

Jacqueline Pinol:

The Canine Condition. Come, sit, stay. Welcome to the Canine Condition podcast. My name is Jacqueline Pinol. I am an actor, documentary filmmaker and animal rescue advocate. The Canine Condition podcast is a platform to bring awareness to dog adoption and to provide all dog lovers and pet owners with information and resources on how to raise a healthy and well balanced dog. If you are thinking about getting your first dog or just want to know where and how you can help a dog in need, this is also a place for you. Have you ever done something you really believe in that has presented you with lots of obstacles but despite the ups and downs, you kept doing it because deep in your heart, you knew it was the right thing to do? You keep doing it because you believe that no matter how hard it is to achieve, you refuse to give up hope. Sometimes hope and determination is everything.

Without those two ingredients, some of the greatest achievements in life may have never been accomplished. My guest on the podcast today can relate to that scenario all too well. She started her work life in the corporate world at IBM in New York and Atlanta, Georgia. But those IBM days are behind her because she found herself on a path she could not turn away from. Given the desperate need in her now hometown of Macon, Georgia, where she lives with her husband, Bill and daughter, Kate, my guest, Kerry Fickling founded SOS rescue in Georgia. This licensed, nonprofit rescue organization now saves thousands of homeless dogs and cats yearly. Many of them are just babies. She's a fierce advocate of spay and neuter, and I mean, fierce. Kerry is a constant and active voice for the voiceless. Hi, Kerry. Welcome to the Canine Condition podcast.

Kerry Fickling:

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I'm really excited that you and I can have this chat. It's been a little while since we've seen each other. For our listeners, I would like you to know how I met Kerry. Kerry, you really have inspired people across the nation and really around the world to jump on board this rescue mission. I will tell you, my listeners, that when I first started my journey in rescue, I was drawn to saving dogs in the state of Georgia because of Facebook posts. I would see these posts. It was such a great need.

I realized the cost of vetting was more reasonable in Georgia than helping dogs in California but I didn't know how to go about it. I heard a story about a woman who had taken it upon herself to spay all the female dogs of her town, the city of Macon, Georgia, to help stop the problem at the start, which is the whole hashtag spay and neuter that you guys always see in posts throughout social media. That woman was Kerry Fickling. Kerry, I would love hear that story from you. How did you begin that mission? Did it inspire you to start your own rescue?

Kerry Fickling:

Well, it did not inspire me to start my own rescue.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I love that you're honest.

Kerry Fickling:

It inspired me to get involved in rescue. The way I actually first got involved in rescue was somebody had dumped three cute little puppies on my doorstep one day while we were out to church. I have a sister-in-law who also has the last name of Fickling who was an active foster for a local rescue. I think they mistook me for that person thinking they will dump these puppies on her doorstep and surely she will take care of them because she's a rescuer. Of course, I knew nothing about rescue. Long story short is those three puppies started my foray into rescuing and it was very shortly thereafter, probably within a year of fostering for a local rescue that I discovered that we were not even making a dent.

It was not even a drop in the bucket that these puppies just kept more and more and more kittens. The abuse, the sad cases, animals getting hit by cars because they're just strays roaming the streets. I finally woke up one day and said, "I have had enough. This has got to stop. We're just putting a Band-Aid on a gusher. It's not working. We need to start a real spay and neuter initiative." Given that my funds were not completely never ending, I decided, we'll focus on the females because they're the ones that are actually giving birth. You could have every single male neutered but if one gets out or escapes that doesn't get neutered, he can impregnate all the females. I decided to focus on the females. That's when the local paper and then NPR actually picked up my little quest to-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes. After I met you, I actually heard the NPR piece by chance. I'm like, "I know her."

Kerry Fickling:

I attempted to get all the female dogs in my town spayed. I actually spent about \$100,000. Not all of it was my own. I did get donations and a few grants along the way but we spent about \$100,000. Sadly, I have to say that we probably didn't make a dent. We're working on another way to solve that problem currently.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I saw an article too with you holding a puppy knocking on a door. It was saying that you would physically go and pick up the dogs from people's homes. Tell us a little bit about that part of the experience.

Kerry Fickling:

When I started, I thought, "Wow, I'm going to offer this great thing for free. Everybody is going to knock down my door wanting to get in on it." Well, I was greatly surprised. While yes, some people were so thankful and grateful and helped out and make an appointment at whichever participating bed I was using and then going, get the thing done and I would pay for it. Others, absolutely flat out refused. "This is my dog. Thank you for taking the puppies but I'm not getting her spayed. I want her to live a full life and to enjoy life as a dog should. By the way, sometimes I can sell these puppies for \$20. Thanks. But no thanks."

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, my goodness.

Kerry Fickling:

I would go around, not just randomly knock on doors but where we knew that we had taken puppies or a neighbor would call up and say, "Oh my neighbor's on her third litter, please go over and help these people." We would go and knock on the door and sometimes we would get a welcome greeting, "Yes, I would love to take you up on your offer. I don't have transportation. Can you take her to the vet?" We would do that. Other times I'd get a door slammed in my face. They were just not interested. Unfortunately, I think sometimes the reason was they were too proud to accept the help. I think, yes, some of these houses really couldn't even take care of their own children, let alone their dogs and to accept help for a dog yet they have children that are not getting enough to eat, I think it was just too painful and they were too proud. I would get the door slammed in my face.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Gosh, you're right. It seems like you are hitting your head against the wall because here you are opening a wonderful door for people to do this great thing that will end a problem and they just refuse.

