



***House Fewer Cats, Save More Lives,
Make Everyone Happy!***

Webcast Transcript
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[Beginning of Audio]

Andrew: Hi, everyone. This is Andy from the Million Cat Challenge Team. I want to thank you so much for taking time out of your busy day to join this webinar. We're lucky today to have us Karen Green, Executive Director of Cat Adoption Team.

Before we begin, we would like to thank Maddie's Fund for hosting this webinar and for making Million Cat Challenge possible for their generosity.

One other little bit of housekeeping, we are reserving the last 15 minutes of so for Karen to answer any questions that may come up during the presentation. You can submit questions as they arise during the webinar using the Q and A button that's in the left-hand column. Please send up questions as they occur to you, since we may not have time to answer questions asked at the last minute.

If something comes up that you'd like to ask about, go ahead and type it in right away and we'll cue it up.

Now, I'd like to hand it off to Dr. Kate Hurley to introduce today's presenter.

Kate: Thanks, Andy. And thank you, Karen, and all of you for being here today. As Andy mentioned, Karen is Executive Director of Cat Adoption Team which is the Pacific Northwest's largest non-profit feline only adoption guarantee shelter. She began her career survey at Best Friends Animal Society in various ways, starting as a vet tech working with cats. So you might sense a theme developing here.

She went on to become the assistant director of the national No More Homeless Pets program where she focused on helping build effective organizations and No More Homeless Pets communities. She served as the senior director of the Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs for six years before she joined Cat as executive director in 2012.

She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Organizational Communication and a certificate in Conflict Resolution and Mediation from Marylhurst University and is proudly CAWA certified.

In her spare time still fostered dozens of cats, kittens, dogs, and puppies with a special interest in newborn and under socialized adolescent animals. She loves reading, musical theater, Birkenstocks, and her 12 year old yellow lab, Sunny.

I also hear through the grapevine that she has an incredible voice, so if you need a voice over for any of your great adoption promotion anthems that you're rewriting, maybe you can tap here the next time you see her.

Karen is here today to tell us about how her shelter, by operating at their capacity for care, how fewer cats save more lives and made everyone happy. She's great example of one of those people. Her and her team, so what I thought might have been originally a suggestion that we made from the UC Davis current medicine team, and implemented it and made it way better than we ever imagined it could be.

So we were pretty confident at the time that moving to capacity for care and providing better housing would not cause them to save fewer cats, that we did not expect to hear from them as we did not that long after to say with half the housing, they were running low on cats.

I think the first I heard of it was when someone from CATS sent an email out to the Million Cat discussion group saying, "This is not a joke, we need to import some more cats." That was not just into their shelter, but that was also creating a safety net in their whole community for all cats at all shelters and still be able to reach out beyond their community and save even more cat lives.

So I am as excited as you are to discover how they made that magic happen. Thanks so much, Karen. Take it away.

Karen: Thanks, Kate. That was a very flattering introduction, very kind. I want to think you and the Million Cat Challenge for inviting me and Maddie's Fund for hosting this webinar. I also want to thank you and Cindy Karsten, and Denae Wagner and others at UC Davis for helping CAT make the move to capacity for care. Which was called adoption driven capacity

when we made that transition. So if I call it that during this presentation, I'm talking about capacity for care.

So please be forgiving with me, everyone, if you hear me call it that. That's what I mean.

Okay, so I'm going to briefly run through what our agenda is going to be today. I'm going to tell you all a little bit about cat adoption seen in our community. Then mostly we're going to be talking about our journey to capacity for care. So how we got interested and learned more about it, how we addressed concerns from our stakeholders, what the process really looked like.

So what the different steps were and how we planned it. Including how we paid for the changes that we made. Then what were the results? The impact on our cats, on our operations, and on our people. Which I think was the biggest area where we had changes that, I at least, wasn't really expecting.

Then I'll tell you a little bit about where things are today. Then we'll have time for some Q and A. And just as another reminder, please make sure to get your questions in early as you think of them. We'll have the best chance of being able to get them answered if you get them in as early as possible.

So Cat Adopting Team was founded in 1998. We are a non-profit organization, limited admission. We don't have any animal control contracts. Between eight and eighty-five percent of our cats come to us from other shelters and rescue groups as transfers. Then the other fifteen to twenty percent are owner surrenders.

Our shelter is located in Sherwood, Oregon, which is just outside of Portland and it's part of the Portland metro area. We also have cats available for adoption in eight off-site adoption centers. We did about 3,200 adoptions last year.

