interested in starting or have started fostering for long stay pets and 73 percent pets with behavioral challenges. These numbers are really awesome and again so excited about what's ahead for us in this movement.

So, if you want people to foster you've got to make it easy. And this doesn't just mean inviting people in, it means getting animals out. So many of our pets just need to get out and it's been kind of commonplace to take them to a place where animal people go, right? Take them to a pet store, take them to a park. But some of the most successful programs that are getting long stay dogs adopted and challenging pets adopted, they're taking them to places that are a little bit different, that don't necessarily have animal people in them. So, this is a dog that was taken to Lowe's. For your reactive pets, there's really no better place than Lowe's, Home Depot. Those home stores are great because they have big wide open aisles, you can see around corners and there's rarely other animals. So, we have our fosters and our volunteers often go to places like this where people may not already have a pet and are looking and have had a lot of success doing so.

If this person and one of the people in this photo wanted to take this pet home today, it would not have left with the handler. It would have stayed and gone to foster. So, we make it easy for our volunteers and our staff. If they're taking animals offsite we will give them whatever paperwork we need to so that that animal doesn't have to come back to the shelter. If we have an animal out in an adopt-me vest and there's a chance to get that animal in a home, we're going to take it.

So, when we first started talking about this and about the idea of sending adult pets period to foster homes, the safety issue came up over and over and over again. Is it safe? Can you do it safely? And we found through our little study that indeed you can do it safely. And we found that

there's really one key to sending not just your adult pets to foster but your serious critical medical needs pets to foster. And that is the importance of being honest, open and transparent with the people that you're working with. This dog is Kai, and you can see him in his full neck cast. He came into us in the animal center as a four-month-old with a fractured neck and shoulder and he had to live in this cast, basically completely stole first six months or more. He spent his puppyhood on leash walk only in this cast. He got out of that cast and you can imagine the dog we had on our hands was not easy to handle.

He was one of those leash biting, jumping, mouthy dogs that are really hard to handle, harder to get adopted in the shelter setting. And eventually thanks to the Hard Luck Hounds and tremendous volunteer and foster support we were able to get him into a foster home where his behavior rapidly normalized and he went from really being like an uber puppy, like an unhandled-able uber puppy that you just couldn't get out of the kennel to being just like a wonderful family dog. That's him with his eventual adopted sibling. And he was another dog that kind of defied what we thought was possible. And we thought a dog that was so – he missed his critical socialization period and a dog that was so far gone couldn't come back. And it surprised us that he didn't just come back, he sort of normalized within a week and went on to live a totally regular old dog life and is happily a beloved pet today.

But when we did send him to foster home we were really honest about his situation and we let the foster, just like we do with all our cases, know everything that we know. We weren't subjective, we didn't make inferences, we didn't guess about his behavior. We just told them everything we knew about him and that's really important. Whether or not you're doing a foster program or not, we know that the key to building public trust is to be trustworthy with the public.

And this is on top of everything really about culture. This is before I started at PAC, I met this dog. I asked the staff who they needed to get out the most, and I don't remember this dog's name but I hadn't started at Pima Animal Care yet and I sat in his kennel and he was adorable, but super reactive in the shelter. And I just did a post on my personal social media page about him and said I asked the staff what animal needs to get out the most and here's what they told me. And I really didn't know a lot about him. So here he is the next day when I saw him on social media, much to my surprise a rescue partner had seen this and gone and pulled him out and saved his life. And it was a reminder that all of us who are doing this work, we are the subjects that are experts in what we do and we have a responsibility to act as models. So, this isn't to say we need to take home all the animals. I know a lot of us have already done that. But we do have to change the culture to start to not let our staff to say that

dog's barrier reactive, unadoptable, but to start to think outside the box and think about what it means if this reactive dog gets out of the shelter for an hour.

And so, creating a pro-foster culture would mean having your staff take a pet out for an hour or two. It would mean having to spend time in a quiet room with one of your most challenging cats. And it means changing their assumptions, your staff and volunteer assumptions because we tend to in shelter see a behavior or see a medical condition and we tend to have a line. And for all of us that line's different, right? For some of us it's at 98 percent. For some of us it's at 60 percent. For some of us it's not a percentage at all, but a behavioral or medical threshold. And what a pro-foster culture means is that we are constantly crushing our own assumptions about where that line is, constantly questioning – we don't care if it's been here 90 days. We don't care that it has a fractured leg that's having trouble healing. We're going to try and one of the key ways to try to save its life is through foster.