Kerry Fickling:

It's not just that way with animals. People will often refuse help for themselves or for their children or in other aspects. It's society-wide.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I think it's just also maybe an American culture thing where we're supposed to have freedom to do whatever we want but sometimes we do the things that are wrong. That's unfortunate. When you finished that part of your journey and you found yourself thinking, "All right, I did this great thing. However, it's not ending the problem." Where did you go from there? How did you get to the rescue?

Kerry Fickling:

The first step that we took was we continued with our free spay fund where we would pay for anyone who wanted the help, we would pay to get their animals spayed. We then started some TNR programs, which is for cats. For those who don't know, TNR stands for trap, neuter, release, which is really aimed at feral colonies that are just multiplying. You go in. You trap them. You get them spayed and neutered. Get them their basic vaccines. Then you typically would ear tip them and release them back into the wild. Often if we found a litter of kittens along the way, typically if they were young enough, we could tame them and get them into a foster home. Obviously, we wouldn't just dump the kittens back out on the street.

We would try to rehabilitate them. But for the most part, feral cats are happy being feral. Most of the colonies have a caregiver that's keeping an eye out, giving them extra food or if they notice a sick one or an injured one, they would remove it from the group. We did that. We bought about 20 of the humane traps that we keep at our actual local animal control. They will loan them out to anybody who wants to borrow a trap to help trap if they have a local colony. Then we have participating vets that they can bring the animals, the cats to get spayed and neutered. We're actively doing that and then-

Jacqueline Pinol:

It's easier with the cats in that respect because they take care of themselves. I've heard you mention this, if you want to talk a little bit about this, you've mentioned that we domesticated dogs. Now here we are just letting them fend for themselves, which now they kinda can't.

Kerry Fickling:

A stray dog is not going to survive on the streets for very long. If they survive for a month or two, that is very lucky. They're going to be severely malnourished. They don't really know how to hunt. They don't even really know how to take shelter. They become a target of cruel humans. Dogs, they are not going to survive out on the streets alone. Cats, even though they too are domesticated and I believe were domesticated long before dogs were by the Egyptians way back, but they still have that innate instinct of how to hunt and how to protect themselves, seek shelter. They are very good at rearing their young in the wild. By the way, a cat has anywhere from say 4 to 6 kittens, whereas a healthy lathe or a pit-mix is going to have anywhere from 8 to 12 puppies. That is a lot to feed and care for out on the streets.

They're just not as lucky living on the streets. The TNR programs are very successful because in many cases, the feral cats are very happy living the way they are. They're able to care for themselves as long as they have a human that can lend a hand from time to time. Stray dogs are not going to survive. When we find stray dogs, we absolutely pick them up off the street. Our local animal control, that's the policies to pick them up and hold them for a stray hold. Unfortunately, in the south, then after the stray hold, if no one claims him and no rescue is able to take them in because of course we're all full, then the next step is they are euthanized.

I know that sounds terrible. I cry about it every time I read one of these stories but the fact of the matter is I would rather see an animal humanely euthanized and it's suffering ended than starving and being abused and shot with BB guns on the street. To me, that's no way to live. I personally would rather end my own suffering than to have to live that way. That's why are no TNR programs for dogs. It's cruel. You just can't do that.

Jacqueline Pinol:

You can't. Also, which shelter is your local shelter that you work with?

Kerry Fickling:

I live in Macon, Georgia, which is Macon-Bibb County.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Do they collaborate with you and your rescue efforts in knowing that you're out there trying to fulfill this mission?

Kerry Fickling:

Yes. As a matter of fact, our shelter and several of our other local Monroe County, Jones County, even our further out shelters are becoming much better at working with local rescues, realizing that we can accomplish so much more together, that we can pool our resources. I find that the county and the municipal shelters that are eager and willing and reach out to rescues are far more successful than the ones who turn a blind eye and just take in the animals, wait the seven days and just euthanize everything, which unfortunately does happen quite a lot still here in the south. More and more, the shelters are realizing that's really bad press, that their citizens aren't really happy with that policy. They're reaching out to rescues.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's really wonderful because I first came across shelters and the system in Georgia in 2015. I have seen progress in different areas. Sometimes it's less progress than I would like but I have to remind myself, "Hey, progress is progress and we have to keep educating and spreading that message." Do you think there's been progress since the time you tried to spay all these females in the education that people are receiving and the resources that people are aware of in these towns? The people that refuse the help, do you think that their mindsets changed?

Kerry Fickling:

I think that the people that refused the help five, six years ago are still in the same situation. I think education-wise, we are getting out a little more, getting our message out, our resources out. Unfortunately, the folks who truly need the help are not on social media. They don't have computers. Many of them don't have cell phones and it's becoming apparent that the only way we're truly going to get out of this is by one, having laws in place that don't really incent people to do the right thing.

But it gives us some ammunition to say, "Okay. Well, you have broken the law and that is going to result in a fine." Or, "You can let us help you and we'll get this situation taken care of, get your female spayed. You can avoid the fine but you have to cooperate." I hear people all the time saying, "Oh, well, up north, they have all these spay and neuter laws. That's why they don't have a problem with all these stray animals and litters of puppies."

The answer is we have a spay and neuter law here in Macon-Bibb county. Absolutely. It doesn't help because we have no way to enforce it. It would be impossible. We have two animal control officers who are out there working with the citizens. There's no way. The judge just throws out the cases because he's got 100 rabies or spay violations and then he's got 4 gang bangers who are in for criminal charges. Who are you going to spend your court time on? I totally agree with that. But you do have the people who don't want to break the law. When they are notified that they have broken the law and facing a penalty, they're much more willing to then let me help them, even though you and I both know, they're probably never going to see court or face any charges or pay any fines. It's just enough to have that threat that I can use as ammunition to say, "Well, look, I will help you. Let me help you get this done."

