



*Saving Lives through Integrated
Medical and Behavioral Programs, Part 1*
Dr. Cynda Crawford and Aimee Sadler
Video Transcript

May 2014

This transcript has been automatically generated and may not be 100% accurate. This text may not be in its final form and may be updated or revised in the future. Please be aware that the authoritative record of Maddie's InstituteSM programming is the audio.

[Beginning of Audio]

Facilitator:

Silicon Valley, when that Silicon Valley was in its boom time and times were lean then. They didn't have a lot, but they had a little dog named Maddie, whose picture that you see on their logo. And Maddie helped them keep their spirits up when they were trying so hard to be a successful new company. And they promised to Maddie that if they ever made it big, they would give back to her kind, and they did so in a very big way. They've endowed Maddie's Fund[®] with over \$300 million dollars that is directed towards helping build a no-kill nation through improving the lives of shelter animals and training of shelter veterinarians and staff and helping communities realize how to do this good work.

So thank you very much to Maddie's Fund *[applause]*. A few housekeeping reminders. I'm turning off my cell phone. We are recording this session, so please hold your questions to the end. We're always going to leave time for questions and there are microphones in the center aisle that you can use so that everyone can hear your question. And I know, especially these first sessions are very exciting and – and there's a lot of videos and a lot of room for discussion, so please just make a note of your questions and hold those to the end so we have a high quality recording.

These recordings will be available for free viewing at the Maddie's InstituteSM website in a few months. So, if you have colleagues who were not able to attend, please refer them to that website. We will be sending an evaluation form by email about a week after the conference, so please be watching for that, and give us your feedback. It always helps us to know how to make our conferences better and what topics are on your mind that you'd like to see at future meetings. We'll also make our conference materials available online so you can look at the PowerPoints, or any handouts, or supplementary materials that we talk about while we're here.

There will be a break at 10:30 after this first session. It'll give you a chance to go visit the exhibits and the posters. And then there will be a lunch that is also sponsored by Animal Farm Foundation at 12:30. So I'd like to now introduce our first speakers. Dr. Cynda Crawford is Maddie's Clinical Assistant Professor of Shelter Medicine at Maddie's[®] Shelter Medicine Program at the University of Florida.

She's one of the founding faculty members and has been with the program since 2008. Her areas of expertise include canine and feline infectious diseases, including diagnostic tests and vaccines. You'll know her best for her work with canine respiratory infections and managing disease outbreaks. She is the discoverer of canine influenza virus, or dog flu, in animal shelters. She leads Maddie's Shelter Medicine Consultation Service.

With her, for our first sessions, is Miss Aimee Sadler. Aimee is Director of Training and Behavior at Southampton Animal Shelter Foundation and the Founder of the Playing for Life![™] program that you'll be hearing about today. It's a training program for shelter dogs featuring play groups. Miss Sadler has over 25 years of experience with animals. Her Playing for Life![™] program has been implemented in more than 50 shelters.

Miss Sadler was awarded the Henry Bergh Leadership Award in 2011 and 2013. She was inducted into the Members Hall of Fame of the International Association for Canine Professionals. Please help me welcome Cynda and Aimee [*applause*]. I have my water.

Aimee Sadler: Good morning, everyone.

Dr. Crawford: Good morning. I'm Cynda. This is Aimee. I'm the dog. She's the pony [*laughter*]. Or is the other way around? I don't know [*laughter*]. Thank you all for attending this conference and being with us this morning.

And I am very honored to share the podium with Aimee, because I am a real fan of dogs Playing for Life![™]. And today, for the first morning session, we're going to talk about integrating medical and behavioral programs, in order to save more lives in our sheltering system. So the first part is really focused on laying the foundation for the second part to follow. And in this first session, we're going to talk about what are the shared goals for animal sheltering systems. What is quality of life? How is that defined? How is it assessed? Is it really important? We're going to talk about stress and then we're going to talk about distress. We're going to introduce the dogs Playing for Life![™] program and then we're going to share some shelter stories – or stories from shelters that have incorporated the dogs Playing for Life![™] program.

Aimee Sadler:

So this is something that I always bring to the table whenever I'm doing a presentation for animal welfare. It's my wakeup, kind of rah-rah thought process in the morning about, okay, what are – what are we actually doing here again? What was the point of being involved in animal sheltering? We want to make sure that we're functioning as a safe haven for lost and surrendered companion animals. We want to provide any and all available resources to maintain them medically and behaviorally and emotionally.

We want to save as many lives as possible. I find that to be the hardest part of the job, especially from a behavioral perspective. Making sure that we're doing our best for the animals, but not at the expense of the community and that we're placing safe animals, but we're doing as well as we can for them. And I think that that's always – I think that's always going to be a moving target to some extent, and it's the most challenging part of the behavior piece, I believe. And of course we want to be good educators so that we're always part of the solutions moving forward, not part of any problems that we currently face or that we're not participating in anything that keeps us entrenched in where we are and not where we can be for the animals.

When I go to different shelters, I have had the privilege of working with shelters, as many of you have been able to bounce around. I know you bounce around all over the place [*laughter*]. One thing that is really clear to me or became very clear to me, especially having been a private trainer and then coming into the context of sheltering. I think as veterinarians, the specialty for shelter medicine, that's going to exemplify how important it is to understand the difference in context for the animals that are in shelters, rather than when you're seeing them as private clients. And all of us as shelters, we function a little bit differently and we have different levels of resource.

None of us have enough, I believe, but they're all different. So whether we're talking about do we have enough staff and the time that they could spend as we would like them to? Do we have enough facility space? How about the monetary limitations? We all face those. Handling and training skill sets specifically.

We're going to talk about that. As we get to that top tier of lifesaving, we're going to be trying to help some animals that normally would be outside of the box of what would be considered adoptable, but do we have the right skill set to proceed in that direction? Do you have the medical and behavioral resources to attend to some of these animals' needs? Maybe your shelter doesn't, but a shelter up the street does. And then, I'm a big believer from this experience of being on the ground at different shelters that there isn't a one size fits all program.

In other words, I love our program, obviously. I think it fits in all shelters in some way, shape, or form, but I think every time we go, I really encourage shelters to understand the concept and then apply it within your context. So take the pieces that work for you and maybe some pieces get held to the side and you know that's something that you can shoot for down the road, but at the moment, it's not a specific one, two, three, four, these are the steps and the how-to. You have to be a little flexible and fluid in our thinking that way.

And one thing that I've also realized is I think if there was one position that we could really invest in at all of our shelters, no matter our context and resource, is to really employ a well-qualified, full-time volunteer coordinator because they're the ones that are going to do that free work for us. And I think sometimes those positions are really undervalued. It's kind of thrown at somebody at the last minute, but that's the position that I think that can make or break your shelter progressing in whatever way you need to save more lives.

Dr. Crawford:

So regardless of our shelter model and our resources at hand, whether we're resource rich or resource poor, we all actually have common, shared goals for our shelter and the animals who are within our care. And one goal is we all strive to stay within our capacity for care as defined by the housing capacity as well as the staffing capacity. We all want to shorten the length of stay for each animal under our care. And this is very important, to stay within capacity for care. And then ultimately the prize is to end euthanasia of all healthy and treatable animals sooner rather than later.

So we're all striving for this goal and certainly this can put us at a little bit of odds with length of stay as we try to save all the healthy and treatable. We may have longer lengths of stay to find the matching home that's perfect for that pet. And this can then have us struggle a little bit with staying within capacity for care. And this is what makes it so important to assure that every pet under our care waiting for its home has good quality of life. But what is quality of life?

I'm sure every single one of us has a little bit different definition and we have parts of our definition match with everyone else, but certainly quality of life encompasses both physical and behavioral health. And it depends on the balance between the two. If you have too much emphasis on behavioral needs, you may put medical health at risk. On the opposite end of the spectrum, if you are too worried about keeping all the animals safe and free from any potential exposure to injury or disease, then they will suffer behaviorally and mentally and emotionally. So it needs to be a balance. And that really is going to be the take home message, the crux of

our presentation this morning, achieving that balance to ensure quality of life.

And we can assess, define quality of life using the five freedoms. I just want to point out here, for example, in this picture of Aileen, she's having a blast. I think you can see that in her expression. You know, blasting her with a hose, or she's looking for that hose. You know, she's trying to catch it. And I'm sure you've all experienced dogs that enjoy that, whereas there's another dog, for example, that would be traumatized.

That would be a heavy correction. It would be very punitive to squirt them with a hose. So I think this is – this picture is perfect for me because it was the example of, you know, the animals are going to tell us if we're – if we're getting it right for them. If their quality of life is good, it's really their opinion that matters more than our own. So, here are three of the five freedoms and these are three that may fall in the wheel house of the animal care staff.

Particularly the veterinary care staff, certainly, to ensure that all the animals have fresh water and food to maintain their health; that they're not uncomfortable because we have neglected their environment and not provided any comforts for them. And also we want to assure that they don't have any underlying illnesses or injuries that are a source of pain and discomfort that we are neglecting to recognize and treat appropriately.

Aimee Sadler:

And sometimes I think that this can be taken for granted, but I can share with you probably have the experience at your own shelters, simple things like allowing the dogs to have blankets in their kennels with them – many shelters have problems with the drains getting clogged if the dogs chew them. Of course there's also the concern if the dogs chew the blankets, right? What's going to happen?