CAT was also a founding partner of The Animal Shelter Alliance of Portland in 2006. Which is a collation of the major animal welfare organizations and shelters and the Veterinary Medical Association in the Portland metro area. So we work with those organizations so we all operate a targeted spay/neuter program for cats together.

We also transfer animals between our organizations. CAT is one of two receiving shelters and the primary feline receiving shelter in our collation.

So our journey to capacity for care – this is Agent Trip, who was one of my former office cats and graduate office cat now. He’s off in a home. So I joined Cat Adoption Team’s board in early 2012, became the Executive Director in December of that year.

My first impression of the shelter when I first visited was, “Whoa - that is a lot of cats there.” So we have our main area where adult cats are housed for adoption. We call it our main room. There were just so many cats. We had a rolling pack of kennels right as you went upstairs. It was really overwhelming.

We would hear people leaving without – prospective adopters who would come in who left without cats saying, “There’s just so many, it’s hard to choose.” Our staff and volunteers were really overwhelmed with basic caregiving for all of those cats.

So between about 2011 and 2013, we were averaging about a hundred adult cats in the shelter at any time during those years. It was actually quite a bit more than that even in the years before that when we weren’t managing admissions. So I’m just going to throw in a little plug for managed admissions while I’m here. But that’s not our primary topic, I’ll move on.

The other thing that was really striking and challenging was that we had cats living in kennels for months or sometimes even years. Which was really not humane or appropriate for the cats and led to deteriorating health and behavior in those cats.

So we measure – a long-term resident of us is a cat who’s been with us for over 90 days. Between 2011 and 2013 we were averaging 41 long-term residents at any time. Which means that over forty percent of our adult cats had been with us for over three months. And that’s, I think we can all agree, that that is way too long. That’s far too long for the cats to be spending with us and spending almost, you know, most of those cats living in kennels. We did have free-roam rooms, so some of those cats were in rooms, but a lot of those cats were what we would call “cage locked.”

So they were cats that couldn’t go into room because of health problems or temperament issues. Those cats would just stay stuck in kennels for very long periods of time.

So I started being interested in, and sort of had heard about portals and was curious about those. The Alliance for Contraception for Cats and Dogs held a symposium in Portland in the spring of 2013. I talked to Kate Hurley at that symposium and said, “Hey, I’ve heard about these portal things. What can you tell me about those?”

She said, “Oh, come here. Talk to Denae Wagner, she is the queen of portals and she can tell you everything about them.” So Denae is also from UC Davis and she allowed me to steal her away to come and visit a Cat Adoption Team shelter while she was in town.

She said, “Oh yeah, this is too many cats. You should definitely put portals in here.” She also talked to us a little bit about fast tracking. Creating fast tracking systems which I’ll talk a little bit more about in a minute.

Our volunteer manager was able to join us for the tour that Denae came on with us. That was really helpful and kind of kept, things kind of kept moving from there.

Doctor Cindy Karsten from UC Davis came and did a presentation for our coalition – The Animal Shelter Alliance of Portland – in 2013. That included doing, she offered to do the calculations for any shelters who sent their statistics. To help us figure out what was our ideal capacity. So we did that and also talked about fast tracking.

Our director of operations and our volunteer manager both attended that presentation and many members of our coalition were there as well. So things just kind of kept progressing.

During all this time, we kept doing a lot more research into adoption driven capacity, fast tracking, looking at length of stay. UC Davis and ASPCA Pro were both really great resources during that time. Maddie’s Fund.

I kept the management team and our board updated, would share kind of bits and pieces of information, interesting articles and anecdotes to kind of keep people informed and kind of on track with the thinking as I was kind of planning and we were thinking though where this could go.

I’d also started sharing pieces of information with all of our staff and volunteers in our regular kind of mass communications, our weekly updates, and sort of strategic conversations and meetings.

So the strategy, the recommendation, from Cindy Karsten was for us to move to having 35 to 40 adult cats available for adoption on site. That was a decrease of more than half from our then-capacity. That meant making all of our kennels into either double or triple capacity kennels. Or not capacity, I’m sorry, compartment kennels, by installing portals. And reducing our free-roam room populations from about four to six cats per room. We have six different free-roam rooms and they range a little bit in

size. Down to between one and three cats per room, depending on which room.

It also meant the recommendation was also to put in place a fast track system that would involve scoring all teen and adult cats as they came in, to identify which cats could be fast tracked through our system and which were going to need more kind of attention and care as they came through. That system would determine what housing the cats went into.

