

**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.

Do you believe in second chances? When was the last time you got one? Did you feel you deserved it or did you just get lucky? I feel that every moment in life is a second chance. The passage of time creates opportunities for us to have a redo or take a shot at something for the first time or the 10th time. And how do we gauge if and when others deserve a second chance? Well, humans can advocate for themselves and present evidence or proof of why they deserve another opportunity. Therefore, it's easier to determine how we go about granting it, but what if those others needing a second chance are canine?

What happens when our loyal canine companions find themselves in a perilous situation and need us humans to be their voice or no second chance will exist? Do we turn our back because it's not our problem or do we feel bad on the inside but we keep going about our merry way and hope that somebody else will do something about it? How bad does it have to get for these innocent sentient beings, for us to take action and be a part of their second chance? Because I don't think you'll disagree with me when I say that our canine companions all deserve a second chance.

If you are not one to look away and leave it to the next guy, and you want to know how and who you can help, you'll want to start by getting in touch with my guest on the podcast today. It is a pleasure to introduce you to Denise Diaz, the Director of Operations of New York City Second Chance Rescue. This nonprofit rescue organization aims to reduce animal overpopulation in shelters with a focus on rehabilitating the critically-injured and deeply neglected. The rescue leverages all possible paths to healing according to each pet's specific needs while raising awareness about animal equality, adoption, education and animal rights and welfare.

The volunteers and staff of New York City Second Chance Rescue consider themselves ordinary people taking extraordinary measures to save thousands of treasured pets. Hi Denise, welcome to the podcast.

**Denise Diaz:**

Hey, how are you doing Jacqui?

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Very good. It's so good to have you here and to get a chance to talk about New York City Second Chance Rescue. So let's start with you telling us a little bit about Second Chance. How was Second Chance Rescue founded and why?

**Denise Diaz:**

All right. Well, Second Chance Rescue, we've been official since 2009, we were incorporated into a nonprofit charity. Our president Jennifer Brooks, she's been doing rescue since she was in high school so she started off with TNR for cats in the community and then she learned that and this is late '90s, early, 2000, then she learned that dogs are being euthanized in the city shelters and right where she lived and that really spoke to her and she decided to start a rescue, did it independently for a while and then 2009, blossomed and was created Second Chance Rescue New York City dogs to help the shelter dogs of New York City and cats.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Okay. When you mentioned TNR, I'm not familiar with the term. Could you explain that to us?

**Denise Diaz:**

Trap, neuter, spay and release for feral cats in the communities like there's tons of feral cat colonies all over the city. In Queens, in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Bronx, lots of feral cats that can't necessarily be homed because they're feral and they can't be domesticated. So but in order to stop them from reproducing more cats on the street, it's a spay-neuter initiative.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh, okay. And now that you mentioned it that way, I have heard of those initiatives in the south. So she started it because she was seeing that there was a large number of dogs being euthanized. How do the dogs in such a big city ... How did they get there? Why are there so many dogs in New York City shelters?

**Denise Diaz:**

For various reasons, and we can touch on a timeline about this. Reasons that we see for owner surrendering animals here in the city, in the northeast here, in New York City could be housing issues, landlord doesn't want them or they're moving to a building with breed specific or size regulations. The animal gets sick and people don't have the money to care for them, and are not seeking other resources to raise those funds. A squabble in the home, the animal never received any training. Now they had a baby and the dog is being protective or territorial with the baby or other animals and yeah, but I would say number one issue is probably moving or housing issues.

And that list used to be ginormous 10 years ago, it would be 50 to 60 dogs and then the cats, that list was even bigger. In the past few years, being that there's now more education out there and way more rescue groups as new hope partners with the NYACC, that list is usually down to about one to three animals a day, if that one to three dogs a day, that's usually for behavior issues or quality of life like the animal is very, very sick and humane euthanasia might be the best alternative.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And what is Hope Partners?

**Denise Diaz:**

So the New York City Animal Care and Control has a program called New Hope Partners where only approved rescues with a shelter can pull. So you can't be some new rescue or older rescue that hasn't applied with them. The shelter has to do their due diligence and run your paperwork, do the background check on the organization and make sure that it's a partner that qualifies as a group with the abilities to meet the needs for these animals safely, legally, mindfully. Some may slip through the cracks in a lot of shelters, but that's what they call is the new hope program.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh, that's really cool. I actually hadn't heard of that, but I like it. It's like another vetting process to make sure that they are 501(c)(3) licensed rescues doing right by the animals, right?