So as much as we need to commit to being open, honest, transparent, there's another piece to this, and I know we're getting towards the end, but this is a really critical part of all of this. Marketing and as option counseling need to be separate processes. They shouldn't be mixed because we are kind of shooting ourselves in the foot. When we take our animals who have been in our care for a long time and we try to sum up their whole personalities and their whole temperament and everything about them, we're trying to sum them up in one paragraph, and if you imagine somebody doing that to you, if somebody tried to summarize me in a paragraph nobody's going to adopt me. It's not happening. I'm living in a shelter forever.

And this is true of a lot of our pets. And this is one example of a dog, this is Dalton, and this is how he was originally described in his shelter. He's an energetic, young dog with a heart of gold who has really cute ears. He has happy tail, which means his tail is bleeding because he wags it so hard in the kennel. He loves people and loves to play but he's becoming barrier reactive in the shelter. Dalton has a skin problem but it can be managed with a special diet! Dalton is looking for a family with no small children and may do okay with another dog with a slow introduction.

How many of you have seen – do you recognize the stop signs in this post? We see them all the time still in social media. Even something the word energetic. I'm very tired all the time. I don't want to take energetic home. That's going to be a stop sign for me. So, there's a different way to market our pet. You're not going to probably really read this, and I'll describe it quickly. But we ended up sending Dalton to a foster home.

And in that foster home he spent not very long there, but the days he was there, every day at a certain hour his foster mom would take him for a walk and it was cold outside. So, she would go and put on her coat before she took him on a walk. And on the third or fourth day of this, 4:00 came around but she was busy reading a book so Dalton actually walked to the closet. He picked her coat out from among the other coats in the closet and started pulling it out of the closet to get her coat so she would take him on a walk.

So, all we did was foster for a couple of days and we told that story. We didn't try to tell Dalton's whole entire personality in one post. You can imagine it's a different way of sharing a story about a dog. We took Dalton back to the shelter after this and he had six or seven people lined up to adopt him because who doesn't want a dog that's that smart and capable and thoughtful? And Dalton got a wonderful home and went on to live a great life. But had we done him the disservice of trying to sort of take all the knocks against him and put them all into that post so that we were getting all the information we never would have gotten him adopted. And now the one caveat to this is when we did find an adopter we certainly shared all of the information we had about Dalton.

We shared that he was really jumpy and anxious in the kennel, he had shown some reactivity, and we shared all that information as part of the counseling process, not the marketing process. And I mention this, I spend a little bit of time on this, you can do all you want all day to get animals to foster, but if you don't fix this marketing piece it won't work. It's critical to the success of these foster programs working. It's using them, integrating them with all of your marketing, integrating them with your social media. You can't keep those two things separate or you won't be as successful as you can be.

So, seven guidelines for starting these programs – know your data. Get rid of your barriers – that is the most important thing. Find your fosters everywhere. Make it easy for people to foster. Be honest, open and transparent with your potential fosters, adopters and volunteers. Create a pro-foster culture and commit to both marketing and counseling for fosters, but keep those separate processes. And one of the questions that I'll leave you with that we've been putting a lot of thought into is we know there's a cost of care for animals in shelters and we know that most of us in large shelters we have 25 or more animal care takers. We work with shelters all over the country and what we're finding is that in many cases shelters have dedicated maybe a quarter of a position to be a foster coordinator or they've dedicated one position to be the only foster coordinator.

And they're not seeing foster as a potential program. And so, the question we've been throwing around is what if we took some of those researches we've put into shelter care and we allocated those into foster programs, into building big foster programs with maybe four or five staff members. Maybe you have a person on your team is all they do is their job starts at the moment the animal goes into foster and they help that foster family get that dog or cat adopted to a permanent home. Maybe there's a whole position dedicated to that. Maybe we say that we want 30 percent or 50 percent or 100 percent of our intake to eventually go into foster homes. And then if we do that, what if we considered subsidizing foster placement? What if we took people who are partly employed? We know people in the world are struggling as much as ever. Many people are partially employed or they're students or they're looking for work.