Those are the kinds of things that can start competing with one another. Then of course we would assume a dog would enjoy a soft blanket, but are there risks to that based upon the environment of the animal and how do you put that together? Uh, and then we have the other two parts of the five freedoms, which I think would fall under the responsibility more of a behavioral or enrichment team. And that would be for animals to be able to express their normal behavior. Boy, does that have a lot to do with everything that I'm going to talk to you about. And letting them have time with their own kind. That, to me, is like the big ding, ding, ding, ding.

Remember, these are – dogs are pack animals that we're talking about, so it's amazing how in sheltering we've kind of come so far from remembering that to be a basic truth for them. And also their freedom from fear and distress by ensuring that their conditions and their treatment

help them to avoid mental suffering. I always want to stress that we're so concerned about that, but we also, I think, have become desensitized to just by the fact that they're with us, we're already starting way down here because our environment's typically – even if they're the best “shi shi” shelters from the animal's perspective in that enclosure is – can be emotionally debilitating to them.

Dr. Crawford:

So this is a chart that was developed by Gary Patronek that I thought was a very good example of balancing physical and behavioral health, integrating the two, merging them so that the pet is happy. So on the left hand portion of this table are some definitions of quality of life. High quality of life, good quality, borderline, poor, and a life not worth living. On the top of the table are the five freedoms, all ending up with happiness, where all mental and physical needs and wants are satisfied. So we have a quality of life scale on the left and a happiness scale on the right hand side. And we can interpret the dog's quality of life and happiness using the language that's shown on the far right.

So obviously high quality of life, all five freedoms are met. The pets are always happy, very competent, excellent, perfect caregiving, but we also have good quality of life where there may not be every discomfort met or there may not be every opportunity to express some sort of normal behavior or socialization need, but most of the time those needs are met. Those two freedoms. The dog is happy most of the time and they still have very competent, caregiving, good quality of life and a nurturing environment. And this is where we need to stay.

We do not need to be going below the high quality scale and the good quality scale with regard to happiness and a nurturing environment. Below that, where many of the five freedoms are compromised by our care, by our neglect, not by the animal's choice, then they have poor quality of life. They are not happy at all. It's borderline caregiving and even at the bottom, you can get to a life really that's not worth living, probably from the animal's perspective or – but we're also anthropomorphizing a little bit. And this is actually where people like the ASPCA and the HSUS and animal control officers start thinking about prosecuting for animal cruelty, when they're – when the quality of life is so poor.

So we as professional caregivers, veterinarians, behavior experts, need to be sure that we have resources, either within our own shelter or resources we can borrow from the community to nurture the five freedoms for every animal and give them good quality of life and strive for the highest quality. So we actually have some industry standards now for animal sheltering. As everyone is probably well aware, since we're going into the fourth year now, that the ASV, Association of Shelter Veterinarians,

guidelines for standards of care in animal shelters have been available to guide us and our choices for care of animals in our shelter. And these are some quotes from the guidelines that I thought were very important to bring out for this presentation:

“Good health and well-being depend on meeting both the physical needs and mental, behavioral needs of animals.”

“Behavioral health should be given the same significance as other components of animal care and should not be considered optional.”

“No matter what your resource level is, there are resources available to ensure that this portion of overall health is addressed.”

“And finally, proper behavioral health care is essential to reduce stress and suffering.”

Aimee Sadler:

That all works for me really well. All of that, written down in those guidelines, helps me when I go on the ground to shelters and there's sometimes some resistance to moving forward with the behavior programs. Now, this is something that comes up all the time to me specifically with regards to reducing stress. I know medically it's incredibly important as well. By definition, stress is the response of an organism to a demand placed upon it to change or adapt, or stress, a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily tension and may be a factor in disease causation.

So my favorite example that I tell shelter personnel is we're going to – about to get started implementing play groups, especially if they're hesitant, is that if I decided that I wanted to lose some weight right now, I would want to start exercising more. And, if I took a walk around the block, from my system, at the moment, that probably isn't going to help me to lose weight. I'm not going to adapt. My body's not going to change. My system won't be stressed enough to start losing weight, right? So stress, by itself, while we have to pay attention to that, stress is part of learning an adaptation.

So by myself, I'm always looking at it, but I'm not – it's not stress by itself that I'm trying to avoid at all costs. It's when that tips over into a level of distress, which is a pain or suffering affecting the body, a bodily part, or the mind. When any living thing gets into a state of distress, now we're talking about survival mode, fight or flight thinking, that lizard brain thinking, and this is where adaptation is not going to occur. There's not going to be the same kind of processing, so I think that we really need to concentrate on this differentiation or is that the right word? Differentiation or distinction between stress and distress.

The stress, when they walk through our doors and they're in our care and they're living with us, we have to face the fact that they are stressed. So then I feel stressed up here, standing and speaking in front of the both of you, but it's good for us. We're going to get some benefit out of it from learning and hopefully you will too, but neither one of us is having stomachaches and vomiting, right? So, we're not in a state of distress. And this – these pictures, by the way –

Dr. Crawford:

And adapting.

Aimee Sadler:

– I want to tell you is that the photographs, you know, I've tried to be – oh. I missed on this one. See, that's terrible. I tried to make sure everybody had credits. The photographs of these animals, these are all positive photographs. Sometimes they're caught so dynamically, like this one, but none of these are animals in distress. These are all photographs of animals in total glee.

We've got a video here. So for an example – there's no sound on this one, just so that you guys don't panic today. This dog, I think if we all looked at her – but you do need to look at her very, very closely. Oh, I do have sound. Actually, I'm going to turn it off, because I don't think you need to hear it. If we look at her – if you can – I wish you could see her butt here.

She's in total conflict because her face is saying one thing, but the rest of her body belies that she's in conflict, you know? This goofy dog that we're introducing to him – to her, when we brought her out originally, this is at Best Friends L.A. She looks super concerned, so we didn't want to overwhelm her in a large group of dogs, but this dog – I called him Frog Face – was so super friendly with everyone, he demonstrated that he could get any dog to play. Now, what I'm proposing to you here is that she looks stressed in this.

I'm not denying that, but what I am proposing is that if we allow her to be in this safe situation with a super playful dog, the stress that she is experiencing will help her to adapt and to her – for her system to normalize and for her to become happy about other dogs and playing, which will ultimately reduce her stress. But again, she's not urinating, scrambling to try to climb over the fence, banging herself against the walls. Those signs that we would see that she would not – she's not processing and it's just too much. Her threshold is blown and this is a horrible experience. So the behavioral effects of stress, again, that is just a happy dog running that looks like the behavioral effects – if we shelter them too long, that they will turn into the Incredible Hulk and have transformations in front of us *[laughter]*.

So these stress behaviors, auto-grooming, vocalization, intense vocalization. There's some breeds or types of dogs, you know, you have the – when they have that kind of howling, wailing crying in the shelter. Oh, that breaks my heart. Impaired social skills in general, not being well adapted to visiting with people or other animals. The kennel craze thing, that's our layman's term. Increased displays of aggression, both defensive and offensive.

We always separate aggressive acts as either what we believe to be defensive or offensive in nature, and then repetitive displays of behaviors like circling, jumping, and OCD type component to these behaviors. And then the learned helplessness, which is that catatonic state with a lack of normal responses. These are all the things that we can see if this – these animals are just stressed too far. And then when we're talking about stress or distress and quality of life, this is a key component to this. Both of them start to diminish quality of life, especially if that stress is sustained and there's no relief from it.

Especially then if it tips into a state of distress, where they do, and as the guidelines say, unrelieved stress or distress is unacceptable and must be alleviated. That's our responsibility and the two of us have decided we recognize that we always want to work on reducing stress, but we accept that it's part of them being with us and sometimes it's going to be a part of them progressing, but we absolutely strive to eliminate distress. So for example, in this picture, that dog was playing and just rolled happily. He was not about to break his neck in that picture.

Dr. Crawford:

Do we have a video?

Aimee Sadler:

Yes, we've got a video for you. So this is at – actually, it has sound, but I have it muted, so you're safe. Um [*coughs*], excuse me. Uh-oh, if I start coughing – she's the queen of upper respiratory, so I mean she would treat me while I'm here. Anyway, this is at Rochester – look, she's standing back, right? Rochester Animal Services.

This is just an example of their play groups where we did a, uh, Playing for Life!TM seminar and it's just goofy, goofy, happy dogs and so it just stands to reason that if you're seeing dogs bouncing around like this, whatever stress they were going through in the kennels, or by being sheltered, or whatever life-threatening situation they're in, behaviorally, right now, no matter what, right here, they've got a better quality of life. It's kind of indisputable, right, for this group of dogs. Okay. So the dogs Playing for Life!TM program – I'm going to get into just explaining to you, it's – this is not going to be the nitty gritty how-to and what I teach when I go to shelters on the ground about how we actually implement play

groups, but hopefully we're going to give you a really strong concept of why we do what we do and what it's all about.

So our overall philosophy is that before we can expect a sheltered animal to cope and thrive, we need to satisfy them at some level. Pretty redundant to everything that we've talking about so far. I want us to think about embracing sheltering as like, summer camp. The animals come into our care. They meet new friends. They have some new counselors. They do some arts and crafts. They learn some new activities and then they get to go home, right? Our goal is really not to get them settled in and bonded and locked into being in the shelter as if this is their home. So that's kind of the attitude that I want to have about sheltering in general. I think sometimes this is just a perfect example.