**Denise Diaz:**

Exactly. And I think as of now, there's over 200 approved New Hope Partners with the Animal Care and Control Centers of New York City.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Okay, awesome. And what is your role with Second Chance Rescue? What was it in you that made you say, "I need to get involved, I have to help."

**Denise Diaz:**

My role is I am now the Director of Operations as of about 2.5 years ago. I've been volunteering with non for profits for probably about 15 years, Planned Parenthood of America, the Achilles running group as a guide for blind runners, Food Bank for New York City and those were always causes that were near and dear to my heart, but they didn't fill some void that really struck passionately with me and my heart. I've always been an animal lover and then one day I was at work, I used to own a restaurant, and I was new on Facebook and then suddenly I see something in my newsfeed and it said, "To be destroyed." And it was a list and pictures of these beautiful dogs in New York City and it was a kill list.

And you had until noon the next day to save that dog. And I felt this overwhelming feeling of guilt like, "How did I not know this that in these shelters right in my backyard that animals were getting killed?" And I've always been a dog owner and I have two cats at home and I'm like, "Why don't I have a dog? I need to go get a dog right now." So eventually, I adopted a dog and she was part of a huge story I didn't know about at the time. If you Google Bronx fire pit bulls. My dog was one of them 2011 in New York City and then I started following rescues and I started following Second Chance Rescue New York City dogs and then I have signed up to volunteer as an emergency transport driver, that was at the end of 2013, beginning of 2014.

So Jen, the President, myself and then Kelsey who also started as a volunteer back then who's now our Director of Partnerships were the only three people driving around all of our animals. So to adopters, to meet and greets, to fosters, to the ER, to training, vet appointments and then that evolved into and I was helping Jen do adoption events handling the animals, then that evolved into then I started running the social media with Jen and then that evolved into then me pulling, being our Texas liaison for our shelter programs there and then I took over as the Director of Operations in 2018. But with Second Chance, I had finally found that charity that I was able to be of service to that really just checked off the boxes and really completed me.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yes, because in this cause you're helping people, you're helping dogs and it's filling something that speaks to you.

**Denise Diaz:**

It's my life across the board. I love helping animals.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yeah, yeah, I don't blame you, that's why we're here, right?

**Denise Diaz:**

Absolutely.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yeah. And in the years that I have known about Second Chance Rescue and for our listeners, I will share that I met some of the volunteers and Second Chance Dogs when I was filming the documentary portion of The Canine Condition, and I have noticed Denise that Second Chance Rescue saves some really critical cases, lots of injuries, things that I sometimes can't even look at the pictures because it's tough, but you

guys are always very transparent, not just with video or pictures and details, how are you able to save these critical medical cases and where do they come from?

**Denise Diaz:**

I love that you asked that because that's always been my primary role since 2015. A lot of these cases that you see posted from Georgia or Texas, I'm the one that's actually managing, pulling them and posting them. And we have a role in our rescue which is if you pull the dog, and you handle the medical care, you're the one that has to present the case to the public, to our supporters, to our donors because it's this authentic, you're in it with this animal. So when Jen started the rescue, it was just to help dogs off the kill list, but she quickly gained a reputation for having a very mindful rescue that was doing a great job and then we would fundraise for a lot of these minor cases, and would hit the goal to provide for these animals pretty easily.

So then shelters I think started noticing that while Second Chance Rescue is getting this big following, they have no issue fundraising because of these supporters, we're getting these train wreck cases where a lot of the shelter vets are reviewing them and they know that these are \$10,000 dogs, meaning that a minimum that this dog is going to cost \$10,000. And a lot of rescues, a bill like that can break them, especially the smaller rescues. So they're apprehensive, they can't bite off more than they can chew. If they are pulling this animal that they think is only going to cost them \$1,000 in care, but some animals can actually cost up to \$20,000, it could level a rescue.