What if we were subsidizing foster and taking some of the costs of care? So, if we're spending \$15.00 to use the pet and shelter, what if we took even a fraction of that, \$2.00 or \$5.00 a day and help subsidize foster placement for our harder animals? And then incentivize people to get those pets adopted. There are so many questions that we're just starting to ask and so many new places and ways to explore what foster care could mean for our movement. If we continue to explore these questions and ask these questions not as individual shelters but as a movement and why I'm here talking to you today as we continue to do that, we may truly change what sheltering means. And we may be able to house so many more of our animals and have all of our pets the day we come in moving towards some sort of foster placement and imagine what a different world that would look like for our homeless pets.

I try to end every presentation with if you only remember one thing, because for many of us we're so busy that we only do remember one thing. And if I can leave you with one thought about this is that these systems, these dog pounds that we're working out of, we're still operating, most of us, in facilities that were designed to house animals for stray hold and they select few up for adoption and the rest were killed. We're still operating on that foundation. That's the foundation that this movement was built on was not long-term care for animals, was not long-term placement through foster, it wasn't to rescue. And because of that for so many of us we watched day in and day out, animals in our care, even if we're at a 90 percent shelter or we're at a life-saving shelter, a no-kill, we watch animals dying, losing their lives or just not getting the TLC that they need and it's still very heartbreaking.

This dog, he is a dog who recently passed away and that's our volunteer, Jo, who saw him and decided – he was sick. He was near the end of his life. He had dementia. But he was an old dog and he had some life story.

We don't know what it was. He came to us as a stray. We have no idea what life he lived. But he could barely walk. His back legs were crippled and he really struggled. But Jo saw him that he was special and he was an individual and she took him home. Her and her husband, Fred, took him home and they let him spend his last few weeks of life in a home loved with them.

And so, I think what foster offers us is this opportunity to not have to be blind and to have no more animals die anonymous deaths simply because there's no one there to care about them. For so long it's been those of us working in shelter rescue. We've been the only ones that saw the pain and the struggle, and that's a burden that we no longer have to carry because our communities are ready to help. They're ready to help with our neonatal kittens, they're ready to help with our pets with behavioral challenges, they're ready to help with our adult pets, they're ready to help even with our pets who are dying, who are at the end of our lives. All we have to do is ask them. Thank you.

*Jessie:* Thank you, Kristen. That was so much wonderful information on foster programs. We're going to now move onto the question portion of this presentation. I know that a lot of you have really wonderful questions and thank you so much for submitting those. We will try our best to get to as many of them as we can tonight. So, with that said, I'm going to go ahead and push the first question to everybody's screen. All right, Kristen, here's your first question. It says you show and talk mostly about dogs and programs geared for dogs. What about cats? We only work with cats. Other than the long-term foster programs. What type of foster programs have you done for cats?

*Kristen:* Yeah, I have a lot of really tough feelings about this. I'll probably go home tonight and think all about how little we're still talking about cats, how little I'm talking about cats. And the reality is that we really don't know. You can't just take a cat out for a field trip and take it for a snack at a fast food place or a pet store and have that experience be anything other than traumatic for most cats. But we don't know and we need people like you to start experimenting with that. At Pima, we are going to be doing it. We're going to dedicate our staff resources solely to learning more about foster placement for cats and we've still got a lot to learn.

We need to figure it out. Some of the questions that we have are how long does foster placement need to be for it to be beneficial for a cat, and that's still largely an unanswered question. So, my answer is both an apology because this is certainly a dog-biased presentation and most of this work has been on dogs, and an opening and a request for those of you who do work with cats to start to work with us and to get some

better information about what foster can possibly mean other than long-term foster, what that can possibly mean for a cat.

*Jessie:* Thank you, Kristen. Okay, here's our next question. It's a little long. Our shelter – thankfully not a high capacity shelter – doesn't want to have pets in foster homes as then there are fewer pets for walk-in adoptions, or even just for people to see when they arrive to give a donation. Even though it is known that is better for animal welfare and more humane, how do staff convince administrators that fostering pets – especially those that have been in the shelter for an extended period – is the best option?