Then we're making progress there. The true answer, unfortunately, I think is generational. I think with this community, this group of people, it's going to be their children that are going to be the change because they are raised in a different society. They're watching all these Disney movies with the war dog hero and all the cute animal stories. They are watching all these TV shows where you have the mom and the dad, the children and the pup who's cute and fun and lives in the house. They see how animals are treated on TV. They see the movies where animals are revered as heroes. I think that is going to be our change. It's just this generation growing up with that idea in their head, and not that Rover belongs on a chain outside because he's filthy and dirty and he's just here to protect the house. It's going to be a generational thing, unfortunately, but at least that means we will get there. It will just be another 30 years.

Jacqueline Pinol:

We just have to keep going on our journey and hopefully make a change and plant those seeds for that generation.

Kerry Fickling:

That's right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Now that you bring up, as we're talking about legislation and laws, we also got to interview your husband, Bill Fickling for our documentary. He brought up legislation. There's a need to advocate for those stricter laws that you're talking about. That also goes for anti-chaining. He mentioned that anti-chaining leads people to using dogs as cheap security systems, which I had never thought about it that way. When he said it, it really got me because it's true. Then you have that chained guard dog. I say that in quotes. Have things changed? Is there progress in that area? Because I know that also he mentioned leads to possible dog fighting rings. How is Georgia dealing with that aspect of animal welfare?

Kerry Fickling:

Every state can pass certain statewide laws but for the most part, it's up to the cities and the towns and the counties to pass local laws. Here in Macon-Bibb County about, I don't know, maybe it was eight or so years ago, a group of citizens pushed the fight to get spay and neuter laws in place, to get anti-tethering laws in place here in Macon-Bibb County. Unfortunately, a lot of the local counties surrounding us do not have those laws. All of their problems spill over into our county. The anti-tethering law and spay and neuter laws are something that each county needs to accomplish on their own first. Then we can approach maybe as a statewide level. I will tell you, there are two people that I work actively with that are doing a great deal of work and making a ton of progress.

That would be Jenny Milner, who's with the Georgia Pet Coalition. She's up in Washington trying to push these laws. She actually was one of the many people who helped push through making animal cruelty a felony across all 50 states.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, fantastic. Yes.

Kerry Fickling:

That was a huge deal. Again, it's not necessarily because, "Oh, there's a law. People aren't going to do it." It's that, "Hey, this is a felony. We're talking about prison time. We're not talking about 30 days in your local county jail. We're talking about prison. It's on your record that will follow you for future job interviews or what have you." It is a deterrent to be able to throw that in someone's face to say, "If you do this, this is going to be a consequence." Either a, we can deter them or at the very least when they're caught, we threaten them with what the punishment could be and so they stop.

Jacqueline Pinol:

We could do something about it or we can seek justice for the animal by pursuing it as a case.

Kerry Fickling:

Exactly. Or make an example of them and even if it never goes to court and they never get fined or go to jail, at least it is out there that, "Oh, wow. I didn't realize that that was a felony." Jenny Milner's done a lot of work with that. Then Debra Berger, who's with Humane Society, US with the Georgia chapter. She's actually also the founder and director of the Georgia Center for Humane Education, which does exactly what it says, helps to advocate and educate for animal rights. Those are two inspiring women that I look up to.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Absolutely. That's great. Like you just said, I mean, if this is going on now and it takes a little bit to catch on, 5, 10 years down the line, their work is probably going to have flourished and set a new precedent for the people in Georgia.

Kerry Fickling:

Absolutely.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's wonderful because I meet so many people in Georgia that are behind you and want to help your rescue in particular. They feel also helpless because outside of your circle, you feel like there's just not that support.

Kerry Fickling:

The real answer is we have these laws in place. Even at the state and national level, animal cruelty is a felony. That's everywhere. That's not just in Macon-Bibb County or just in New York City. It's a felony. If you have enough people who, when they see something wrong, if they go to their commissioners, mayors, councilmen, whoever, and say, "Look, this person is chaining their dog. The dog is starving. The dog has no shelter." That's animal cruelty. Animal cruelty doesn't just mean that you're beating your dog or leaving your injured cat out to die. It can mean that you're just not providing adequate food and shelter, which will eventually end up with the animal dying. That is animal cruelty. We all have a right to speak up about that, bring it to our people in charge.

Eventually, they have to listen because this isn't just some little anti-tethering law that this one city has but my city doesn't have it. It's not that important to me. It's a felony. It is US-wide. You cannot turn a blind eye to that. You may not think it's important but it's a loss. That's where it gives us some ammunition to not feel like it's falling on deaf ears because it really shouldn't. It is a felony. It's right up there with murder and rape and child molestation. I mean, it is a serious crime.

Jacqueline Pinol:

You can get up to seven years in prison for some of these cruelty cases. I had an attorney on our last episode from Arizona, animal rights welfare attorney. My goodness, he really just opened my eyes to things I had no idea about. What I'd like our listeners to know is that we have the power by speaking up. Like you said, going to our local legislators. Also, the things that people don't think about is it might not be because you're interested in making a difference for a dog. You might not even like dogs but your husband worded it in our documentary. He brought this up in his interview, which I also loved because it opened up my eyes is that if your neighbors are chaining dogs, if there's something going on and nobody says anything, this is affecting the quality of the community, I hate to say it, but the real estate prices. You have to think big picture here. It's not just about those dogs.