I don't know how many of you have seen this. Obviously these are not dogs, but they are awfully cute, and I think it's the same exact principle, you know, of zookeepers trying to work with their – all these different species and thinking specific to their species, what is going to make the animals in my care happy while they're in a cage? Bottom line. And even with *[laughter]* – even in zoos, you know, it's – I don't care how much money is put into those environments. Those animals explore those environments within how long and it's still the same environment and it's still going to be lacking in a certain amount of mental and emotional enrichment.

So this is the kind of stuff that starts happening to make sure – from current slide. There we go. That wasn't that painful, was it? These are the kinds of things that we want to do for all animals in our care, even little baby elephants. So play groups themselves can provide enrichment.

That's number one. Much more comprehensive assessment for the animals in your care. A training opportunity. There's – just like that little scared dog. We're going to actually be working on or that would be more behavior modification because we're not teaching her something specifically, but from a training perspective, we start working on the dogs' manners when they're coming in and out of the enclosure.

Like, in other words, if you love play group, I'm not going to let you jump up and down and scream your head off and then reward you by letting you in. I'm going to ask you to have four feet on the floor and be calm and then you get to come in. So we have training opportunities while we're out there and then behavior modification, like the little dog that you saw. If we keep exposing her to the other dogs in play, then hopefully she doesn't look so concerned and she becomes a more well-rounded, balanced, normal dog. And in my experience, from a behavioral perspective, if people want to learn from me about the advanced behavior

program that we do, I don't even talk to you about how to deal with on-leash reactivity or anything that you think is critical, which it is, until you're doing play groups first.

That is the part that gives you the best bang for your buck. I would say this is anecdotal. Probably 80 percent of the problems you think you have for the dogs in your care behaviorally, if they enjoy playgroups, it's going to handle – about 80 percent of those dogs will be smooth. You won't have to do any advanced training or anything specific for them. It's going to take care of it for you.

Dr. Crawford: Let me, um – oop. She wants to – well, go ahead with the benefits.

Aimee Sadler: Okay.

Dr. Crawford: I can – I can make my comment when –

Aimee Sadler: – get into it here. I don't know why this one – okay. So then specifically, did you want to make a point about it here?

Dr. Crawford: Well, uh, Aimee's going to discuss many of the benefits provided by play groups when we think about balancing behavioral and physical needs as well as quality of life. But one benefit that is not really brought out on our slides, but I wanted to be sure to mention because it's one not often thought of except from the kennel staff's viewpoint that I want to represent. Most shelters have some sort of time in the mornings where play groups can be most beneficial and that is during sanitation, especially those shelters that have single sided runs to house their dogs. They don't have the luxury of having the double sided runs with the dividing guillotine door to move dogs back and forth to keep them away from the sanitizing chemicals.

Aimee Sadler: Or many times they have them, but they have the doors down and they have a dog on either side because they're trying to save lives and use all their space.

Dr. Crawford: Uh, and that is a very common scenario. That, we see when we visit shelters. So play groups actually are, I think from my point of view, they are most beneficial to the kennel staff in the mornings. When they are tasked with sanitation, which usually takes the first three hours of the day, and it is so – they have such better quality of life themselves and are so relieved of stress if the dogs are not in the runs. And they can achieve their task in a much quicker time.

So wouldn't it be great to address all the concerns and issues if the dogs are out in the yards playing and having their needs met while the staff are

free to sanitize more efficiently and more effectively. And this is something I think about every time I walk into a shelter that has not yet implemented the dogs Playing for Life!TM program in some fashion. As the stress the staff are under to have sanitation completed before the shelter opens and the stress that's inferred from them onto the dogs.

Aimee Sadler: Yeah, and we do have a great example of that. It is one of the bullet points, so –

Dr. Crawford: Oh, okay.

Aimee Sadler: – remember what she just said when we get there. Basically this sounds kind of silly, but I think dogs are better at being dogs than we are at telling them how to be dogs. It's kind of a naturalistic approach, I guess, but dogs – for dog to dog issues, socially healthy dogs can be much more effective trainers than humans. And in some circumstances, like at our shelters, we're able to provide a very unique service to our community. In other words, professional trainers and people from the community that have issues with their dogs with other dogs bring those dogs to us.

Trainers refer dogs to us because we have this large population of shelter dogs that are very well socialized. We don't want those folks bringing their dogs to the dog park. So for example, in this video, to find out, in other words. We don't want people and the public just go to dog parks to work through their dog to dog problems. So when you have this program in your shelter, you actually can provide a very unique service to your community.

For example, in this video *[video plays]*. Let me fix the sound for you. *[Speaking over video]* The corgi is the owned dog.

Yeah. A herding dog *[laughs]*. Okay, so this is a little bit reminiscent of the other little dog, right? Now, is this corgi stressed in this session? I think – I would say that I would consider her behaviorally a little bit stressed, but again, I'm not concerned and going to end the session at that point because I identify it as stress and not distress, right? Again, she's not panicking, trying to bang her way out of the room. We know what those signs look like, and Poppy is just being playful, so my sense is that if I allow her to go through some of the stress in this – and I have faith in Poppy, right? – that that will help her to adapt with the change.

We were able to tell her mother, “You do not have a dangerously dog aggressive dog.” She would walk this little dog at midnight because her dog acted like a Tasmanian devil on a leash. So Poppy earned the shelter \$75.00 for doing a dog aggression assessment for this client. We were able to assuage her fears about her dog's behavior. We plugged her into a

handling class so that she didn't make things much worse on her poor little dog when she got concerned on-leash around dogs. And we suggested, don't take her to the dog park because if a dog is mean to her or is overwhelming and not as responsive as Poppy is, that's going to be a negative experience for her. But you can bring her to our shelter and we'll make sure we match her with the right dogs to play and help her get past that.

Dr. Crawford: Did she adopt Poppy?

Aimee Sadler: I wish she'd adopt Poppy, but somebody did end up adopting Poppy as a result of one of those sessions. So the mental and physical outlet from being able to go out into play groups can create higher receptivity to training. So if you are in a shelter that does have a behavior program or an enrichment program and your goal is to actually get some training done while the dogs are in your care, this is how it started for me. I was – I went to my private client's house and she said to me – she did a bait and switch on me one day and said, "Guess what. Well, today we're going to go down to the shelter and work the dogs there instead of you working my dogs."

Which I loved, and we did that, and then she kept saying when I had free hours, "Would you go down and work with the shelter dogs?" So maybe I had two to three hours, but I had 20 dogs in the shelter at that time. It was normal and natural for me – let me just let them all out in the yard, play together, get their yaya's out first because then when I go to do the basic obedience, I'm not dealing with that high level of frustration. They're satisfied.

Those sessions will take better for them. It'll be more efficient for me in getting to the other stuff. That was how this all started, so that I could work more dogs more efficiently. So this is an example of our team at the Southampton Animal Shelter in New York and all of these dogs, except for one dog. First of all, the people.

We have a couple of our staff, a couple of volunteers and a couple of interns in this group and all but one of the dogs there they were all on-leash reactive, extremely on-leash reactive. And one of the dogs – this was the first training session. The one coming right in the front of the frame with the gentleman there. That's Tom from Animal Farm Foundation. That dog came in a catatonic state.

You know, she was in her kennel, terrified, and this was her first time in a group session doing any kind of obedience and Tom was a new handler for her. So the issue – the reason that I demonstrate this, is that this is an example of dogs playing. The fish on the ground, by the way, is just

supposed to be a weird distraction for the dogs to work around and wanting to investigate it. This is very basic training. There is nothing advanced or fancy about this, but it does feel challenging to get this number of shelter dogs in this situation, not with owners that they have a relationship with, to look that kind of happy and good.

I would say most shelters find that a little bit challenging. All I want to propose to you is that this becomes so easy when you let them play first. It doesn't become challenging at all. Here's an example of an intern of ours that came in. This is Kate from Baltimore Humane and after she watched our first play group that morning – we just had her go get a dog out of the kennel because we wanted her to feel what it was like to have a dog that knew something *[video plays]*.

Stands to reason, being able to get that basic training done while the animals are in our care, is awesome for adoption, right? You'd think it much easier to adopt a – the dogs out and they're just well prepared, good mental stimulation. That becomes really challenging. I'm sure many of you are feeling like, pfft, yeah. That's not going to happen in my shelter, but it can.

It can happen at your shelter and volunteers can get that done for you. And it becomes very simple when you let the dogs play first. What may be considered inappropriate play for a person could be natural between dogs. It's no different than us allowing our kids to go out to recess at school, right? So that they could bounce around, bonk each other on the head, grab each other while they're going down the slide.

That's not appropriate in class or in other situations, but it's appropriate for them to play at this time. I'd rather the dogs are allowed to drag each other around by body parts when they're out in play groups with me. They're not allowed to grab equipment, because that could be – and I don't want them grabbing people, but they're allowed to do that with each other because guess what, they're practicing bite inhibition when they do that, right – for example.

More benefits. Enhanced quality of life. That's, like, the basic premise of our whole presentation. Uh, here's a great example *[video plays]*. This was at our seminar at Baltimore Humane Society. You can see Kate's in there. This was after her internship. So we're introducing the dogs for the first time.

Most of the dogs at this shelter reportedly, they were having high, high, incidents of on-leash reactivity, injury to handlers, you know? Redirection due to reactivity because the dog's having such a hard time in that situation and so time and time again, they would come out and just behave like

Sequoia. And obviously it seems just so obvious that her quality of life out here in this yard is going to completely change compared to the experience that she's been having. You can – you can understand why a dog like that, being taken out of a kennel, being walked on a six foot leash, sadly oftentimes the person's wrapped it around their wrist and shortened it to about three feet, and that that's her experience outside of the kennel with, you know, her tugging on them, them tugging on her.