So we started getting tagged a lot on these crazy cases even to the point where some weeks I was like, "Can we just get tagged on healthy dogs because these are really out of control?" And we started gaining a lot of medical knowledge throughout the years. We have dogs that were born without ... Forgive me for getting a little graphic, without an anus, and most rescues would euthanize. We actually have a surgeon that did a 100% clean job. The dog has no abnormal deficits and this puppy was given a second chance because now she has a butt hole and she's older than her anus.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh my gosh. So sweet.

**Denise Diaz:**

So we've learned a lot of ... We had a lot of these landmark cases which after a while, you get a groove and then you start to love them because you're like, "Wow, our rescue has managed to pull off giving this dog who everyone thought had zero chance was better off being euthanized. One year old, happy, sweet, kind, dog deserves these chances." So we get tagged on a lot of those and because we're using that donor money where it's supposed to be going and we're showing you what that result is.

We were tagged on a dog with dinosaur pajamas rocket in Texas. He had so many fractures and I'm reading the medical, I'm like, "That's a \$12,000 dog. No local rescue is going to pull this dog." And I'm sitting there, I'm watching and I'm waiting because our caseload was so high and I'm like, "Someone, please pull this dog." It's not even a pitbull, someone pulled the dog and then it came to euth date and I said, "No one's going to pull the dog like we suspected." I said, "We'll help him out." And he ended up costing us \$12,000 which thankfully again, our supporters came to bat and we were able to fix all of his orthopedic issues and he lives like a 100% normal, healthy dog as if it never happened in Brooklyn, and they just welcomed a new baby into the home and he absolutely adores them.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

That's just awesome to hear. This might be a rhetorical question, but since you are familiar day in and day out with critically injured, abused or neglected cases of dogs, let's talk about the human condition. In your opinion, where have we gone wrong?

**Denise Diaz:**

Mindfulness I think, a vast majority of the country still doesn't view dogs and cats as sentient beings. They have feelings, they should be handled mindfully, they should be treated with dignity and consideration. A lot of the southern states especially the deep south view these dogs as property, not family members, there's no laws, there's no legislation in place to protect these animals, it's more to protect the person. So a lot of these counties in the southern towns or southern states rather lack of leash laws, it's okay to chain your animal outside as long as you have a bowl of water out there or a covering sheltering which that could mean, "Okay, the bowl of water is out there, but it's been out there for two weeks and it's brown."

The sheltering could mean the shade of a tree branch. So until people are held accountable, this isn't going to change much. We had a case that we picked up a dog Cannon in Georgia in February, at the end of February and this dog had gone I'm hit by a truck and this was on a highway, we happened to catch it right when it happened and he's just laying there and cars are blazing past him, not picking him up.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Nobody stops? Oh my goodness.

**Denise Diaz:**

Nobody stops. So our Director of Adoptions was in the car with me and she said, she gasped, she said, "Denise, look." And I was like, "Oh my God." And so we threw the car on the other side of the divider and closed down the highway, and started telling trucks to stop and then we leash the dog up and he was so desperate and so sweet and we got him in the car and you could tell he was a good dog, and he was only a year old. And that's all we saw during that trip is just the bodies of dead dogs and cats all over the sides of the road, there was no flyers from people looking for their dog, not one, not one flyer anywhere in the 20 square miles that I covered in that trip for five days.

There's no one picking up those bodies and the bottom line is no one was looking for him. No one cared and we had to still do a stray hold on him and I was confident I was going to come forward. The reason and they've tried to push leash laws in that particular county, and the commissioner actually lives behind our director of adoptions, and he wouldn't pass the bill because he very, in my opinion, these commissioners, they know that they're going to have to ticket their own friends because everybody's doing it, everyone's letting their dogs out, so no one's going to be held accountable.

So I think that's where the human condition is going wrong is they're not viewing these animals as something worth fighting for, or loving the way that they're correctly supposed to be loved and that involves treating them humanely, making sure that they get top notch vet care, making sure that they're safe. It's not only about providing for your dog, but it's also keeping them safe, that is a loving owner. Not just petting them, hugging them, there's so much more that comes with love.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And like your motto says, because they matter.