Kerry Fickling:

By the way, even if you don't like dogs, if your neighbor is abusing and mistreating their animal, there's a good chance that maybe they're abusing and mistreating their children, their wives. It's usually a chain reaction. It's usually something that is a bigger issue going on. If you're that inhumane, that innocent creature can just be left to starve, how are you treating your children? To me, that's a big issue. We all need to speak up about that.

Jacqueline Pinol:

With smartphones nowadays and, like you said, the younger generation can't live without them. Use those phones to videotape and keep evidence. I will just reiterate this from our last episode. The attorney John Schill from Arizona did mention that a lot of times as rescuers, we want to go in and provide food and shelter and water for those dogs. First, we have to document that there's actually cruelty going on because if we fix the problem, then the law can't come in and say that there's anything going on.

Kerry Fickling:

Well, let me tell you one other little story that just came up recently, which I had never even thought about myself. There were some dogs that were chained on a property, malnourished, absolutely just starving to death. They had no shelter. It was horrific.

Jacqueline Pinol:

God. It's hard to hear that.

Kerry Fickling:

They had been living that way for nine months. This is a county that doesn't have animal control, very close to Macon but not in Macon. Citizens called. Sheriff's department said, "Well, it's nothing we can do about." Dogs have a bowl of food out there. It was of course rotten, with maggots in it. They did nothing.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, gosh.

Kerry Fickling:

Finally, a rescue got involved and said, "I'm not going to take that this is fine. This is not fine." She documented evidence. None of the Sheriff's department in that county would do anything. She plastered it all over Facebook. "Is this how we treat our animals? Is this what this X county feels is proper treatment with these animals?" Well, guess what? It turned out one of those chained dogs was a missing family pet from another family who had lost their dog nine months earlier. I don't know the story, found it. Whatever came into possession of it and chained it up in their yard. It was someone else's animal.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh wow.

Kerry Fickling:

Because she's plastered it all over Facebook and said, "This is wrong. The Sheriff's Department there will not listen to me. Many citizens have spoken up. We all need to speak up. Even if it's not your county, this is wrong." That's when I started opening, by the way. Sheriff's Department did finally remove the animals from that property and they went into a rescue. And the one dog went back to his rightful owners.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, my God.

Kerry Fickling:

There's a lot of reasons to speak up. It's not just because you feel bad for a dog.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes. The power of social media too. Let's use it to our advantage for goodness. Tell me, speaking of all this social media and getting the word out this way, how has that helped your rescue movement? Because I know you now have SOS Rescue in Georgia. When did it begin? When were you officially the licensed rescue that you are now? And what is your procedure for getting the dogs safely adopted?

Kerry Fickling:

I started off just fostering for another rescue. And then we were presented with the opportunity to send animals north. The Northeast in particular, I am originally from Massachusetts. I grew up there. When I grew up, I never saw a stray animal in my life. Nobody was giving away puppies in Walmart parking lots. This just never went on when I grew up. When I moved south, obviously I had a huge awakening. But I was presented with an opportunity to partner with a shelter up north, the first one being the Northeast Animal Shelter, which is one of the largest adoption agencies in the Northeast. They're really not a shelter as much as an adoption agency. Because really the animals come in, they get vetted and they're immediately adopted. They do a wonderful job with rehoming these animals.

They also realize that there are just no stray animals or unwanted litters of puppies up north. There's a few, but nothing compared to what we have in the south. So they saw the opportunity to help with the crisis that we have here in the Southeast. So they started their Pets Across America program, which I think they started probably about 15 years, maybe 20 years ago. So we started with them about six years ago.

I was still with another rescue, but the whole transport side of the rescue, just became huge. It became like a whole business in and of itself. We decided to branch off, form our own rescue, so that we weren't taking away from all of the resource and time of the rescue I was currently volunteering with. They had a lot to do already. We separated, created SOS Rescue. And to date, we have sent, I think it's over 6,000 puppies and kittens, dogs and cats from Georgia to the Northeast. Mostly to the Northeast Animal Shelter. It's been a hugely, hugely successful program.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I just got the chills with you saying 6,000. Because think about how many animals that actually is.

Kerry Fickling:

And think, 6,000 because a Georgia housewife who fostered with the rescue, just got the crazy idea that, "You know what? We could really like do something with this. Let's start our own rescue and, and focus on transporting." Which is really what we do. All because somebody just decided we can do more. We should do more.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes. You took action.

Kerry Fickling:

That's what we're doing. Right now, we've saved over 6,000 in the five or six years that we've been in existence. Right now we're currently doing about 2,500 a year. That 6,000 is greatly expanding with every year.

Jacqueline Pinol:

It's exciting because so many families are finding their family members, because I call them family members of the canine and feline species. But at the same time, you think there's more to come. You think Georgia, like you said it earlier in our interview, it's like just gushing.

Kerry Fickling:

It is. Even with all these animals I send north, on the one hand, that means here's an animal that is not going to continue to live in Georgia, to get pregnant and create litters and litters of puppies. It's also just physically getting the numbers moved out of the state. Yet we still have such a huge, huge task ahead of us. But that leads me to my final project. I say final, because if I get this done, I will be complete.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Tell us about it.

Kerry Fickling:

Maybe I'll just go back to fostering and let somebody younger to take over. My final goal, which started with the picture of the younger Kerry juggling puppies, trying to open the door in the newspaper, when I started my free spay fund or my crazy challenge of trying to spay and neuter all the dogs in Macon... My final thought was we have got to have more access to low cost vetting and specifically spay/neuter. It is so far cheaper in the Southeast, than it is in the Northeast or anywhere else in the country. But it's still quite unaffordable for many of our Southern families.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's true.