So that plan kind of freaks people out. The idea of cutting our capacity that much was really alarming. It was scary for all of us. The biggest concern was really, “Well, what are we going to do when our partners need our help and we suddenly only have room for half as many cats. Less than half as many cats.”

That was really scary for everyone. The primary concerns were really among our staff and our volunteers. It wasn't something that we had really concerns from the public on, because this wasn't something that they really knew about. But as we're exploring this internally, it was very nervous making. So I want to talk a little bit about how we kind of thought through and addressed those concerns.

One thing that was interesting was we had a little mini case study, kind of by accident in some ways. Which was that in 2012, we had a flood in our building. And kind of related to that, we reduced the number of cats, of FIV positive cats we were housing in our FIV room.

So if you look at this chart, so the blue line there is the average number of our FIV cats in care. So these cats were all in one room. So we went from having an average of about ten cats in this room, to an average of just over, well almost six. It was 5.7.

With that change, we went from 13 adoptions in 2011 to 25 adoptions in 2012. So it was nice to kind of have this little sample in-house of what this could mean. That by having about half as many cats, we had increased our adoptions almost two-fold.

In 2013, we kept the number of FIV cats about the same. It was 5.6, and did 30 adoptions. The adoptions continued to increase. So, that was helpful to have to refer to in addition to figures and stories from other shelters. We had something right in front of us that everyone could see. They could also see that that room looks and sells a lot different with five cats in it, than it did with ten. Ten was really way too many.

So in terms of the communications, a lot of what we talked about was that what we were doing was really not fair to the cats. A lot of that really had

come from the staff and volunteers. So while we were concerned about, you know, what's going to happen? Are we going to be full and then not be able to help our partners? Everyone was uncomfortable having the cats spend this much time in kennels.

So we'd done staff and volunteer surveys. Just satisfaction surveys that asked a lot of different questions. But the feedback that we got from those, both from staff and volunteers included concerns about, "We really hate seeing cats spend one, living in kennels for so long. And two, just spending so much time at the shelter."

So everyone wanted the cats to get out of the shelter faster and to not be living in these small kennels. We were certainly, everyone was bought into that. It also really helped to be able to talk about some of the other shelters that had made this move and seen it work.

We talked about what had happened with our FIV-positive cat. Frankly, it also helps to have, you know, we always have the backup of saying, "Hey, you know what? If it's really a disaster and we're really desperate, we could close the portals and bring in more cats if we had to. We hope not to do that, that's not the plan." But this was a move, where we could in a way kind of undo it temporarily or something if we had to.

I also shared, again, links to the data that we used to get here. So again, those articles, and webinars and things that we'd watched, and things that we'd learned from. The calculator that you could use to figure out your capacity was available online. We had shared those things all along the way and really invited a lot of communication.

So there was a lot of, "If you have any questions or concerns about this, please let's talk about this."

We did hit a point where, you know, I really wanted to make sure that everyone was on board and really comfortable with it. But we hit a point where it became clear that we couldn't wait for everyone to get comfortable with it, we were going to have to just move forward and hope that the results would make us all comfortable with it.

I remember being on a call with Cindy Karsten and our communications and development manager and we were talking about, "Well, what about this, and what about this?" in that call. She was saying, "Well, you know, it's going to work. You'll see that it will work."

We got off that call and said, "Okay, so basically, we just need to do it. We've just to do it." So it definitely required a leap of faith there and just saying, "Alright, let's jump in."

So our plan of course involved getting funding in place to install the portals because that was the biggest expense piece. Making the transition during the slow season because we didn't want to stop or slow down and take it all, but by doing it during the slow season, we were able to make the transition without impacting intake.

Related to intake, we did not change our intake criteria at all. So we didn't say to any of our partners, "You can only send us fast track cats." Or anything like that. We didn't make our intake criteria any more stringent. We took that same cats that we took before. Actually, over time, we were able to take harder cats and more cats and more difficult cats. But even from the beginning it was important to us that we not change our intake criteria.

We needed to put our fast track scoring system into place, and then we needed to clear the shelter as much as we could for the portal installation.

So I'm going to talk a little bit about funding and this is going to throw me off of sort of a time schedule because I'm going to talk about how we did some of our funding, but include funding for some of the projects that we did later. Because we have, since we did this initial project we have installed portals in the rest of our shelters as well. This initial project was for our main adoption floor for adults cats.