This is a whole different ballgame when they get to come out and do this instead. And being in a group can create the most natural environment. Again, these are pack animals. It's interesting. I don't want to create a pack while they're sheltered. Remember, this is summer camp.

I want them just to meet new friends. I want them to have a very social experience, but I don't want to create, you know, these mini packs on one competitive territory. That is a contextual difference between shelter play groups that I talk about when we get into the nitty gritty, but dogs as a species are meant to be living in groups. That's all that I'm basing this upon and so if you put them in a more natural environment, their potential for overcoming some fear, anxiety, and aggression becomes much better. Now, this is one of those silly videos that you just have to plug in somewhere *[video plays]*.

So I can't say *[audio skip]* she's particularly anxious or fearful or aggressive, but it was such a funny video. You've got to put it somewhere, right? But front door, back door greetings, very normal for dogs. She wasn't quite happy about the back door greetings, and all we wanted to do was put her in a situation so that she – that natural environment with dogs that want to greet her back door and have her learn about that and become comfortable with it. And finally, determining sociability more accurately, boy, oh, boy, do I hope that there is a study done very soon with somebody with a bunch of letters after their names that will get this done.

Assessments on leash or behind a barrier are not accurate predictors of a dog's ability or inability to be social with other dogs. Boy, would I like that knocked out of the park once and for all. I can say it all I want, but I need people with letters and journals and stuff to get plugged in there to say that that's not the most *[applause]* – thank you. That is not the accurate way, if that's what you're trying to assess. If you were trying to assess a dog's ability to be social with a dog when they meet them on leash, which is a very important behavior for our adopters, it's very important.

I'm not denying that, but those tests do not accurately predict whether a dog can or cannot be social with other animals when they're not on leash. For example *[video plays]*. This video was made by *[speaking over*

audio]. That's Wallace the Pit Bull Foundation. They made that video for us, which was awesome. Um, okay. Here was back to Dr. Crawford's point, that a more efficient resource, a 30 minute romp, can be equivalent to a two hour walk.

In other words, if you let the dogs bounce around as opposed to me hand holding a leash and trying to walk them up and down, it would take me a lot longer to do it that way, to get them to that point of being happy and satisfied than just letting them roll around with the other dogs. And the mental and physical energy is burned through that intensive social interaction. There's a lot of other things that get covered. Dr. Weiss actually recently wrote something about being cautious about not just physically conditioning dogs, like just burning that physical energy, that's what happens. You know, they're just going to need a longer walk and a longer walk and a longer walk.

We want to add some kind of mental component to satisfying them as well, so either some training – the only thing that I don't want is I didn't love the idea of volunteers being told they can only walk the dogs for 15 minutes. That was a little concerning, but I love the idea of let them go out in play groups and then do a short, 15 minute so that you can get to more dogs. Have the volunteers work with certain dogs for a shorter amount of time, but get a little bit of basic training done in there. Then you get some of that mental piece as well after they've gotten to play. A natural environment for pack animals, we talked about that.

Pack-like bonding versus social isolation can minimize behavioral deterioration and there's a component of this in colony cat housing, right? That's the big driver for allowing cats to live together as well while you're taking disease management into consideration and each animal's individual behavioral needs. Rapid behavior modification can be accomplished and remember, I talked about not creating mini-packs. This is a – this one I'm not going to show because it's a little redundant to Oscar, but this one is important and this is one of Dr. Crawford's favorites *[video plays]*, rapid behavior modification. This little dog here, we named him Swiffer because he was one of the catatonic dogs.

He had no defensive reactions, no defensive aggression. In other words, he was clearly terrified, in a state of distress, but this is how it was shown, that he would do nothing. He wouldn't try to bite you, so the point of this part of the video is just to demonstrate that he has completely shut down. Obviously will not take food and my presence is very concerning to him. Typically in shelters, when you have a dog like this, the protocols would be sitting in the kennel and reading with them.

Individuals would come in on their nonscheduled days or their nonscheduled volunteer shifts because Swiffer needs them and they would work really hard to create a bond, which I think is one of the most heartfelt mistakes that we make, because then this isn't summer camp for Swiffer. He's not learning anything other than okay, you're safe. What we want to teach dogs like this, we – first of all, we want to see, there's nothing I have to offer him that's positive or that helps to reduce his fear at the moment. I'm actually just adding to it. So for me, I want to see, are dogs a natural positive for you? Is that going to make a difference for you?

So I didn't keep it in the film here, but I ended up just picking him up and carrying him out so I didn't – because I had to get him past all the dogs in the kennel. And he urinated and defecated when I did that. He was so scared. My goal is let's just get you out to the play yard and see if the dogs are going to make a difference for you. So typically people would come in again with him.

This is actually cute *[video plays]*. After that initial attempt where I'm petting Swiffer, which I think was terrifying for him, not necessarily positive, you won't see – excuse me. You won't see me actually working hard to befriend him anymore. My goal is not for Swiffer to become comfortable with me or to create a bond with me.

I'm going to have to break that bond on him unless I want to adopt him. I'm just going to break that bond on him anyway, so why would I do that to him? My goal is for Swiffer to learn that people aren't scary and that his time in the shelter isn't so scary. And we're hopeful that the dogs are going to be help – going to be able to help Swiffer see things differently, much more quickly, much more effectively, and much more efficiently than we ever could.

Dr. Crawford: And I think Swiffer's presentation is very common in shelters. I'm sure everyone out there has seen a Swiffer in your shelter on a frequent basis. Certainly not a presentation in the kennel that invites adopters. So high risk for euthanasia.

Aimee Sadler: Right, and some shelters, some shelters, these dogs are safe because he shows no – okay. What was I about to say about Swiffer?

Dr. Crawford: So today, 24 hours later, Swiffer's actually at the front of the kennel and not cowered in the furthest corner.

Aimee Sadler: Again, what you won't see, me working hard to interact with him anymore because clearly after his first hour, he looked like a normal dog with me, didn't he? Almost looked like he had a nice head up, heel, going on. Why do you guys think I had the other dog with me on leash? Confidence,

right? Hoping that he would model that that dog was comfortable walking on leash.

He could be comfortable walking on leash. He'd already demonstrated for us that dogs are more comfortable for him than people. So if I turned around to try to pet Swiffer, he'd hit the deck. He'd still be scared of me, but he seems very compelled by me and what I'm trying to propose here is it's not because I have created a relationship with him. That has happened inadvertently. I'm relevant to him because the other dogs seem to be responding to me as if I'm relevant. So again, I – the naturalistic point of view is if you put animals into a more natural environment, the abnormal behavior or the weak behavior can have a tendency to be brought up to normal. What is a better way to say that, a better language than what I just did? You know, there's probably a term for it that I should know, but think about if you – if Swiffer was the outlier, right? And this was a pack of dogs, and he was behaving on this – he's going to get picked off, right? Natural selection makes him vulnerable if he's hanging out on the outside.

He's got to come up to normal and be part of the group to be able to survive. So that's kind of what I'm looking for, for those components to kick in. Now, the goal of course is to make sure Swiffer is with super social dogs, nobody that's going to be mean to him, so that he can learn and build his confidence. And this is a new handler. So once after that first day, Swiffer was willing to walk with me that well. I stopped handling him.

Again, biggest mistake is that people will continue to come back because Swiffer needs them. My goal is for Swiffer not to need me. I want him to see that people walk you out to the play group, not, oh, Aimee shows up at my kennel in the morning and takes me out. So these are all new handlers and so within, I don't know – what do you think is the common timeframe to turn around a dog like this and have them on the adoption floor, showing social behaviors?

What do you think is common? Six days? Okay. Well, then this isn't so quick then, if that's your experience with that. Most shelters are telling me it's two to three to four weeks to get an animal like this willing to be social with multiple people. Not one person, but multiple people and he was on our adoption floor within five days.

Dr. Crawford: If the shelter allows them to survive for that two –

Aimee Sadler: Yes, exactly.

Dr. Crawford: – to four week period.

Aimee Sadler:

So on-leash reactivity and barrier reactivity. Those are really problematic behaviors for us to contend with in the shelter. Sometimes can make people unsafe. Certainly makes dogs look less appealing and less adoptable and are challenging for adopters once they go home. So again, those are life threatening behaviors, especially if the displays are extreme.

So my – our notion is that healthy contact can reduce the perception of threat because I assume that most of that behavior is actually extreme defense rather than offense. So you've already seen an example of that with Oscar, so we're going to skip that video, because I feel like we're getting tight on time. And finally – I keep saying finally, but these are more benefits, more benefits, and more benefits. Better roommate matches. More and more in sheltering we're letting animal co-house together.

Typically it's because shelters need to make space, so if that's what's triggering – at our shelters, we allow – we pair dogs up for quality of life. If we recognize these two dogs will probably be happier if they have a roommate and they can do that well, they can cohabitate well together, we make that choice for their quality of life behaviorally, but a lot of shelters won't do that unless they need to make space because they'd rather make space that way than through euthanasia. Either way, when your dogs are out in play group like, let's say, at our shelter, we had a big list of the layout every morning and the dogs would be brought out while the kennels were being cleaned. Our dogs needed to be removed from the kennels to be cleaned and so now they're out playing instead of being shifted around or tethered to the wall or crated while that's happening.