Kerry Fickling:

Especially families who are maybe inundated with animals. A lot of families in the South... I know some northerners or people in California, other parts of the country think, "Well they're doing it to themselves. They're just allowing their animals to get pregnant." But that's not always the case.

Jacqueline Pinol:

No, there are so many wonderful families just wanting to help.

Kerry Fickling:

Oftentimes, you have families who see a stray dog and they take it in and it turns out that dog was already pregnant. By the way, gave birth three days later. That's why she was hanging around their house. It's not their fault that this dog that they just took in, ended up having all these puppies. Or unfortunately, you'll get people who will get a dog off Facebook or from social media. The people quote "selling the dog" will say the dog is spayed. And the family believes it. Then of course, it ends up getting pregnant. I've heard that story so many times, it's crazy.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh my gosh, I hadn't even thought of that.

Kerry Fickling:

Yeah, it happens. It's not always just irresponsible people, letting their animal get pregnant over and over again. A lot of times it's somebody who's reached out, try to help, then suddenly, they're stuck with all these feral cats that now have taken up at their house because they're putting out food and now they've all had babies and they're just throwing their hands up, "Please help me."

But the good news is, vetting is a lot cheaper here. So my final big project is I'm actually going to be opening a free, 100% free, not income-based, not anything based, free to everyone, free spay/neuter clinic. Hopefully, we are actually going to be opening it up right inside of our local municipal shelter. Actually think of it, they just changed the name to the Bibb County Sheriff's Office Animal Services.

But that shelter that we actually raised money through a SPLOST, which is like a special interest tax that the community decides to pass, it's a short term, additional sales tax that's put on everything. They use that money for special interest projects like building some parks or upgrading playground equipment or building a senior center. Or in our case, we built ourselves a brand new municipal shelter. Our own county shelter was really in disrepair and way too small, not up to date or up to standards. We built a huge, beautiful brand new shelter and had the forethought to put in a two room surgery suite inside that shelter. Which up until now has kind of been used as a storage room.

But the good news is, we have just received our final funding. We received approval from our mayor and our city councilmen and we are opening a free spay/neuter clinic that is free for everyone. Anyone can come there and get their animals-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Amazing, Kerry.

Kerry Fickling:

Yep. We're very excited. It's taken a long time to kind of get it up and going. Sadly, our biggest challenge is a veterinarian. It is crazy that it's just so difficult, like our nursing crisis that we had several years ago, we have a veterinarian crisis. I don't know, just not graduating as many or if we just have so much more demand than we used to. But we're having a hard time finding a good vet. But we'll get there.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Hopefully. You've come this far and once the word gets out, you just keep the ball and it'll happen.

Kerry Fickling:

It's so crazy. I even think, I was talking with my partner, I said, "Gosh, maybe we could offer a signing bonus and offer to take over some of the vet school loans of [inaudible 00:34:07]." Push back the vet-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Incentive.

Kerry Fickling:

Incentive. Let's entice them with maybe some money to come and get their experience. It's great experience working in a shelter. You get to see everything and deal with all kinds of problems. This is going to be a monumental. It will be the first ever, continually operated, free spay/neuter clinic in the country. We have never had a continually operated, spay/neuter clinic. I'm hoping that this not only will attract some young vets who want to get in on this, because it's such a wonderful way to get back to the community.

Of course they will get paid, but we have the funding in place to pay for that. But at the same time, it's something that I think other communities can easily replicate. Because it is such a profound thing that there are grants out there, just foundations that would love to be involved in something like this in their own state or their own community. It could be very far away from here, but I do believe it's going to be something that can be replicated.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I think that is amazing. I truly believe that that is the answer. I know spay and neuter, it's just like right now, it feels like rats on a spinning wheel. But it's the money.

Kerry Fickling:

It's the money.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I do know that. I've spoken to families who, when I volunteered to help with applications on adoptions or certain rescues with certain aspects of their process, adopters who have to spay their puppies or neuter them, their vets are charging \$700 for a spay.

Kerry Fickling:

I know. It's crazy.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's a lot of money.

Kerry Fickling:

Not only that, it's access to good vet care. Some of these clinics down here, I'm talking even our high dollar clinics, it's a month and a half wait to get in it. It only takes one time for a dog to get pregnant, and eight weeks for the puppies to be born. You don't have a month and a half to wait for an appointment. We need just better access to the care. Not only have it be free or reasonably priced, we just need more access to it.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Great. I would love to have a followup episode with you down in our future seasons, when you have this clinic open in the shelter. Because I think it's a wonderful resource. It also goes to show that, yes, as much as we have all these families who don't know or don't care and let animals just multiply, there are hundreds upon thousands of people in Georgia who are on board the rescue movement. People with wonderful hearts who want to help. I have four dogs from Georgia and they never would have been able to get them out to me, had I not been able to rely on caring Georgia rescues, fosters, transporters, you name it. It's all a part of the village.

Kerry Fickling:

It is. It truly is a village. I used to think that was just a cheesy catch phrase-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Me too.

Kerry Fickling:

... until I got involved, and I'm like, "Wow, this really is a community. It is a community of people with a common goal. It's just so wonderful to be part of that community." Not just, yes, I'm saving a lot of animals, but I have met so many wonderful people through this rescue community that I count as my very good friends that I would have never met otherwise.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's so awesome. A lot of puppies are saved. Like you said, just litters of stray puppies. But some of them have the mama dog with them and you are a big proponent of not leaving the mama dog behind.