*Kristen:* That's a great question and we actually have a good solution for it. One of the programs that we started was we have this issue in Fairfax too. We just didn't have the volume and have some trouble keeping kennels full, it should never be a problem for anyone, but that's a whole other webcast. So, what we did is we started having fosters take home the pets at night and bring them back for open hours and people were very willing to do this. So, they would come at close of business, they would take the pet home at night, they would keep it when we were closed and then we would bring it back for open hours. And that meant the pets were, especially for our pets that didn't do so well in the shelter, they were coming back much more well-adjusted and getting adopted faster.

*Jessie:* Great answer. So, we'll go onto our next question. This one's a little bit of a shorter one. What was that volunteer software that you mentioned, Kristen?

*Kristen:* Volgistics. It's kind of the most used shelter software in the industry. It's also I think the public facing side is called VicNet. There's a number of other shelter software systems, but in virtually all of that you can integrate your volunteers and fosters and make them the same.

*Jessie:* Okay. Here's our next question. If a dog is in foster care, how is he made available for adoption to the public? I.e. to view, interact with, etcetera. Social media postings, appointments with potential adopters? What do you do, Kristen?

*Kristen:* There's so many ways to do this and it really depends on the animal. So, some animals we don't want to come back to the shelter. So, for an adult cat or an adult dog that really doesn't do well in the shelter, we use our fosters as the liaison. So, the fosters actually meet with adopters and complete the adoption. There are so many ways you can do it depending on your organization's comfort level. You can simply on the online posting for the animal you can simply list the foster's information and say please contact the foster. That's one way to do it. Or you can do that

through the shelter. Another way to do it is if we have an animal, and this is true for cats in particular, if we have a cat in foster we'll tell the cat's story, we'll post it on social media and we'll say contact, email this person, email the foster if you're interested and then the foster handles all of those calls.

One thing that people don't think about is if you have a thousand animals go to foster and 500 of those get adopted, their fosters complete the process for you which is a great way to do it, that foster is going to be really thoughtful and careful about their match and take a lot of time to find an adopter they think is a good fit. And this is also a great way to make great fits with pets. If pets are in foster and there are challenges, let's say the foster works throughout the day, another way to do it is to have the animal come back. A lot of animals need to go to foster so we can figure out who they are. And if they go to foster for a week and we figure out who they are they can come back to the shelter, they can come back and be viewed publicly. But we have enough information that we can get them adopted. So, if we have an animal that goes to foster and comes back, we often put a cute picture of it in foster on its kennel front to help the adopters see what it would be like in a home.

*Jessie:* Thank you, Kristen. I have your next question all ready. Here it goes. I am concerned about sending dogs home with people that have not been screened. Mass foster promotion can be dangerous. We screen foster homes as carefully as adoptive homes, reference calling and a home visit so we know the dog will be safe.

*Kristen:* No, I absolutely hear that. And depending on your rescue that may be the most appropriate way for you to do it. I think the best reference that I encourage, because we get this question a lot, and we always encourage people to read the Adopter's Welcome Manual from the Humane Society of the United States. It's available for free download. And it's such a great reference because it really delves into some of those issues of screening and home visits and things like that and really kind of frames them in a way that's really interesting and helpful. Our business in the shelters that I work at and our business is really getting the most animals out alive into the highest quality homes possible. And so, we simply – if we decided that we are going to do screening, reference calling and home visits that would vastly reduce the number of lives we could save and more than that, and what Adopter's Welcome sort of points to, is that we may not necessarily be getting as valuable as information as we think out of those practices. So, I encourage you to read the audit and check it out.

*Jessie:* That's a great suggestion. Is there a simple instrument or questionnaire that we could use to measure behavior in shelter and after some time in foster home?

*Kristen:* So, because animals are individuals, not yet. Because animals are all individuals, what we have found to be most valuable is to write a summary of sort of observed behavior in shelter and then ask our fosters to write a summary of observed behavior in foster. And so, before any animal comes back from a foster home to be adopted we have a one-pager that we give all of our fosters and this can be done online and I believe it's in that resource list that I showed at the beginning, a one-pager that just asks them some very simple questions and then asks them to talk about their experience and that is really meaningful for then adopters who give that information to adopters and help share that with them.