So they're out playing and then we notice these two dogs seem to be choosing each other as best friends. We know we needed to make space that day, so we would just let the volunteer bring Fluffy back in with Fido and they would go back into that kennel and we were done with play group. We'd move the paperwork. They – we'd set them up on the computer and that's how we did the switch. The kennel was sanitized in the meantime and they chose each other in play group.

Very efficient and much better for them to pick their roommate. And then better adoption matches. Obviously if you have a client that comes in and wants a very public social life with their dog, you're going to steer them towards the dogs that have demonstrated they're play group rock stars. Much easier. Talk about liability and risk.

When we force our adopters to do a dog meet, they have a dog at home. They want to adopt one of ours and we know nothing about our dog's ability to be social with other dogs. And the first time we're going to find out is with our client's dog. To me, that is nerve-racking, and now that we

do play groups every day, you know, it's not the same level of – that's not the same level of risk to the client's dog. So much better.

None of this is a guarantee though that dogs won't end up with personality conflicts, territorial issues, or resource guarding that could surface in the home or later on. We have dogs that do beautifully in play group, but they won't kennel together because one doesn't want to – they don't want to share resources. So they're not a candidate to kennel together, but they love being in play group. Finally, this was Dr. Crawford's point, okay? So to people – in other words, when we showed up at Longmont Humane Society to implement this program in its entirety, it was myself and Pam.

That was with – my friend, Pam, with Swiffer. We showed up and told the staff, "You don't have to worry about getting the dogs out anymore." They were required, in their job description – the kennel attendants had to get the dogs out twice a day. If volunteers came, lighter load for them.

If they didn't, they were required to do it. We said, "You're off the hook. We're going to handle it." So we rotated about 80 dogs in two, two and a half hours every day, twice a day, by ourselves. We did play groups first and then we hand walked the ones that weren't play groups, either for medical or behavioral reasons.

That was pretty efficient and boy, did the kennel staff love us at that point. And this is a phenomenal example [*video plays*]. The gentleman that had worked there, I think he had been cleaning kennels for about 20 years and dog adopts had 90 kennels in it. It typically took him three and a half to six hours, depending upon if it was full, to clean. Three and a half was his easiest load and that day, they had 50 something dogs in dog adopts and the volunteers – no staff were involved in that.

We came and some volunteers ran the dogs out for us. We wanted to – them to see what it felt like to have the dogs out of the kennels for cleaning. He walked out an hour and a half later and well, came out, smoking a cigarette, looking at us like, you know, "What is going on here?" He was so happy.

You know, actually, he was a very routined gentleman, so he was a little disgruntled that his routine had been – but he did have to admit that, wow, I get a long cigarette break today. Okay, and who are the candidates for play groups? Everybody, I'm sure you're probably already figuring it out from the videotapes that all ages, breeds, and temperaments, right, as long as they're not appropriate and not aggressive. It depends upon the dogs in – as individuals, but most importantly, the comfort level of the handler. And this is a – I don't know if you [*coughs*] – you can tell.

Most of the dogs are catching air in that picture. I don't know how these guys get these pictures. It's amazing. Um, this is an example [video plays]. She loves cats. So the point of this is I posted this video on Facebook for the interns so they could show themselves off of what a great job they'd done.

That was their decision to mix that group of dogs. So we were going to do a small play group next and they kept out the large dogs that had demonstrated to them that they had a lot of confidence in those dogs and their behavior. So what a great assessment too, right? You find out if any of these dogs feel differently about small dogs and – but this video got some people really upset on Facebook.

People were being very critical that we didn't understand how to identify dog aggression. And I was – I kind of felt like saying, "You want to see dog aggression? I got a video of dog aggression and this is not it."

That little – that little exchange where the dogs started rushing around, the big dogs and the little dog, that was the thing that they thought was dangerous and an accident waiting to happen, but if – no. We didn't do anything. They defused themselves and they went off and played on their own.

So what I like demonstrating there is I'm sure that many of you are in the audience thinking, "I can't believe you took – made – took that risk," right? And this is part of what we're talking about, is weighing risks and benefits, quality of life, five freedoms, and getting to all that as best as we can. And this is a big question. I'm not going to get into the nitty gritty again here about how – what we teach these handlers to do, but one of the biggest obstacles is that we don't have the qualified people.

This is all – what it takes for me to have a lead handler is they have to have confidence with dogs. They just have to be really comfortable with multiple dogs. They have to be flexible, open minded, a team player, strong communication skills with people and animals, strong leadership qualities with people and animals. They have to be willing to boss everybody around because they're running the show here. They need to be spontaneous, not be very regimented in their routines because this is – you've got to see what's happening in front of you and respond to that.

You can't have this idea in your mind of how it's supposed to go. You have to look at what's happening and you need to be willing to be wrong and to learn from your mistakes and what do you think is missing from this? Experience and certification. I've had many of the shelters that we go to – this is Brian George from BARKS. He was a kennel attendant there.

I think his title has been changed to behavior manager. They developed a behavior program, which is their enrichment program that revolves around their play groups and Brian was the one that had the natural comfort with all of this and he's the one that's now in charge of it all. Let me see. I just forgot what video this is. Oh, this is a good one *[video plays]*.

What I love that is – that Marcel was – he was an animal control officer and they're still looking to try to shift him into being able to do this piece full-time because he was so enthusiastic. And he was the one that we identified, this is the guy that should be running your play groups and your enrichment program for the dogs. He's the animal control officer, but I love his enthusiasm. So we're going to tell you some stories quickly of some shelters that we've had the privilege of working with. First of all, how it got started.

Southampton Shelter in 1999 was when that private party sent me down to the shelters to start training the dogs. It was a municipal shelter, but the lead ACO was really looking. He was already – he was progressive at that time. He wanted to move into this kind of new age of sheltering and get away from that feeling of being in the pound. Their live release rate at that time was at about 74 percent, and that's where I identified – I've got to let the dogs go run and play first if I'm going to get some training done for them, because this lady was paying me. I had to be able to demonstrate something.

Experimented with comprehensive approaches to training there. I had a lot of experience with multiple species in all different kinds of venues. I had started with marine mammals and worked with equine. Had done all kinds of stuff, and I was trying to pull from all of that experience to place it within this context of a shelter training program, just like you guys have the specialized – I'm so excited about that, that you're going to have specialties in shelter medicine. I'd like to do the same for behavior. I'd like to have the specialty in the shelter behavior training program.

So this is what I was kind of working out in my mind at the moment when I was there, figuring it out, and we are now a privatized shelter. We've got an advanced behavior program. As you heard in that video, people are sending us cases from all over and we have a 96 percent canine live release rate, and that's as an open admission shelter. Wide open admission shelter. Like, literally anything that comes through our doors under any circumstances, open admission. And we take behavior cases *[video plays]*.

This is just – you know what? I'm chicken. I hate to say it. It was a demonstration of training. I think you've seen that and I'm afraid we're

going to lose our time, so it was just a great demonstration of two dogs that are living in a kennel together. We all know how challenging that can be, to get them out, and you – they're sitting politely and they get their equipment on and they wait. The kennel door gets open wide, but it's just a good training example, but if we have time, I'll go back to it.

Then after being at Southampton for a while, that same private party, she had her reasons, but she asked me, "Would you go out to Longmont, Colorado, and work with a Longmont shelter? I'd like donate you full-time to implement the program. Do it again there." They had a higher intake, about 5,000 animals a year compared to the 1,000 at Southampton. It was a small shelter.

Their live release rate, same thing. It was bizarre. Right around 74 percent. They already had a strong volunteer program established that was really married to the behavior program, which I think had a lot to do with the level of success. Again, this is a training demo. I think I've given you guys some good examples of how play groups can bring you to some really fun training very easily.

So I'll just skip that one, but this is a group of the volunteers that we were training that worked with the dogs at the shelter. Phenomenal volunteer program. Moved into an upgraded facility in 2009, this beautiful building, a \$9 million dollar upgrade. That had a lot to do with helping with the disease control, for sure. Many policies and protocols across the board at this shelter.

It was a whole cultural shift for that shelter. By implementing the behavior program, which really only was me showing up and rotating the dogs through play groups in the beginning. That's where it all started. The rate of euthanasia decreased. Yeah, decreased in excess of 60 percent. In 2012, when the private party that I worked for pulled me from Longmont and said, "Well, they're up and running. They don't need you anymore."

And I'd started speaking and going to other shelters. So she said – she cut me loose. I go to Southampton once a month now to work with my team there and the rest of my time is spent on the road, working with other shelters. They have a lively – it's amazing that the numbers are identical, but 96 percent canine live release rate, same thing, excepting behavioral transfers. Then I went down to BARKS. It was one of the shelters we worked with.

March of 2011 was the first time. Staff and volunteers worked together to keep the play groups going after we left. We were sent back in May and June of 2012, different grants that they had received. They really loved

play groups. They wanted to really keep progressing. It was a primary driving program for them at this point.

They wanted to decrease their euthanasia, even though they were in a position of euthanizing for space day – daily. Their live release rate at that time was 62 percent. I'm not sure where they are now. Here's an example. When I went back [video plays] to see what they were up to, this is what they showed me.

So funny. That's Brian George in the background. He's their lead – that kennel attendant that became their lead play group trainer and he was training all these volunteers and his volunteer was running the play groups because he's over there, taking those phenomenal photographs. So I came back and they were up and running and doing a great job. We just helped them progress even more.