Kerry Fickling:

Right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I happen to know there are still rescues, unfortunately in this country who do leave the mom behind, who take the puppies because they're great, they'll be easily adapted out. Sometimes they don't even spay the mom. Talk to us a little bit about why we should not be leaving the mom behind and what your process is.

Kerry Fickling:

I like to say that any decent rescue worth their salt, would never leave the mom behind or at the very least, for example, if the family wants to keep the mom, definitely pay to spay that mama dog, and if need be drive that dog to the clinic to get spayed and not just rely on the family who allowed her to get pregnant once, to miraculously make sure that doesn't happen again. I take that upon myself. That's my responsibility.

It's sad when we hear about rescues or people that will take in the puppies and not help the mom dog. Number one, that dog's going to be pregnant again in six months. Dogs go into heat twice a year. She's been pregnant once, she's going to be pregnant again. Or if it's a dog who's in a shelter and you leave that mom dog, more than likely she's going to get euthanized. Simply because there are just so many adult dogs in the shelter, that they don't have the space or the time to keep them forever and ever. So they do euthanize them. To me, that's just heartbreaking.

Yes, we absolutely take care of the mama dogs. You know what? Every once in a while, there'll be one that is just unadoptable. It happens.

Jacqueline Pinol:

It does happen.

Kerry Fickling:

Sometimes these poor animals have been so abused or living on the street for so long, that they just don't trust humans, they are semi feral, they are dangerous. I can not put an animal, adopt an animal into a home, especially a home with children, if I think there's a chance that that dog is going to bite those children. We do sometimes have to make the hard choice that says, this animal is not an adoptable. But again, I'd rather take care of it humanely and end it's suffering-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Than leave it on the street.

Kerry Fickling:

... than to leave it on the street or to leave it in a shelter for God knows how long before something happens. I will tell you, that it's rare. We almost always, even if the mom dog is a little bit growly at first, it's usually because she's just trying to protect her puppies through instinct. The minute we have the puppies separated, adopted, moved on, the mother just turns into a whole different animal. She's now loving and happy and not worried that she's got a whole nother responsibility. Now it's just, "Oh, I get to be a dog."

10 times out of 10, they're great dogs. Personally, I actually won't work with a rescue that leaves the mother dogs behind, or even cherry picks the puppies. I've heard of rescues that cherry pick a litter of kittens at the shelter. Maybe there's not even a mom involved, but they only want the Siamese ones or the orange ones. They, say, leave all the black kittens behind.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh my goodness.

Kerry Fickling:

To me, that's disgusting. That's like saying, "I'm a family that wants to adopt a child, but I only want white, blonde hair, blue eyed children. Anything else I'm not interested in." To me, that's just disgusting. How could you do that?

Jacqueline Pinol:

No, no, absolutely. I'm sure then you have adopted out a ton of mama dogs. Do you have stories and have seen pictures where they become the most lovable and loved dogs in their homes?

Kerry Fickling:

We have come across so many mother dogs. As a matter of fact, I've ended up keeping four of the mama dogs that have come through.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I believe you. I have one from Georgia.

Kerry Fickling:

Four of my nine. I ended up keeping them, not necessarily just because they were like great mama dogs, it was, they all had like issues. One was just terrified of people. I thought, "Oh, she's never going to make it anywhere else." She trusted me so I kept her. Another one was heartworm positive and in the very beginning we didn't have access to cheap, heartworm treatment. I was doing the slow kill method, so she ended up staying with me. One is terribly food aggressive, practically wanted to eat her puppies.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, my gosh.

Kerry Fickling:

Because they got old enough to where they were just very annoying, so we had to get them moved on of course quickly. I thought, "Oh, I'm not putting her in a house. God forbid she bite someone else's dog." So she stayed with us. They're all kind of the misfits for one reason or another. But then I come across Bailey. Bailey, was this huge blockhead, Pitbull something mix. Beautiful, Sable colored fur. She was just the best dog I have ever met, literally, probably in my life.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh my gosh, Kerry. That's saying something. Because you've met thousands of dogs.

Kerry Fickling:

I have. And I have fallen in love with practically every one of them, I will admit. But Bailey, Bailey was different. She of course had, I think she had like nine puppies in her litter. Of course was a great mom. Would let my dogs come over to sniff her puppies. She was never on the defensive and just always very sweet. Would let people come over and pick up her puppies. Would let my child pick up the puppies. Just a very agreeable, easygoing dog. Then of course the puppies grew up and we got them all adopted.

Then we were waiting for Bailey, for it to be safe for her to go ahead and get spayed. During that time, after the puppies had left, and of course I've bonded with this dog, obviously by now and fallen in love, like I do all of them. Once her puppies were gone, especially, I mean her whole world was us. She just loved us. She loved all my dogs. She was such a fantastic dog. I looked at my husband and I said, "Would it be so bad to have number 10?" He just looked at me and he's like, "I have married a mad woman. This is insane. You're not possibly thinking about keeping that dog." I'm like, "Well, what's 10? What's one more? We've got nine." He did. He finally said, "Well, I got to say, out of all of them, this is the best one we've ever had."

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, my gosh.

Kerry Fickling:

"You want to keep her, we can keep her." But then I really sat and thought about it. This is now my new thing that I use to talk to, especially my fosters and people I come across in rescue. "Yes, could we provide the best home ever for this dog? Of course. She would have a great life. She would have the best of food, the best medical care. I'm a stay at home mom, so I'm home all day long. Other dogs to play with. But you know what? That's not fair to Bailey."