Initially, we receive a grant from the ASPCA in 2013 which allowed us to do housing improvements. So we used that for portals and then also to make repairs to a lot of our kennels. So we had kennels that were missing pieces and didn't have doors that worked properly and things like that.

We're really grateful to them for that help. That was the main gift that got us started on this project. Our most recent portalling project was paid for by a grant from, innovation grant, from Maddie's Fund, which was fabulous. That allowed us to finish portalling all of our remaining single compartment kennels in our building.

So these are kind of the bookend funding right here for our portal projects. We also did direct mail appeal for our portals. We were not sure how this was going to go. This was very different than any direct mail appeal we've done before. You know, usually they're really focused on, "This cat came in and was sick and in terrible shape and please help us help more cats like this."

This was very focused. This was, you know, "Help us get cats out of cages and twice as fast. Each portal is going to cost \$171.00. Will you fund a portal?" This appeal was made almost three times what the next two

appeals have made. It basically has outperformed almost every quarter appeal that we have ever had.

Our average gift for that appeal was \$90.00 versus \$60.00. We had a lot of people who sent in gifts of \$171.00. So it was very effective. People were really moved I think, and motivated to support the CATs doing this. I've had many donors that I've talked to close to that time and even years later who've said, "Oh yeah, we funding one of those portals," that really connected to that.

So I encourage you if you're looking at doing a project like this, to really engage your donors with it. They want to help your cats be happier and healthier in the shelter too.

One of the things we've been a little bit concerned about with this was, "Well, are we making ourselves look bad if we're pointing out that living in a shelter is not great? And living in kennels is not great." But we were able to do it in a way that, I think, people understood that.

They all know that, no one wants cats to live in shelters, but they get that the point is to get them back out of there and into homes as quickly as possible. So being able to make that transition quickly really helped.

Again, so if anyone has questions about this or any of the funding pieces, again, remember please to get those in now or any of the things that we've talked about so far. Try to get those questions in early so we can make sure that we can cover those.

I'd also be happy to share the sample of that appeal letter that we sent out with anyone. I'll share my contact information at the end of this presentation and you can reach out to me. I'd be happy to send you that.

Okay, so I'm going to kind of back out from funding now and show you, so this is our fast track scoring sheet. I'd also be happy to send anyone this if you'd like.

We looked at two other shelters' scoring sheets. For anyone who's not really familiar with fast tracking, it's a way to identify when animals come into your shelter at intake, to try and identify, "Is this going to be an animal that we can move through here really quickly or are they going to need more time and resources?" And if they can be fast tracked to help them move through really quickly.

Interestingly, I think for us, we've actually used our fast track system more as a way to identify the cats that needed the extra help. So our focus

is more in catching the slow track cats and focusing on those. Then fast track cats really kind of take care of themselves.

So we looked at a couple of other shelters' scoring sheets as models. Then we adjusted based on our population and our market. So we know what our adopter respond to and adjusted based on that.

So there are five sections on here and cats are scored. So they get different points within each of those sections. The sections are age, color or breed, behavior, medical, and other. Other can be plus or minus. So things in other might include, you know, you're part of a bonded pair. That will take points away from you because we know that that's likely to slow you down.

Fast tracking isn't about saying, "We think you're a worthwhile creature," or anything like that. Of course we think they're all wonderful creatures. It's just about identifying, "Are you someone who's likely to be here with us longer or are you likely to be sailing through here pretty fast?"

Our fast track cats go into double compartment kennels. Our medium and slow track cats and our exception owner candidate cats, which are the very low scoring cats, they all go directly into triple compartment housing. So we just recognize, "If you're likely to be here longer, we want to give you bigger housing right from the beginning."

They're also going to be put on a behavior plan if they need it. They're going to be put on a special medical plan if they need it. We just want to identify them from the get go and give them what they need immediately.

The fast track cats do not go into triple compartment housing or any other special housing.

So what we used to do is kind of wait until a cat had been here for a month or two and then say, "Oh, this cat is not moving. Let's move them into a bigger kennel now. Let's give them more stuff in their kennel. Let's look at doing more for them." But now those cats are getting what they need from day one.

Because really we know for the most part when those cats come in, right? Most of us can if we think through it, we can identify those cats. I'm like, "Oh, okay. You're six years old, you're a short-haired black cat, you're shy and you're on a special diet. You're probably not going to be moving through here really quickly, so let's just make sure we're setting you up to be successful from the beginning and supporting you for a longer stay."