They changed the focus to quality of life to inspire and maintain staff and volunteers emotionally. BARKS is the first shelter that I went to where I really learned to speak about and frame the program. Like, I get stats from each shelter that I go to, see where they are and where they're trying to get to next. If they're still at a high kill rate, we really drive the program as a quality of life program. It will help them increase their life saving, but if you imagine that they start running the dogs in play group, they don't see the dogs as problematic anymore, but they have to kill them anyway. It's having to kill healthy and treatable animals is devastating to people.

So to help them, because there's a painful part to getting past that, is that give the animals a better quality of life regardless. It's going to be painful for you, but it's better for the animals, and that is going to help you get to the next level, but that's how we help them cope with – there's nothing wrong with these dogs. How can I justify? And we're going to talk about that more later. We began tackling the conflicts between medical and behavioral best practices. The medical teams were really struggling with the implementation of this program. And we established primary changes in their kennel routines to keep handlers and dogs safer.

Staff and volunteer trainers worked collaboratively to start building a training process so that they had some certified handlers for their – within their program. You've put this many hours in. You've demonstrated the skill. We're certifying you as a play group handler. Staff reports better behavioral health of the dogs, better adoption matching, and rescue transfers.

The rescue groups pull up their wagons now in the afternoon when the dogs are out in play group and they pick the dogs out of play group. Most shelters, if you're transferring, or foster homes, or any other resources

other than – and even adopters. If you have a socially healthy – or what's the – a social dog, it's got many more opportunities to get out. So it's great to demonstrate their abilities in play groups. Okay, then we were sent down to Kansas City Pet Project.

That was a nonprofit group that took over a municipal shelter in 2012 under terrible circumstances and conditions. I'm going to give you an example of this. This is pretty heartbreaking. I'll let you hear what it's like *[video plays]*. So I don't think I've ever met a harder working group of people.

I came in one morning when we were there with the training and their director of operations was sleeping in two banks of kennels, you know, with her knees. She was on her stomach, like this, with her knees up – like against the back. She was sleeping like this because there was an animal that she needed to care for and keep an eye on over the night and that's how she slept. This was actually – my understanding is the shelter was taken over under pretty terrible circumstances and this group just said, "We'll take it," because they just wanted to try to fix the problem and then they got in there and went, "Uh-oh." And it was a really big problem for – have you done any shelter consults for Kansas City?

Dr. Crawford:

No.

Aimee Sadler:

No? Okay, so this is, um – can you imagine safety issues for volunteers having to pull dogs off of a top kennel like that? So this is actually, I have to say, one of the hardest startups that we ever did. The dogs were so – that's the walk board. If they had gotten out every third day, they were lucky, from those kennels. So they were taken out of those kennels, tied to the wall or crated, and put back in. So they were trying their best to be no-kill.

They wanted to get to the highest level of life saving, and these dogs were certainly under adverse conditions. So when we started putting them in together, there was a lot more aggression proportionally in this group of dogs, but knowing what I know, and because this group identified the benefits of play groups, we persevered and pushed through and they ended up – they were euthanizing for space and quality of life. They weren't euthanizing for quality of life. Quality of life to them was the primary issue for the dogs in their care. We did the seminar for them in 2013. They created a full-time staff position as a result of the seminar and they consider it a primary program in their life saving efforts. I think they're up to – I think they're above a 90 percent live release rate now. And, do you think we have time for this video?

Dr. Crawford:

Yes.

Aimee Sadler: Yes. Okay. She wants this video.

Dr. Crawford: And certainly the kennel arrangement *[video plays]* is a common one that we find in shelters. A single housing –

Aimee Sadler: A lot of times people think about food, water, and shelter, but we also want to provide for the mental and physical health of the animals and play groups does both of those. Play groups are an opportunity for the animals to get some enrichment time out of their cages.

[End of video] That's every day. So when I saw that video, you know, I was crying when I saw that video, but then I was really mad at them because they said that they were the only shelter and they – oh, they were so apologetic.

That was a classic thing where the editor of the video didn't know all of the components and she continued to speak after that, but it was edited out. But I still love the video regardless. Okay, now I have to go to here to here to here. Okay. And this was a picture of the dogs that they sent right after we had left the seminar.

And you remember what you saw when we were filming through the kennels, right? And this is what it looked like instead after they had done their play groups on their own without us there. So, I don't – picture says 1,000 words, right? Okay, then we were – we had the privilege of bouncing down to Mississippi to Southern Pines Animal Shelter and you've worked with the Southern Pines as well, correct?

Dr. Crawford: We visited, yes.

Aimee Sadler: Okay, so this was an open admissions shelter and they changed hands, like one group had it and again, I'm sure you've all seen this. I don't know what exactly precipitated this, but a whole new group came in to take it over. Their live release rate when they took it over was only at about 20 percent, right in there. Primary issue, euthanizing for space and disease management.

Dr. Crawford: And they did have recent problems with canine distemper at the time that was contributing to the low live release rate.

Aimee Sadler: Right.

Dr. Crawford: And focus on disease.

Aimee Sadler:

So our focus was quality of life. This was another one of those shelters where be brave – in fact, while we were there, the dogs that we identified as our play group rock stars on the last day – they needed to make space and the staff was in another level of distress because all of these dogs that they now saw very differently, many of them were potentially on the euthanasia list and everybody was – there were some tears. My assistant and I were trying to, you know, be brave, because from our shelters, there's no way any of those dogs would be euthanasia candidates, but again, understanding the context of where we were, helping them get to their next level of life saving, and it turned out, they couldn't take it. They could not stand the idea, and they just ended up doubling up dogs and rearranging and they would not have had the ability to do that prior.

So none of those dogs ended up euthanized and they all ended up adopted. When we left, the staff would make overall operational changes to accommodate the – these daily play groups. They report better behavioral understanding and assessments and I've got to tell you, there was an actual story where there was a little – a litter of dogs that came in. They were a little scruffy looking, what we would consider highly appealing and adoptable dogs just by their look, but they were feral and I guess one of – they were very young and one of the dogs was receiving its intake vaccination and yelped and screamed and its litter mate panicked at that point and would not let anybody touch him. So he was slated for euthanasia the next day.

They literally sedated him, the pre-sedation for euthanasia and the director of operations went back and just said, "You know what? Let him wake up. I can't stand it. I've seen all these dogs out in play group do better. Let's just let him go to play group and just see if that makes a difference," and he was adopted two days later.

So talk about saving a life that was, you know, off the table. It saved his life and here's a story about Corinth [*video plays*]. He was one of the primary helper dogs, so he met every dog in the place because he was so social and it clearly made a difference for him. Apparently this group – now, this doesn't have anything to do with our program. By the time we had gotten there, remember when they said that they took it over. They were at 20 percent. They were up to 70 percent on their live release rate and I don't know if I'm allowed to – their budget. Am I allowed to say what their budget was? They had 6,000 animals a year. \$600,000.00 budget. Nobody's responding like I –

Dr. Crawford:

No, it's not. It's definitely not a well-resourced shelter.

Aimee Sadler:

Like that is – right.

Dr. Crawford: And the buildings are those modular sort of warehouse style buildings and it's amazing before the play groups were started, the dogs were getting sick, mostly from distemper. And there was a lot of euthanasia going around, to try to manage the shelter out of the distemper crisis and after play groups, it's amazing that the disease rate has actually plummeted concurrently with the increasing live release rate. So this was a shelter, had \$600,000.00 a year; 6,000 animals walked through the door and instituted play groups with just that little resource and changed the whole quality of life for the dogs, for the staff the outcome was just absolutely fantastic and achievable by other shelters in the same situation.

Aimee Sadler: That's one shelter, you know? You have different experiences when you go to other shelters and it's really eye opening to get out of your own environment and have the experience that other people are having trying to care for the animals, because we know that we have these common goals. We know that we all want to get the same thing accomplished, but the picture of how we get there is really very different from shelter to shelter. What I can share with you is that the animals are all the same. The animals are never the problem.

The problems are people, protocols, policies, entrenched thinking, lack of resources, but lack of resources – I think Southern Pines is a shelter that I had – that was a very moving experience when I went there. They were all moving, but some of them really stand out to me. It's a shelter that I really want to keep an eye on because they do exemplify that lack of resources really is no excuse when we're talking about quality of life and trying to achieve a better outcome for the animals. We've had no warnings. How are we doing on time?

Dr. Crawford: We are doing well and the lack of resources I think is one of the big reasons for not considering implementing play groups within shelters. The – they don't feel like they have the staff, time. They don't feel like they have the outside area or resources to create an outside area for play groups.

Aimee Sadler: There are grants for that, by the way.

Dr. Crawford: Yes, and they feel like they don't have the expertise and something really horrible's going to happen when all of that is mixed together. And we're – we become so inflexible and entrenched in our own daily hemisphere that we don't realize that there are actually resources in each local community that could support the establishment of play groups actually on the shelter grounds.

It's the community that can help establish the play yard. It's the community that can provide the staffing to run play groups. So we just

need to learn to be more flexible. And I tell you myself, after going to shelters and watching Aimee start play groups for different shelters, uh, it's – the experience has totally revolutionized my outlook about shelter pets because as most of you know, I am very ingrained in diseases. Diseases are my career and I focus on managing them and preventing them and the shelter environment, so naturally I would be very fearful of play groups.

Boy, what is a better way to start a disease outbreak than to have all the dogs in the shelter go out and mix together intimately for a couple of hours every day? So I can tell you, and I think hopefully we will revolutionize some of the thinking of you all in the audience with our second session about it is possible to do this from a veterinarian's perspective. And forget about the disease. Forget about outbreaks. You can actually do some things to really reduce the risk for that happening and really enhancing the quality of the life for dogs and increasing a live release rate because they are so adoptable now.