This is truly like you talk to somebody who says what I repeat. "It is not fair to Bailey to be dog number 10. It's not fair to Bailey to be dog number five. Bailey, deserves to be dog number one or two. Maybe three. Bailey does not deserve to be dog number 10." And no matter how much we can provide and what a great home we can give her, Bailey deserves more one-on-one attention. Because even as a stay at home, mom, I can't possibly give 10 dogs enough attention, individually. There's not enough hours in the day.

I reminded myself of what I tell everybody, "This dog does not deserve to be dog number 10. As much as you love her and she loves you, she deserves to be in a family where she's one or two, maybe three, and gets all the attention that she needs." We did finally decide to give up Bailey.

Jacqueline Pinol:

You did.

Kerry Fickling:

We did. I have to say, the moment I listed her for adoption, I must've had 20 applications. Because I wrote such a heartfelt story about how we found her and how we so badly wanted to keep her. But my final paragraph was, "Bailey does not deserve to be dog number 10 in my house. She deserves to be number one or two, because she's that great." We found her great family and they still send me updates to this day.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Really?

Kerry Fickling:

Absolutely.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, my gosh.

Kerry Fickling:

They love this dog.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Did she go to the Northeast or did she stay in Georgia?

Kerry Fickling:

No, no, no. She went to Northeast. I almost never adopt out down south. Not because I don't think Southerners make great pet owners. I'm a Southerner now, and I think I'm a great pet owner, but there's just so much more demand for animals up north. Families up there do only have one or two dogs. They don't have 10 like me. They deserve to have animals. I'm so thankful for their spay/neuter laws and for people being so conscientious up there. But at the same time, it means they have a very hard time getting ahold of animals when they want to add to their family.

Typically, they have to go through a breeder and an out-of-state breeder. Of course, none of us really want that when there's all these homeless animals down south. Yes, I do send the majority of my animals up north, because there are just so many families who've been waiting months, months with applications approved, waiting for animals. She's a Northern dog and has a whole selection of coats and little booties and-

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's wonderful.

Kerry Fickling:

She has a great life.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I love hearing that. For people who, because you're bringing up breeders, people who are still married to the idea of getting from a breeder, you save puppies of all kinds of breeds and some of them are purebred, aren't they?

Kerry Fickling:

Absolutely. In fact, I would tell you that our pure bred puppies, don't get adopted any faster than our mixed, Georgia mutts. Our mixed Georgia mutts-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Really?

Kerry Fickling:

... absolutely get adopted just as fast as the purebreds. A lot of people have done their research and realize that a lot of these purebreds, do have medical issues down the road. Hip dysplasia, and the chance of cancer, different various forms of cancer are 10 times more likely in a purebred dog, simply because they have been overbred. And they do have these issues in their bloodlines because there are fewer purebreds to breed them with. A lot of people say, "You know what? I would love to have that pure breed Lab, but this one here looks just as cute and labby enough, and will probably live twice as long without some horrible cancer taking her life. We'll go with the mutt." I think people have come around, not only that it's just humanely the right thing to do to, to help end the homeless pet population by adopting. But they also realize that it's probably going to produce a healthier dog in the end, which is great.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Absolutely. Oh, that's wonderful. Tell us, Kerry, how can more people help SOS Rescue in Georgia and be a part of your mission? If people want to reach out either from out of state or if they want to be boots on the ground with you.

Kerry Fickling:

I will say that by number one issue is education. People think that that's just like a pie in the sky, wonderful thing to say. But think about it. Somebody will contact me and say, "My neighbor has had their third litter of puppies. Can you help them?" What if that neighbor had gone over to this other neighbor six months ago, before the third litter was born and said, "Hey, I noticed that you've had a couple of litters, not trying to pry, but I know a rescue that is willing to help. I can help with transportation. I may be, as your neighbor, I don't have the money to maybe pay for surgery myself, but hey, I can take some time off on a Tuesday or maybe bring the animal on a Saturday, if you need some help, to get the animal to the vet. I can reach out to a rescue that I know of that is willing to help."

And be part of the solution. People don't give that as much credit or credence as it deserves. That neighbor would have not had that third litter, had somebody bothered to just put in some effort. You don't have to put in money, you don't have to take in the animal and be a foster. Not everybody can foster. I completely understand that. But everybody can impart some education or some information. I can't tell you how many people in rescue that I know of here, that have cousins, brothers, step sisters, that are letting their dogs get pregnant, letting their cats get pregnant. It's like, you're in rescue. How can you not be doing your best to educate them? Because if you can't educate them, they're certainly not going to listen to a stranger, coming in from outside the family.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Absolutely.

Kerry Fickling:

I stress to people, we have to educate. The best way to educate, is to go to that person that you have a relationship with. Maybe it's a coworker at work. Maybe somebody from your church. A friend of your child who goes to your child's school and you're dropping them off for a play date, say, 'Hey, I noticed that your dog's not spayed. I know that's probably very stressful for you, worrying about her getting pregnant. Gosh, what you would do with the puppies? I know of a rescue that can help.'

Or maybe you have the money and you say, "Hey, I'm willing to help pay for it. Can you bring her to the vet?" There's so much we can do, that doesn't necessarily involve fostering or trapping cats and doing TNR. You can just reach out to people you know and try to change their ideas about things. Try to help them get help. Because it's so much harder for a stranger to...