Whereas the one year old cat who, tabby and white, who's outgoing and at the front of the kennel, is only going to be here for a few days. They're going to do fine in the slightly smaller housing. They don't really need as much because they just aren't going to be there as long.

Okay, so next we worked to really empty the shelter as much as we could so that we didn't have as many cats to move for our portal installation. So we did our project in March, which was when our population is naturally already low. Then we did an adoption promotion, our hard hat adoption special, to try to further reduce the population. So we got as many cats out as we could. So we only had, I think, maybe – I don't have numbers in front of me – but not very many cats that we needed to move out for the portal install.

The portal installation was very noisy because it involves cutting holes through our stainless steel kennels. So we had to really empty out the entire upstairs adoption floor.

It took about four days. We had 27 portals installed which left us with 23 double compartment kennels and six triple compartment kennels. Our portals look like this. So we had a local company kind of custom make our portals. They built portals at another shelter so that they knew how to do them.

We had to make ours a little bit different because we have stainless steel shelves in those kennels upstairs. You can see the shelf on the top left, the left side of the top of the screen there. They have the sliding door that goes in there. We don't really use the doors. The door all just, you know, sit around in a little pile but we have them there in case we need them.

In theory they would maybe get used sometimes for cleaning, but that rarely needs to happen. So this is – for our move in – this is Winona, who was waiting downstairs for her new kennel to get ready. So this is what our “before” kennel set-up looks like. This is Winona, just moved up stairs, checking out her new digs and her new portal to look through.

The cats did not take long at all to figure out how to use their portals and they were all quite happy with them. So we had, the changes that we noticed with the cats were really immediate and more dramatic than, I think, at least then I had expected. It got much quieter very quickly. The cats weren't vocalizing as much, but I think one of the biggest changes actually is much less fussing in the litter boxes. I think because the litter box was no longer just inches away from food dishes and bedding.

They're less complaining, the cats were very calm and quiet. They acted more like themselves. They were just expressing more normal behaviors,

they were resting more comfortably, they were playing. And with dropping our numbers, we had more time to spend with the cats. We had half as many cats in house, so there was almost twice as much time.

We still had the same number of cats coming through, so we're still, the time for processing intake and adoptions and things like that was the same. But in terms of daily caregiving, we had a lot more time to work with. So we suddenly had time to be able to do things like behavior modification, enrichment, and other housing improvements that we were just not able to do before.

It was like suddenly this whole world opened up to us. That we, that just wasn't a possibility before and honestly, that had not been part of the plan. The plan was, "Okay, the cats will have bigger housing and they'll be more calm and they'll be healthier and happier and they'll get adopted faster." We hadn't realized how much more making this change would make possible.

So this is what one of our standard doubles looks like now. So we go, left is litter, then right is rest and relaxation. That they have the food, water, their bed, scratcher, hidey box, second bed area. They'll have a hanging toy, they have loose toys. They also have this, we put these scent rubber – I have a better picture of a scent rubber, I'll show you in a minute actually. So the cats have better space this way.

Then this is what our triples look like. So we use again, the triples are for the cats that are, that we expect to be with us longer. We also use these for bonded pairs so it gives them a lot more space to work with.

All of our kennels are actually identified with – let me see if you can see this on any of these. No, you can't quite. They have little stickers that say slow or fast above the kennel numbers, just to make it really simple for staff who are moving the cats into them.

This is one of our free-roam rooms. Years ago, this was a room that would hold eight to twelve cats. When we moved to the recommended 18 square feet per cat guideline, it put this room at about four or sometimes we'd push it to five cats. The 18 per square feet was somewhere between four and five. Now it maxes out at two cats, to put the population for our whole adoption floor at the right number.

I've got to say, it is amazing how much different a room feels when you only have two cats in it and how much better the cats do when you're only making two cats who don't really know each other well live together. So the fighting and the stress are just way down. You can keep less furniture in the room which makes the room much less cluttered.

It's much nicer for people to go in and visit with the cats. You don't end up with the same thing where you have one or two cats that are really outgoing that make it so that the more quiet cats don't get noticed. This room is currently set up for one very nervous cat. Its people can go in there and do a lot of behavior modification and work with her without any distractions because there's no one else in there. It's the slow season and she can have a room to herself right there.

So this is what happened to our length of stay. So 2013 was basically kind of our baseline year because we installed our portals in the spring of 2014. So this is for adult cats and this is not including time in foster. Our length of stay numbers are not perfect because they do include time in treatment. So any time the cat spends in the hospital or ringworm isolation, anything like that. But this is sort of the closest we can get with our software right now.