The more information you can get from that foster the better of match you can eventually make. There may come a time in the future when we do have those resources available and that's part of what this study we're doing is about. The Maddie's Fund study was sending adult dogs to fosters. We really want to know is what the questions we should be asking are and what kind of information we can get from them. So probably yes at some point but for now we encourage you to be sort of getting as much qualitative information in writing from fosters as you can.

*Jessie:* Thank you, Kristen. And remember everybody to check out all those resources that she put up there for you. We'll move onto our next question. Do you think it is better for a foster dog to meet potential adopters at the foster home, adoption events, or back at the shelter?

*Kristen:* That's an awesome question. It totally depends. I mean any time you could avoid doing a stressful on-leash introduction in a high-traffic place between two dogs the better. And if it's a cat – I'm assuming you're talking about – oh, you're talking about foster dogs meet potential adopters. I thought you were talking about meet and greet between pets. But that's another issue and those should be done in the least stressful environment as possible. I don't know that it matters. It kind of depends on the dog and the cat that you're dealing with. For some animals coming back to the shelter gives us as staff an opportunity to provide counseling.

In most cases if some people can meet foster pets outside of the shelter it's even better but it really just depends on kind of your setup, your situation, but we don't make our fosters bring animals back. We don't make them adopt them from adoption events. If they adopt them out of

their home, we just facilitate that and make it easy for them to do. And I know someone will want to have asked this. If you are wondering how people pay to do that, in my last organization they just sent in a check to pay to complete the adoption.

*Jessie:* Great, thank you. What sort of training do fosters get in order to be able to adopt animals out on their own?

*Kristen:* So, the foster manual that is posted on the Maddie's Fund site has all of this information in it. It's a really great resource and it's a pain to go download a manual, but it's a really good resource because it goes through all of that and it's really just a simple process. It's not rocket science. And so, what we do is when we initially onboard fosters depending on the pet, we give them a different level of training. So, if it's a special needs pet they actually do receive training in order to complete those adoptions. If it's just an EPPV animal without any big issues they really can do most of it based on the manual and the email that we have an automated email that goes to them.

*Jessie:* Thank you, Kristen. So, I do know everybody that we are going a little bit over. We just have so many wonderful questions. So, we'll take a few more questions. We hope that you can stay on. If you can't, this will be On Demand within 24 hours. We hope that you can stay on with us tonight. So, with that I'm going to move onto our next question. I know some rescues have found fosters that turn out to be bad. So how can we handle it if we foster out a dog without a check of their responsibility?

*Kristen:* This is a great and important question. I think this is a larger question in the movement right now and it has been for years. How do you determine – what was our level of responsibility to make sure people aren't bad people? And the way this movement has progressed, the way it's moved forward, the way we're moving towards so much more lifesaving communities is by trust in our community. We had this dog one time and her name was Mocha. She was my favorite dog ever. And she went to this family and they were the perfect family. It was like if I could think of a perfect family in my head with my bias this was it. Goes with this perfect family, shows back up at the shelter a year later. The dog is obese, her skin is sloughing off, she had horrible allergies and not only that, she was despondent. It looks like no one has paid any attention to her in a year. It shocked me.

It really changed my whole outlook on this stuff. What it really hit home for me is that we really don't know. We really don't know when we send an animal outside of our care, the world is a tough place. People struggle. They go through challenges. They lose housing. That is not our role as animal welfare professionals. Our role is not to sort of solve the

problems of the world. We do our best and we trust our community and of course there's going to be those cases where there are some serious red flags, but they are so rare. The vast majority of people really do this because they want to help. My short answer that I've given in a really roundabout way is that there is no check. There is no check that we can do that is going to tell us every time if someone's going to be a good person or a bad person. Those people aren't bad people anyway. They're just people that have struggled. And we are going to be adopting out pets and fostering pets to people that have struggles, but that is not our problem. That is the problem of the world.

*Jessie:* Onto our next question. In a high-volume shelter, how do you get the negative information to your A/C's if all the comments on the kennel card are only about positive traits? With hundreds of dogs, there needs to be a place for volunteers to write all they know about the animal, not just the happy stuff.