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah, they matter. And then I wanted to touch on what you had mentioned about our social media, some of the stuff we post, yes, I know it's graphic, I'm the one posting the majority of it and writing the majority of it. And the reason I keep pushing that envelope is this needs to be transparent and a lot of people just like myself in 2013 don't know what's happening in their own backyard. And I know a handful of folks get on those posts and say, "I don't want to see this. Why are you showing it?" I don't want to see it either and until it stops, we're going to continue showing it because unfortunately, this is a way that we have to bring awareness to the situation.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Right, take off the blinders.

**Denise Diaz:**

Take off the blinders and it's not the same as if we did not provide a picture or a video, how much does this really going to hit home for people? If we just wrote a post and then have these pictures and videos, are you really going to understand what we're seeing or are you going to look at these videos and put your cowboy hat on and and really understand the emotions that these animals are feeling.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Right. Or if you only show the cute, fuzzy, heeled and adoptable dog at the very end, then people don't really know where did he come from or she come from?

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah, and these dogs, they're all individuals. Every single one of them is an individual just like a person is. They shouldn't be viewed in groups or clusters or letters. They're all individuals, they all have different personalities and they all have different feelings.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And let me ask you, I know that the rescue had started off saving dogs from New York City shelters, but now you take in cases from these other states. Tell us why you're called upon to help in these other states now other than obviously because you can raise funds, but now you have people coming to you specifically knowing, "Hey, let's reach out to second chance rescue." Why aren't these other states helping their own dogs?

**Denise Diaz:**

Well, as far as them reaching out to Second Chance Rescue is again, our President Jennifer Brooks, her philosophy, she will help any dog in need especially in the earlier days when as a rescue, you get us personally via her getting texted or private messaged or DM'ed or me or the rescue email or our social media messages. We get asked 300 times a day to rescue animals. So I think that with Jen building this strong reputation and being known to be someone that will help any animal, her number and her email got spread all across the land and people are not bashful in asking her for help and she will find a way.

If it's a state we haven't worked in before, Jen will find a way to get that animal help. And again, I think we're now with her over 10 years into the game of rescue, she can easily find local people to help assist us in acquiring that dog and collecting it and bring it to local vet or putting it on transport. A lot of our shelter partners reach out to us with big lists. For example, we have one shelter Tifton who I love working with. Rural shelter, grossly underfunded and this one volunteer, she has a day job and she goes there late at night. She'll be there till midnight, one o'clock in the morning and she has a family and she

goes to temperament test as many dogs that she possibly can to see if they're good with cats, they're good with dogs and then she reaches out to 20 groups like, "Here, I think you guys would like these dogs and here are all their tests. Look, they're a good dog. I even put my hand in their food while they were eating."

She goes beyond and a lot of these shelters tell us the same thing. "Can you take these dogs? I don't want them being readopted out in this area. People around here don't care about these dogs. You guys find them nice homes, can we please send them up north to you?" That is a consistent sentence that comes out of several of our shelter partners. And again, the south is so grossly overpopulated with stray animals, and we don't have an overpopulation issue in New York City with strays.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Right. It breaks my heart. And it's hard because I've been in the south when I started shooting the documentary part of this series, and I did pick up quite a few of my journey. I have four from Georgia now, they are my personal dogs. So I feel you.

**Denise Diaz:**

Georgia has some great dogs man, let me tell you.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

They do, they are the best. So we want to just spread the message of do we need more education, more resources in Georgia, but like you said, with the laws, when the laws don't stand behind the movement, or the people trying to make a difference, then we have no leg to stand on.

**Denise Diaz:**

Exactly.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And at the end of the day, it just sucks because you say to yourself, "Well, if the law is not going to back me up, no matter what I do, I've got to let this dog live in these conditions or be in this situation because the law says he can't."

**Denise Diaz:**

Your hands are tied. And meanwhile, they don't realize that they just passed that law and they look past their friends getting angry at them because they're the ones breaking these laws. The money you're bringing in for those citations, you could be using to improve your shelters and education in the community. Some of these shelters don't have ACOs to go ... Animal Control officers to go pick up the dead bodies or stray dogs. So it's like the cycle continues, but you're not starting from the beginning where all you have to do is pass these laws, give these minor citations out which add up and then that could just make such a vast improvement. And again, providing more Animal Control Officers out there, getting these dogs off the street, improving shelter conditions, educating the community.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Right. Or empowering the community to feel like hey, because there's a small town in Georgia named Ellaville, Georgia. We've been there many times. Three of my dogs are from those areas. There is like you said no animal control officer, there isn't a shelter even within that little town, tons of strays and people actually go there to dump dogs from other counties because they know nobody will pick them up there. Have you encountered that in smaller towns in the south?