If you saw the video that the local news station did when I was going door to door, you saw the door slammed in my face. I'm just some random woman, walking up to a random house... And it wasn't random, the neighbor had called me and had alerted us to this chained dog having litters and litters. But if that neighbor maybe had spoken to their neighbor, they have a relationship with that person. Why just call this stranger in? You're going to have a much better chance at convincing your neighbor, your friend, your coworker, your family member, to maybe do the right thing. And maybe be part of that solution. That's that's my biggest advice.

I know a lot of rescues just say, "Oh, give us money, money, money." Well, I'm very proud to say, my rescue is pretty self-sustaining. We've got a pretty good business model. We apply for lots of grants. We have donors that support us and through our partnership with the rescues up north, we actually get reimbursed for the vetting that we do. Money, yes, is always great. But more important than money, is be part of the solution. Help change ideas. Helps stop the litters. Help stop the chaining.

I had a neighbor say, "I'm staring at this dog next door. These people are gone for weeks at a time and it's on a chain." Oh my goodness. "Go get that dog. Go get a dog house and put it over that dog." How can you just sit there and say, "Oh, there's this problem that I watch happening day after day."

Jacqueline Pinol:

I know. Thank you for saying that, Kerry. I know.

Kerry Fickling:

Go get a shelter and put it over the damn dog.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes.

Kerry Fickling:

It's crazy what people will just put up with and not stop and think, "Hey, I have the power to maybe do something." And you know what? I tell people every day, they're like, "Oh, well it's my neighbor's property." I would rather get a trespassing violation and save an animal, because then when it goes to court, I will say, "I will gladly take my trespassing fine. By the way, animal cruelty fine, right here. You can't fine me for trespassing, till you fine them for animal cruelty. And oh, by the way, that's a felony." I think the trespassing would be overlooked to try to correct the animal cruelty violation first. People have got to stop being afraid. It was like the whole smashing in the car window thing.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh yes. That was huge in California. But finally, now we can do it.

Kerry Fickling:

You can now do it. Because it's the right thing to do, people. And you know what? I'll pay for your damn window, if it meant I saved that dog. I could never go to sleep. Never could go to sleep, knowing that a dog that I could have saved, has died a horrible death, because I was afraid to pay \$100 to fix a broken window. I'll do it all day long. I don't have any problem with that.

Jacqueline Pinol:

You know what? It's for all of us to understand that we have to empower ourselves. Like you said, let's stop being afraid. There are so many resources and programs and people to reach out to. Like we talked about in this episode, social media is an amazing resource. I can look up anything and find help. Look, I found you and you gladly, you responded to my Facebook post, my message that one time when I said, "Hey, I want to help. I can do what you do. How do I do it?" You guided me and I was able to help a lot of dogs in Georgia. Thank you, Kerry. Thank you for your message. Thank you for all the work you do. Please let our listeners know where they can find and follow SOS Rescue on Facebook or Instagram.

Kerry Fickling:

Sure. Our website, which is www.sosrescuega.com all one word, sosrescuega.org, because we are a 501(C)(3). Then our Facebook page is [Facebook.com/SOSRescueGA](https://www.facebook.com/SOSRescueGA). Our Facebook page is definitely where we post so much more of what we're doing, our plight with getting our clinic up and running. That story's on there. Anytime we offer, like sometimes we'll get a special grant to do TNR or to do spays or things like that, I post it on there so that people can share it, and hopefully we can help end some unwanted litters.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Absolutely. For my listeners, I will have all those live links in the show notes for this episode, so you can just scroll down and easily click and follow SOS Rescue in Georgia. Our listeners should also know, that I am not getting paid to advocate for any one person or organization on this podcast. I choose to interview guests from organizations that I know are doing the good work for dogs and for people across America. Kerry Fickling and SOS Rescue, have the Canine Condition seal of approval from me.

Kerry Fickling:

Thank you.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh gosh, thank you. You do so much, for so many. I really hope my listeners will go to your Facebook page and see all these adorable, beautiful dogs, that will no longer be homeless, thanks to you, and that they will find forever homes.

Kerry Fickling:

Well, and I'd like to say, here's somebody in California, who's not even here in Georgia and look how much you've done to help animals in Georgia and across the country. When people look at me and say, "What could I possibly do?" There's this crazy lady in California, doing so much. You can do a lot. You can do a lot. People just need to take the initiative. Thank you, Jackie, for always being so just involved in the plight of animals. I appreciate it greatly. So do the animals.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes. Thank you. We're a team. I'd like to think I'm just a small part of the team and we need more people on board. To my listeners, come and join this mission. You can do so much. Like Kerry said, you don't have to foster or adopt, just educate.

Kerry Fickling:

Yes.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Thank you, Kerry. Take care.

Kerry Fickling:

Thanks, Jackie. Bye-bye.

Jacqueline Pinol:

This conversation with Kerry, should make us all feel empowered. There are so many of us wanting the safety and proper care of our canine and feline companions. Let's not be afraid to speak up and share information with people around us. When something doesn't look right or feel right to you, listen to that voice in you and take action. The smallest of gestures can help save and improve lives. And not just for canines, but sometimes for humans too. Help and support is out there. We just have to look for it.

I leave you with this quote from animal welfare advocate and author, Karen Davison, "Saving one dog, will not change the world. But surely for that one dog, the world will change forever." And surely, Kerry Fickling, has proven that quote to be true for 6,000 plus dogs and counting. Thank you for joining me on this episode. Please press subscribe on our podcast and tell your dog loving friends about it. Until next time, hang on to those leashes.

The Canine Condition. Come, sit, stay.