*Kristen:* Well, so I didn't say anything about kennel cards. That again is another webcast. So, kennel cards is their own thing. In general, there's ways to communicate important safety information in a shelter that is an internal communication system so that all volunteers and staff know animals that are more challenging to handle versus easier to handle. That can be done without writing negative things on kennel cards. If an animal is truly so unsafe as to have to have negative traits written on his kennel cards, meaning safety information, that animal probably shouldn't be publicly on the adoption board. It should probably be in with a trainer or headed towards a placement where it can receive rehabilitation or be safely handled. And so, the happy stuff, it's not happy stuff. And I hear this a lot of you just want to tell the happy, fluffy stuff as we talk about this, and that is not actually true.

But what I am saying is that we have a responsibility not to imagine that based on what we're seeing in a shelter we can sum up and understand the whole total personality of an animal that adopters need to know. So, you would never hear me say about a cat for instance, great with kids, great with other pets. Because we don't know that either. We have a responsibility to tell the public in a responsible way through face-to-face counseling what we do know about the animals. And what we do know about the animals is likely a tiny sliver of what we could know. But foster is important because that tiny sliver gets a lot bigger when you send a pet to foster and you can find out more about them. So, this isn't about non-transparency and it's not just being fluffy.

It's really about only saying what we know and when we do that we communicate that in a face-to-face counseling process and it's certainly possible in a high-volume shelter and we know that there's shelters all

over. I'll give a quick shout out to Ventura County, California sending hundreds of adult animals to foster, providing excellent counseling and really making amazing changes. If you get a chance to follow them on social media, it's Funds for Ventura County. You can get the animal services and they do incredible work with foster also sending about 2,500 animals to foster a year.

*Jessie:* Thank you, Kristen. So, I know it's getting late for some of you out there, so this will be our last question for the night and then we'll do some closing remarks. If the problematic behavior history or in-shelter includes some kind of aggression, how do you minimize risks to safety of the foster family?

*Kristen:* Certainly, public safety has been in municipal animal services now for more than five years, and public safety is one of our primary responsibility. It's something we take very seriously. So, some animals cannot be safely placed because of a history, a known history of aggression towards humans or animals. Some animals can't be safely in just any home, and that's just reality. A very small number of animals will be euthanized due to a known history of aggression towards humans or animals and that's a very small number that will die for that. But another group of animals really, they have behavior that can truly be unsafe. They are capable of causing some kind of harm to the humans or animals and those are treated – the way that we treat those is a lot like you would treat – we treat them as individual cases. We get all the information. We find out everything we need to know.

When we look at notes on animals that come in with histories of behavioral challenges or aggression, when we review those notes, half the time – no, 70 percent of the time those notes are inaccurate. Sometimes we don't even have the right dog identified. Those notes are often taken under duress and so we're really careful and do a lot of due diligence. I talk much more in depth about this. On the Maddie's Fund website, I did a talk for American Pets Alive, about how we make behavioral decisions, how we decide what animals live and die for behavior, and the answers that we have process – we have process built into everything that we do because safety is so important to us. And so, I encourage you to watch that. But we always tell everyone everything. And of course, there's cases when we decide an animal, this really isn't a safe placement.

If we had a pet with behavioral challenges and a family with three young children who obviously aren't great at following rules about not grabbing ears, we're going to be reasonable. We're not going to send an animal home and put them up in that situation. We learn as much as we can about the foster and we learn as much as we can about the particular

animal and we do our best to make the right match and always, always, always we disclose everything we know about that animal to the foster family. And that is our greatest responsibility is to let fosters and adopters know all the information that we have and then help them make the right decision for them.

*Jessie:* Well that's the end of our event for this evening. Thank all of you for your time tonight and a special thank you to Kristen for an amazing presentation. Click on the link to take our survey. Your feedback is important to us and we would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to respond. Look for more On Demand webcasts on our website at [www.maddiesfund.org](http://www.maddiesfund.org) and watch for our promotion of our next webcast in November, Behavioral Pharmacology with Dr. Sarah Bennett. Also, a quick reminder to keep an eye open for Maddie's Fund's upcoming innovation grant cycle, which will be specifically open to the categories of innovative foster care, every moving barriers to adoption. Thanks again for being here with us this evening and good night.

*[End of Audio]*