Aimee Sadler:

And this part of the presentation is really designed, hopefully, to make you feel inspired by the possibilities and hopefully to open your mind and say, "Wow, that's how. It can really look like that and it can be that great," and it really can be that great, but we all have different responsibilities. And I recognize every time I go into the shelters, and we're obviously going to talk about this in much more depth on the second round. Dr. Crawford's going to take the lead on that.

Talking very specifically to your – I'm sure many of you feel like your heads are going to explode when you're trying to think this through – when you went back to your shelter. Like, what if this came and I was now responsible for making decisions about maintaining the health while they're going to be out there, doing that. And trust me, I've had plenty of vets come out and watch like this *[laughter]*.

And it's – and really what we want is to – is have that medical and behavioral piece not be adversarial and really having us understand that we can do this together. And that, you know, the truth of the matter is if I got to do everything I wanted to do for the animals behaviorally, it would wreak havoc on medical best practices, right? Generally speaking. That's – so I understand when the vets come out like this, but similarly, if we adhere to medical exactly as we've been doing it, it's really going to tie my hands about what I can do for these animals behaviorally, and we're going to get into a lot more detail about that in the second session.

So we have ten minutes left. It's a good time for questions –

Dr. Crawford: Yes, so we – we have a – a good amount of time for questions and discussion if somebody wants to kick it off.

I think for the purposes of recording, if you can please, come around, and step to one of the microphones in the center aisle so that we can actually record the question and therefore the answers will make sense. Dr. Levy?

Dr. Levy: Can you comment on the significance of dogs having their hackles up or mounting during play groups? I see a lot of concern sometimes about that being read as aggression or inappropriate behavior and then also can you comment on where people can look for grants to get play yards.

Aimee Sadler: Caitlin? Where's Caitlin? You're going to be hearing some Caitlin. Animal Farm Foundation – I don't know if I'm allowed to offer them up like that, but she knows I always offer her up. Animal Farm Foundation is one of your best resources for potential grants to help you get started with your play group programs.

Animal Farm Foundation sponsors, I would say, 90 percent of the gigs that I do and right now, we're actually – if you want, sadly – if you wanted to get a seminar scheduled for your shelter, we're talking March of 2015. This train is down the tracks. Play groups are coming to shelters. I'm hoping that, you know, one day it's going to be in these guidelines as part of the daily care, the expectation, like cleaning and feeding. Play groups, of course you do that for your dogs in your care.

But at any rate, Animal Farm has really been behind that and it has been helping, that they're the ones to reach out and we're also trying to build some more teams so that we don't have to make shelters wait that long if they feel that they're ready. My only criteria – don't let me forget about your hackles question – my only criteria when we come on the ground is that you do have to have some area where the dogs can play that's enclosed. But if it's indoors – we've done it. We're going to be doing New York City in September, so if it's, you know, a pen on a rooftop and that's all you've got, then that's – we're really wanting to support shelters. Work with what you have.

You can do something. There's – everybody – unless you have literally – there's only one shelter that literally had no enclosed area and then of course we can't do it, but we are really flexible and willing to work with whatever you've got. With regards to some of the specific behaviors that we typically get so concerned about when we do a seminar for you, we really get into the nitty gritty of body language and behavior and all of that. What I can tell you [*coughs*] is I coach people not to focus on the minutia of body language because all of those things that we've taught to look for as potential precursors to aggression it looks like there might be a

study coming out that will disprove that those are reliable predictors of aggression, by the way.

But you need to look at the whole animal and the whole picture, and you're going to see hackling with animals that are playing and you're going to see hackling with animals that are concerned and the same for mounting is something that dogs do. And we really get into the nitty gritty, much different than what I just showed you here with the benefits of play groups are, but I didn't show you at all, like, how we go about doing it, which I'm sure you're really curious about. But minutia of body language will cause bad timing, will cause you to interrupt behaviors that are perfectly normal and natural. There is a time when a mount – mounting will be a threat in – as a precursor to an aggressive act, but it most certainly is not always, so you start to learn about how to know the difference and how to let dogs be dogs. Yes, did you have a question back there? Next question?

Question: Yes. This might be a little bit too detailed right now, but in every [clears throat] – excuse me. In many groups, there's often one dog who – or one or two dogs who just don't engage. They kind of stay off by themselves and they just don't engage. And they don't look necessarily miserable, but they're certainly not getting the exercise and the emotional and everything, stimulation that you're hoping that they'll get from a play group. So are we worried about those dogs or is there something that we can do to help them to engage a little bit or figure out if they, you know, what's wrong and why they're not engaging or –

Aimee Sadler: So [coughs] – that's a good point. Excuse me. One of the – after we're done with play groups we held – BAD RAP came up originally with this categorization of is a dog dog-social, dog-tolerant, dog-selective, or dog-aggressive? We've just added. The aggressive, we split up. Is a dog defensive or a dog offensive?

Dog-tolerant is one of the categories and we don't necessarily see that as a problem. It's just that dog's personality and style. They may – most likely I would assume – you'd have to be looking at that individual dog and assess are they actually in a state of stress or distress or are they just mellow, you know? And this – they're just happy to be around dogs. They're just not particularly playful, and I wouldn't consider that a problem and I wouldn't feel that I need to cajole them into playing, because maybe that's not what their needs are. As long as it's not – you know, if they're not foaming at the mouth.

In fact, we just had an experience when we were at Fairfax where a dog – they invited their foster families to bring their dogs in to do the play groups with us. Another great resource for your fosters, right? To create

supervised play groups for them, and this [coughs] – excuse me. The dog, as she walked out [coughs] – excuse me. Out of the building and to the shelter yards, her tail was tucked.

We've seen tails tucked. That doesn't, by itself. She was shaking, trembling, and almost having a hard time walking, so there's two things. I'm like, "Ooh." She was foaming at the mouth and she was chattering. I said, "Get her out of here."

That was clearly signs of distress to the point of a physiological reaction. Made it clear to me that having her come into play groups was not beneficial to her. Her – she was not processing at that level, so to me, that would be dangerous. You take a dog like that and put them into a play group, they could be targeted by the other dogs. Natural selection, whatever that might that drives that.

But it was very clear to me that's not what I'm talking about. Let's – that – this is not going to be beneficial for that dog, and she wasn't like that – it's something about the shelter environment. She was terrified when she came to that environment, so I would be interested later to see if I could take her to a public park, if she would have a different demeanor. Would I progress with introducing her to dogs? But clearly at that moment it was not to her benefit. But a dog that's just tolerant and hanging out and willing to sunbathe while everybody else is bouncing around, I still consider that behaviorally, emotionally to their benefit as opposed to sitting in that kennel. Do you want to add to that at all?

Dr. Crawford: No, I agree. Just being outside is a great benefit for that individual dog, even though they're not engaging in play as we would have hoped.

Aimee Sadler: Yes, like for example, in the picture, can you guys see what that is? Right? I wouldn't be interrupting or correcting the dog that's butt up on the head of the other dog if that's how they engage. I mean the mounting is the biggest thing that people get all upset about. Now, if I was teaching you how to run a professional doggie daycare, that is a different context from shelter play groups, and what I would be suggesting that you interrupt and how you guide the play, because people are paying you to make sure that their dogs have these kinds of experiences is going to be very different than how I teach people to do shelter play groups.

This is where I want the dogs to learn how to be dogs and to be able to do – interact. Get cranky with each other and be responsive while they're cranky and then have the discussion that they need and let it go. Much more comprehensive assessments by observing the dogs. I also would rather us find out an animal's worst case scenario while they're in our care. I'd prefer to find it out here rather than masking all that than hand them off

to somebody and have somebody come back and tell me that they found out there in the community. Yes, a question?

Question: I noticed a lot of your handlers had spray bottles in their hands.

Aimee Sadler: Uh-huh.

Question: And I also wanted to ask if that's part of – if you have a real altercation between two dogs, how you break that up.

Aimee Sadler: There's a series of interrupters that we use for altercations or for arguments to interrupt and/or to go to a level of correction. I kind of differentiate the, so there's a whole series. There's – we use air blasts, citronella spray, the air horn, anything that can be a startling tool as interrupters. I really want people to be safe, so I'm really a huge proponent and not getting in there with your hands, not handling the dogs, but giving them information about that behavior. So in other words, if dogs start arguing and it's inappropriate, it's not a discussion I want them to continue on their own, if we, let's say, blow the air blast, they get some information of like, "Ooh, maybe I should think twice about that."

And there's some learning that can occur as a result of that. I have to tell you that one of the resistances to the program that we teach is that we do use aversives as interrupters and there's this – there's a – a desire to be very positive-only, and a lot of training and behavior programs for shelters. And as you see by our training, we do all of that. But in play groups, basically I want the handlers to stay out of it and let the dogs do what they need to do.

We only tell them when to knock it off, so people sometimes have a hard time wrapping their brains around that. Their positive comes from their interactions together, you know? And like, I don't run around and tell them, "Oh, that was a good play bow, a nice tail wag." Like, I don't think they need me to tell them that, so yes?

Question: Hi. I loved the example of Swiffer that you presented. For dogs like that, that are just completely shut down when they first arrive, do you recommend any sort of cool down period when they first get there before you introduce them to the play groups, or really, do you recommend starting that right away so that they don't get in that pattern of shutting down in their –

Aimee Sadler: Are you talking about medically or behaviorally? Those are two different questions.