**Denise Diaz:**

Absolutely. All the time, all the time. It's not just a one-off in that particular demographic, it's all over the place.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Texas also I've noticed, Texas needs a lot of help. I think some of the worst cases I've seen just visually across social media have come from Texas, it just breaks me to know that because they have so much open land and also their weather can be so extreme in the heat, I see these abandoned dogs and they need so much help, but Texas being such a big state and with so much money, why don't they have I guess more New York Second Chance Rescues out there.

**Denise Diaz:**

They do have shelter partners affiliated that are from New York City.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Does it have to do with the laws there more as well?

**Denise Diaz:**

With other rescues getting involved, no. I think it has to do with a lot of rescue politics and also transportation. The reason that we're able to save so many in Texas right now is because we've partnered up with Dallas Pets Alive and we use their approved foster pool.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh, okay.

**Denise Diaz:**

That's why it's so easy now for us to ... These are approved fosters, I'm in private message with a group of these 12 amazing women who we pull these dogs and this is where they're going to after the hospital and they take such wonderful care of our animals. In the south, it's a whole different mentality. Some of my favorite fosters and Second Chance rescue are actually through DPA. So for me to comfortably start pulling a ton of dogs there, there were so many boxes to check off. We had to set up a ton of vet accounts with rescue discounts.

So we have to send them all the approval certifications, the 501, the tax exempt documents and stuff and then hope that they can take on another rescue partner because again, they have a ton of local rescues that are also asking for the same discount. We have to have transport team in place, we have to have a transport company that will grab a great approved, no bad record, safe transport company because there's plenty of horrible ones out there. So you've got to do your research and make sure that whoever's transporting your animals is just as squared away as you are. So there's a lot of moving pieces to be able to establish a safe, mindful, legal operation in a state where you're not physically in.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Right. And I'm glad that you mentioned fosters because without the fosters-

**Denise Diaz:**

They do the hard work. That's my opinion, they definitely do the hard work. Fosters are the lifeblood of any organization and we are so blessed to have the best fosters. They're really incredible. You can just



tell how much they love the dogs. They go pick them up from the shelter, they take them to the hospital, then they pick them up from the hospital, and they go out to go get their medications. They decompress them, they socialize them, train them, give us behavior profile so we can start matching them here for adoptions and then eventually, we put them on transport.

We have three transport companies that we currently use that are really wonderful as well and we've been using them for several years. So yeah, a lot of moving parts. The the south certainly welcomes any northern rescue to help alleviate the population issue over there, but you have to know who you're "getting in bed with." There's a lot of scummy rescues out there too and that's why you just have to make sure you have all the boxes checked out before you start just randomly pulling animals, you have to know your people, you have to know where you're putting them, you have to walk into those vet's office and make sure you feel comfortable with these vets. I've been to Texas several times, I lived there for a year.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Good. No, that's important. That's the transparency part that I love too is that if anyone and the reason I want to put this message out in the form of a podcast as well because to anyone listening who doesn't know who they can trust, who they can go to, where they can send their money, that it's going to actually make a difference. Well, here's another wonderful place, New York City Second Chance Rescue, you will see where your donation goes or if people want to apply to volunteer or become a foster, is that another possibility for you guys to get applications that way?

**Denise Diaz:**

Absolutely. I'm so happy you brought that up Jackie. We always need volunteers. We always need fosters. Right now and a lot of rescues go through this. We're having a drought on fosters that can accommodate dogs over 40 pounds. Everyone's wanting the smaller dogs, everyone's wanting the puppies, those we have a ton of great fosters for and still continue to process applications that were a little behind on the smaller breeds or the puppies, but it's the larger dogs that we definitely need fosters all the time. That floodgate is open for anyone to apply at our website at [nycsecondchancerescue.org](http://nycsecondchancerescue.org), fill out the foster application.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And if it can only be temporary, I know that fostering scares a lot of people because they feel like it's such a big commitment. But what if somebody can do it for a month or six weeks?