So we went from an average length of stay of 45 days to, let's see, it went to 33 in 2014. Then it kept dropping. So it dropped twenty-six percent in year one. Then over the first two years, it dropped by forty-seven percent. It actually took a couple years for us to be able to really realize that full impact because it took that long to clear out a lot of the long-term residents that we had had that were hanging out for a long time.

Now, it's kind of stabilized a little bit more. It's still dropping some, but it's kind of leveled out some. But that's a decrease of almost half over two years. The cats are happier, they go home faster. They act like themselves, people notice them. The people who come to adopt aren't overwhelmed by a huge number of cats. They just go home better.

One of the things that was really striking to us was what happened with our number of long-term residents. Again, for us long-term is over 90 days in care. So in our first year, our number of long-term residents dropped by fifty-two percent. Over the first two years, it dropped by eighty-one percent. So a significant decrease. Honestly, we take a lot more difficult cats in than we used to because this now works.

So because the cats don't just sit around and we're able to move them through, we take more of them from our shelter partners. So we're actually willingly taking, bringing in, intentionally bringing in more of these cats and more difficult to place cats and still having fewer cats turn into long-term residents in our care.

I think that's a big part of what's happening is that we're not turning the cats into long-term residents by putting them in housing that stresses them

out. We're identifying cats that come in that need special care quickly and giving them that support of care, so that they can be successful.

So our adoptions also increase this time. So as the average number of adult residents decreased by forty percent, our adult adoption numbers increased by thirty percent. So the bottom line for a lot of people isn't just, "Are things nicer for the cats that you have, but did you save more lives?" And yes, we did. You see? More lives every year. Our adoption numbers have increased each year.

I want to talk a little bit more about how that works. So our – oh, and just looking at this to kind of closely tie this a little bit more together, this is just looking at our adult population numbers. So they've decreased pretty significantly.

When you have roughly half as many cats to care for every day, you can do a lot more with your cats. So you can do enrichment. So our cats have a lot more in kennel enrichment, so a lot more toys, smells, things that we're able to do, provide for them, in their kennels to make their lives more interesting and provide them safe places to hide. Because we have time to give them those things and because they have more spaced for it.

But we're also able to provide much more enrichment outside the kennels. So we have enrichment volunteers and staff that work to do different activities to provide enrichment for the cats. They're getting enrichment at least five days a week outside of what is just provided in their kennels every day.

We work really hard to provide a lot of enrichment for isolation ward cats especially because they're lives are more boring being in isolation. So we use food puzzles, and some of them are fancier ones that people donate to us, and some of them are homemade ones like this.

A lot of the enrichment stuff that we use is great things for volunteers to make for us. Including things like Girl Scout groups that may be too young to come and volunteer at the shelter. We integrate scent and visual and sound, try to really mix things up for the cats.

Most of our free-roam rooms and our isolation wards have TVs and we play cat TV for the cats. They have squirrels running around on them or birds flying on them. Some of the cats don't, they ignore them. Some of them fixate on them and will try to paw at the TV. Some do this, and just sit there and lounge and watch the TV like how people might. It's very silly.

I know some of you are going to laugh at this, and I don't blame you, but we actually have some cats that will go out on stroller walks. We had a couple of strollers donated and for some of our cats that have needs that are harder to meet, we have volunteers who will take our cats out on stroller walks.

Some cats hate it, and some obviously, if a cat hates it, we don't take them on stroller walks. Some of them love it and it gives them a little bit more exposure. We have one cat, recently, who was a very difficult to place cat and we sent her stroller home with her when she got adopted because she loved her stroller walks so much.

We use a feel-a-way in our – oh, excuse me. I'm having a slide issue. There we go. We use feel-a-way throughout our shelter to help reduce stress in the cats and help them feel more comfortable. We also use, this is a photo of a cat using one of the scent rubbers I mentioned to you earlier.

So these are made with pipe insulation, with felt glued to it. Then we wrap it around the kennel bars and so the cats can rub their faces on it and get their own pheromones on it and makes themselves feel more at home. Then we'll move that with them if they move to another kennel.

So we really try to make them comfortable in their space as much as we can. Again, that was just something that we really didn't have the brain space for before when we were just buried in cats.

We do behavior, we have a behavior modification for cats who are shy or easily overstimulated or have aggression issues. We do clicker training and agility, it's very effective. I want to show you a little video of this is a cat who was in our socialization program. So we're able to do a lot more socialization work with adults, but especially with kittens that come in who are maybe semi feral kittens and really need that work.