Question: Yeah, I know –

Aimee Sadler: Medically, Dr. Crawford gets it and then I can give you my answer –

Dr. Crawford: We're going to actually cover that exact situation in the next hour on –

Question: Yeah.

Dr. Crawford: And we'll come back to the Swiffer-type dogs and do they need a period of time for adjustment prior to inserting them into the play group environment, and we'll certainly cover the merits of that. And what – are there merits to that quarantine period? And we'll present some evidence that maybe not. Maybe we do need to move quick, more quickly and relieve that dog's stress before it really becomes extremely distressful and stress starts at intake.

Aimee Sadler: This is one of my provocative statements to those kinds of situations, is that if we really, really care about the animals – this is behavioral. Medical is different. Protocols for medical, you know, a disease prevention, a whole different ballgame. We really, really care about the animals. Our personal opinion does not matter.

You know, we look at them and they will demonstrate to us. They will show us if what we're doing is benefiting them behaviorally or if what we're doing is to their detriment. And the bottom line is if you don't try, you never know. So we're – our program really revolves around take these steps and observe the animals and let them show you. So why make Swiffer wait five days to meet other dogs if on day one that would have helped him cope better? Okay? Yes?

Question: Lisa Hara Levin. I'm a veterinarian and medical director at New York City Animal Care and Control.

Aimee Sadler: Ooh. I'm going to be down to see you in September.

Question: That's wonderful. Why I – and I welcome that. I'm sitting like this in here not because I dislike the idea, it's just because it's chilly, but play groups I think are splendid. So I do that.

Aimee Sadler: Great.

Question: I've suspended my disbelief for a long period of time. I have the medical issues, I think like many other veterinarians would have about it, and I'm interested in integrating that into the system. Now, being in New York City, of course real estate is limited and we need to go vertical. And I think many of our – within the five boroughs, play group areas are going to have to be in an enclosed situation.

Aimee Sadler: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Question: But my question is about moving the program forward and looking at the current housing that we have, let's say, in the runs the larger kennels. Do you think it is compatible to have roommate situations in runs that are already, let's say, a decent size for one dog. Is it offset by the behavioral benefits by putting two in and having roommates, rather than saying, "Okay, we need to reconfigure and go back for some more money and generate more kennel space, or go in more vertically"?

Aimee Sadler: I think we're both shaking our heads that again, at our shelters, some of our kennels in that new, \$9 million dollar upgrade at Longmont were quite spacious and some were a typical front to back kennel. And we would choose – we would have empty kennels and dogs doubled up because for their quality of life for those individual dogs, they demonstrated to us that they were happier, from our best observation, to have each other, rather than to be in a space, isolated. So I absolutely would encourage you to consider that. You know, sometimes, depending upon state regulations, like for Kansas City Pet Project, for example, if a dog had a certain measurement in length and height, they were required to put them in certain kennels.

So sometimes you – thank you. Sometimes you are forced. Your hand is forced, so within whatever your regulations, not policies. Policies can always be changed, right? But as far as regulations, state mandated, USDAA, whatever it might be, yeah. I would be really flexible behaviorally, and take that space and do whatever you need to do with that space for the animals to be happier. And if it means they get a roommate, then there you go.

Question: Thank you.

Dr. Crawford: And I totally agree with that too. I will tell you probably this time last year, I did not, from a veterinarian's perspective. But I do realize now that many dogs are happier with a buddy. And that's why I have more than one dog because I think my dogs are happier when they have their own little social group, especially being away from home 12 to 14 hours a day. And I think having a buddy certainly is a part of the whole enrichment picture.

It doesn't work for every dog. That's why daily behavioral rounds are necessary, to ensure that the compatibility is still holding true. And certainly be careful with feeding, because even though they are very compatible in the play situation and snuggling up together on the same bed

in the run does not mean they want to maybe share their dinner with their roommate.

Aimee Sadler: Or toys sometimes too.

Dr. Crawford: Sometimes toys. Maybe come out –

Aimee Sadler: Yeah, maybe those two, they really enjoy each other, but they'll resource guard toys from one another, so that pair of dogs lives together, but you have a sign, "Please no toys for me," for example. But if they were housed individually, they would be provided with the stuffed Kongs, or the toys, or whatever else you have for enrichment.

Dr. Crawford: So you may want to consider feeding them in two different runs.

Aimee Sadler: Mm-hmm. Yes, sir? There's a question back there? Oh. Oh, we've got two.

Question: Yes, I do. He was first.

Aimee Sadler: Okay.

Question: Um, I'm with a breed-specific rescue here in Florida for Akitas.

Aimee Sadler: Mm-hmm.

Question: We do not do any interaction and play at this time.

Aimee Sadler: Mm-hmm.

Question: I did see muzzles and Gentle Leaders being implemented in the videos.

Aimee Sadler: Yep.

Question: How would we start a program like that with a large breed or a naturally aggressive breed like the Akita?

Aimee Sadler: Okay, so that's interesting. Usually everybody's asking about pit bull type dogs, right?

Question: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Crawford: Because the assumption is that pit bull dogs are dog-aggressive, which is not –

Aimee Sadler:

Now I know in your breed standard, right? Incompatibility with other dogs is usually written up for Akitas, but of course we've all known plenty of very social Akitas, so we're always preaching individual, rather than breed. So I would approach it exactly the same way with your dogs as I would with all the other dogs, which I'm happy to get into more details with you about that, but generally speaking whenever in doubt, go to a muzzle, because you can always pop it right off. And the reason – any time that people would have the inclination to hold onto a leash to try to manage an interaction is when I would be going to a muzzle and dropping that leash and getting people out of the equation, okay?

So that's how I use that and then let the dogs use their full body language, all of the things that they can do to communicate with each other canine fashion without a person trying to manage the end of it. Muzzles. That's the best way to go if you have concerns, and then some of your dogs, you'll get confidence with and then you'll find your helper dogs, your ones that are social, and then you'll find that you'll trust that dog to handle the next one. And – but when in doubt, muzzle. Okay?

Dr. Crawford:

So that's an – it's an interesting situation that you bring up with considering the Akita as a breed that may not be so dog-social, loners. What is it that potential adopters want?

Do they want a dog that has been presented in a manner that maybe they should not take this dog out near other dogs or did they want a dog that they would like to take out socially and they would like to see be happy playing with other dogs. So play groups would be a great way to actually present these dogs to your audience.

Aimee Sadler:

And for you to more comprehensively assess your own dogs prior to placement, right? Much more comprehensive picture. Yes, sir?

Question:

Hi, Dr. Crawford. Ed Williams.

Dr. Crawford:

Hi, Ed.

Question:

We have, FYI, the shelter in South Georgia, very similar statistics as to the example that you mentioned, \$600,000.00 budget. 5,000 animals a year. My question is, when you said that there – you had seen a connection between the lowering of disease in a shelter like that as the play groups were introduced and as the live release rate introduced, do you feel like that is maybe akin to holistic or integrated medicine in humans? That somehow the animals in a – when their temperament or their, you know, their personality, they're being enriched? That they are maybe developing a – or putting forth a better resistance to disease, and if so, is there any way to prove that from a scientific or medical standpoint?

Dr. Crawford: That's a great question. The answer is I don't know *[laughter]*. We've – we all want to think that that is actually correct, that the happier you are, the healthier you are, and the better able you are to withstand stress, whether it's emotional stress or whether it's a physiological stress, such as exposure to potential pathogens. This is a field that needs a lot more evidence generated as to the connection between the healthy body and the happiness level and how much they interconnect. And we hear a lot that stress causes suppressed immune responses, less favorable response to vaccinations.

And I am not one to really subscribe to that thought, because I don't think I've seen enough evidence that if you're up at this stress level, your immune system is operating down here. Because if that were true, we would have – we would not exist. We would always be infected, but we need more evidence.

Aimee Sadler: Especially when we have to present at conferences.

Dr. Crawford: Yes *[laughs]*. Yes. We need more evidence to show that the holistic approach actually results in better health and resistance to potential disease in the environment.

Aimee Sadler: I can say – share with you that I just saw – and I'm really poor at citing things back. There was a – okay, our time is up. So I'll just answer this question. Then we're finished, but that there was a hospital that wanted to implement a pet therapy program for its patients and they wanted to be able to the program that was going to be implemented, that was going to be contracted in from outside of the hospital. The hospital wanted evidence, and so they did do a study.

I don't misquote this, but it had something to do with the patient's heart rate and then that – how that helps them. So they did their own study to verify that this is a program we're willing to bring in that made them feel that this was – that the – the risk that they perceived was worth the benefit to the patients and it fleshed out that way. I don't want to misspeak to it, but there has been some version of pet therapy programs. There has been some studying of the effects of that on patients, but I don't have broad strokes.

Dr. Crawford: Yes.

Aimee Sadler: So if – could we superimpose that over an animal's emotional well-being? Does it help them to heal or does it help them to resist better? Then I go back to Dr. Crawford's answer –

Question: Thank you.

Dr. Crawford: That it? Are we done? We made it through the first – I think so and I will say that there are groups out there that are performing studies on outcomes associated with more holistic approaches even merging western and eastern veterinary medicine and does that provide a better overall health outcome. So the evidence will be forthcoming.

Aimee Sadler: All right. Thank you. We get to do more after a little bit of a break. Thank you [*applause*].

[End of Audio]