We work with them in foster care, but also we've been able to do more with them in the shelter now. This is one of our graduates, Babybell. Okay, so, oh there we go.

We've also been able to add more in-depth, complex, and kind of creative medical management. Including some medical approaches to behavior. It looks like I've got a problem with one of the photos that was one here, it's not displaying. But we had one kitten who, name Rialta, who had just really chronic diarrhea that was not responding to treatment. We ended up trying, our vet was able to try a number of different diets with her, including a raw diet which is not something that we normally would do, but we were really pulling out all the stops and looking for something that would be successful with her.

And ended up with her on a special limited ingredient diet and she eventually put on weight and her diarrhea cleared up and she was adopted just a couple of weeks ago.

Then this cat in the photo here is Lilly. She's on the behavior modification plan. She's on a calm diet by Royal Canaan. They have a diet that's supposed to help with keeping cats calm and she's wearing a pheromone collar as well. To help, she's the cat who's in the room that I mentioned earlier had one cat in it right now who was on a behavior modification program. She was quite the little mess. Swatty, just hiding in the kennel and swatting at everyone. But she's doing really well now, coming out, seeking attention, doing much better.

So all medium, slow, medium and slow tracked cats and exceptional owner candidate cats, if they need them they get a plan. So we create a plan for that cat. We say, "Okay, what do you need? Do you need behavior modification? We need to look at different housing for you and figure out what that is." Plus anyone on the staff who identifies a cat as needing extra help.

So I want to show you this video, this is of a cat named Columbia. So Columbia came in and she was a cat who was in a kennel, down in her bed, pretty shut down. Did not want to engage at all and would get swatty if you tried to engage with her. But she was just petrified.

However, she would respond somewhat to treats. This is her. So she did clicker training, this is our volunteer manager, did clicker training with her. As you can see, she did very well with clicker training. This took a long time to get her to this point, but she responded to it very well. It was because of the clicker training, I mean, that's what brought her out and got her to the point that she could get adopted.

As you can see, she also got a little chubby. But we'll take chubby and adopted over not chubby and freezing in the corner of the kennel for, and living in a kennel for months on end. So these are the kinds of things that we're able to do now that just weren't options in the past.

Alright, so the plans for the cats, they include things like trying different housing or trial foster. The behavior modification programs, different marketing strategies, medical treatment options. We do make some of our cats available for a foster-to-adopt program where people can do two week or 30 day kind of trial in their home.

Alternative placement options. Most of our adoptions are indoor, but we'll, indoor/outdoor, or outdoor only or barn cat placement. Just kind of

thinking out of the box in terms of placement options. Adoption fee adjustment. Or bonus stuff like we'll send this cat's stroller home with them. Whatever it is that we think will, might help a cat get home.

So we can have plans for these cats because we have fewer of them. When we had 40 to 100 long-term resident cats at a time, we could not have had a plan for each of those cats. It was just too many. But when we have two or three of them at a time, or two or three long-term residents and then maybe another handful – our average is six across the year – we can work with those cats. A lot more is possible.

One of the biggest changes and again, this is one of the things that I think was really surprising to me, was how making this move impacted our staff and volunteers. It was really night and day in terms of the pride in what we give our cats. They're recognizing just what we're, that we can give them good care. They're not spending all of that time in kennels and we're able to help them get out.

We're much more willing to take risks with cats. So we're more, I see the staff more confident that we can help, that we can figure something out for a cat. So we're more willing to take a cat that looks like it's going to be a difficult to place cat.

I think because there's not that fear that, "Oh gosh, but if we take this cat, it's going to end up stuck in a kennel for six months or a year and a half." Because we know that we can figure something out for them. What ends up happening is that we're able to save a lot more lives because of that.

Then we're giving all of our cats a lot better care while they're with us. And the people who work with CAT and are engaged with CAT are happier too. So it's really been an amazing transition for us, you know, across the board.

So today, throughout our shelter, we don't have any single compartment kennels except the large ones or those that can't be portaled for some reason. We're giving our cats individualized care. We're always growing. Our supporters love what we're doing. Beyond funding for the project of installing portals and improving that housing, they love knowing that we're investing in our cats and giving them that individualized care. It has really engaged them on a different level.

Our single compartment kennels look tiny to staff. As soon as we got the initial ones portaled, single compartment kennels started looking bad and wrong to people. They don't expect the cats to tolerate them.

We have reduced, across our coalition, public intake of cats by over fifty percent through our spay/neuter programs over the past about ten years.

And our live release rate for cats is up to ninety-three percent in the Portland metro area. So our local focus is really on difficult to place cats.

So it's really important that we've gotten to the place where we can really give those cats the care that they need and help move them through our shelter. So I really encourage everyone to consider making this move. I am happy to help anyone who has questions or is wondering about any aspects of it in any way that we can. I know that we have questions now and I've been talking for too long!

So I think we're ready to start taking questions.

Andrew: Alright, Karen, thank you so much. That is so inspiring and it almost sounds too good to be true. But let's take a look at the first question which I think kind of relates to that.

“Did your adoptions go up in terms of percentage of cats you took in that year or in absolute numbers?”

Karen: Well, we are an adoption guarantee shelter, so all of our cats that come to us, unless we have a death or a euthanasia due to a serious illness that can't be treated, those cats get adopted. So it was absolute numbers because our percentages are, you know, nearly every cat. Except for incredible sick cats that we can't save.

Andrew: Okay, here's a question about fast tracking. This is from Katie and she asks, “How fast will you fast track spayed/neutered kittens? Our shelter's protocol currently requires every cat to be one week past their second FVRCP vaccination before they will even be admitted to the quarantine room where they usually get sick. Convincing staff to change has been impossible thus far and this slows our fostering down so much.”

Karen: We don't use the fast track scoring system on kittens, but our personal, my feeling is, and the way we operate is, we limit the amount of time that kittens spend in the shelter to pretty much as little as possible. Being in the shelter is not good for kittens, they're just going to get sick there.

So when we have kittens come in, if they're old enough to stay in the shelter, which for us is about eight weeks, they get vaccinated and they go right on the adoption floor. They can go home as soon as they're spayed or neutered. They can get put on hold as soon as they hit the adoption floor.

If they're sick or under socialized or underage, they go into foster care and they don't come back until they're ready to go to the adoption floor.

Andrew: Okay. Well that kind of relates to the next question here which is, “How do cat in foster homes fit into the picture of capacity, reducing length of stay, and increasing adoptions?”

Karen: Oh, yeah. So for us, again, we primarily use our foster care program for kittens. Usually for kittens that aren’t ready for adoption because they’re underage or they need socialization or they’re sick.

We use foster homes for adult cats if they need, sometimes we need to try them in a different environment. So we’ll have occasionally have a cat who’s just doing really, really poorly in the shelter. Maybe we’ve tried them in some different housing at the shelter and that’s not worked and we want to see if this is a cat who is just doing poorly in the shelter but they’re going to be a different cat in the home? So we may try them in a foster for a few weeks to see if that’s the case.

But we don’t use foster homes as just general housing for adult cats. Because for us, the cats will move faster if they’re at the shelter where they can be seen by people. Or where they’re more accessible to adopters.

So unless there’s a reason they need to be in foster care, if they’re an adult cat, we want them at the shelter or at one of our adoption centers.

Andrew: Okay. I think we have time for one more question. I’m sure it’s one that’s on many people’s minds. “Has this been revenue positive, negative, or neutral for your organization?”

Karen: Oh, I would definitely say positive. So it the direct cost of installing the portals and making the housing changes were covered by grants that we received and specifically for them. And by funds from that one direct mail appeal, which as I mentioned, did far better than similar appeals that we’ve sent out at that time of year.

With the increase in adoptions, that’s also increased adoption revenue. And I believe that our general donations have increased as well, because our supporters really like to see what we’re investing in our cats in terms of things like enrichment and behavior modification. Those are things we couldn’t do before.

So we’re able to demonstrate a much higher level of expertise and care for our cats than we could previously. People want to support that and I think that that’s been a big part of our general donations growing over the past several years.

Andrew: Yeah, it seems like capacity for care is just a really, it creates a virtuous cycle.

Karen: It really has. It's been part of and connected to so many other pieces of growth at our shelter. It just made a lot of things possible for us. I really encourage others to look into it.

Andrew: Well, that's great. Alright, well thank you so much, Karen. It looks like we're just about out of time. I want to say thank you to all our participating shelters. If your shelter isn't already in the Million Cat Challenge and has the desire to save even just one more feline life, we welcome you to join us.

To register visit www.millioncatchallenge.org. If you have any questions, we are always here to help. You can reach us at info@millioncatchallenge.org.

Thanks again, Karen, and thanks again everybody for taking time out of your busy day to be here and have a great day.

[End of Audio]