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah, absolutely. We do require a minimum of a month in a lot of situations. But yeah, we'll take any help we can get. Same thing goes for volunteer opportunities. We have several-

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Do not be shy people, reach out.

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah. In order for us to grow, we've got to keep growing the team of incredible volunteers that we have, we know there's a lot of folks out there that are looking to contribute back to society and love animals and they can't foster or they can't donate, well, then volunteer your time, we'll welcome you. One of our biggest needs is transporters, especially for emergencies, especially during the day, especially around

New York City, that's our number one need. We always need help in our events department as well, we need volunteers for foster counselors and adoption counselors.

Those are some tough jobs in our rescue too. The adoption counselor, you are taking that one dog's journey and you are closing it out at the finish line, you've got to be the person that puts this dog, gives them that best forever home. That's a lot of pressure and that's a difficult job. Being an adoption and a foster counselor, it's a lot of dedication. We do require a minimum of 10 hours a week for those specific roles. For the volunteer transport drivers, you can do one to two hours a week.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Any little bit helps.

**Denise Diaz:**

Absolutely.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

So it's just about finding where you fit in, where you can give your time, any type of volunteering will help.

**Denise Diaz:**

Absolutely. We have a volunteer coordinator who after they approve your application to volunteer and sets up an interview call and says, "All right, I see you applied for this task, and what do you think about these?" There's a conversation to be had that we're making sure that we're just not throwing people in places that they might have not necessarily wanted to volunteer in or they actually might not be a good fit for that and didn't know that this was another volunteer opportunity.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Okay. Oh, yeah. I love that. Let me ask you this. So a rescue to rehabilitate a dog to me is not damaged goods, but I still meet people who are fixated on getting dogs from breeders for fear that they don't know what they're getting if they get a rescue dog. Can you tell us a story or I'm sure you have many stories where a dog that you save debunked that myth and proved that a second chance is worth every effort and brings years of happiness and love to a family.

**Denise Diaz:**

I can probably give you over a thousand examples, but I'll start off by saying my own dog is a black pitbull. She's now a senior, but she's a lot more different than when I had first gotten her, and she was actually a return, but we'll get into that. So she's a black pitbull. I never had a large dog in my life. Again, as I said in the beginning of this awesome podcast, I love animals and at the time, only had two cats, two rescue cats that I adopted from my vet who they were strays.

So when I was looking, when I couldn't believe that they were killing animals in my own backyard, I came across ... I ended up telling a couple friends that I ended up finding out did volunteer in rescues at the time and I said, "I'm looking for a pitbull." I said, "All she has to do ..." I said, "I would like a black one and she just has to be good with cats. That's it. That's all." So they were like, "Actually, we have this dog being returned into our rescue right now and she's a phenomenal dog, you will really love her." I said, "Great, I'll adopt her."

And I guess I'm what you would have called a unicorn adopter at the time because I was willing to adopt the dog sight unseen, might not have been the most educated thing. So she was being returned from a family who was great and they had cats, a chihuahua and a toddler because she kept spite peeing in their bed when they had people over.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh my goodness.

**Denise Diaz:**

So and that didn't bother me because I'm like, "Well, maybe she needs some training. And I've never trained a dog before, but I'm very dedicated and I'll get her some training and this will be good." So I immediately adopted her. She was three years old at the time and she was used for breeding from a dog fighter. He had 14 pitbulls in his basement and this huge fire had erupted in his apartment, in his studio apartment while he was at work. My guess is that my dog probably started the fire because she breaks out of her crate and she was the only one not crated and her babies were there too.

So the other dogs were used for dog fighting the other adults and then she was being used to produce litter after litter. So the ACC and the fire department came and assisted with the removal of all 14 dogs. Some of them didn't make it, she was treated for smoke inhalation I think at the ASPCA. Then she was put on the kill list. My dog is a beginner-rated dog. If I locked this dog in a closet with a kitten, a child and a dog, she's not going to do anything to them and I know my dog.

As a dog owner, it's your responsibility to really know your dog. So I put her through all this training when I first got her, but she ended up being exactly the same. Because training isn't pennies in the bank, you have to train your animal. None of them come plug and play. Well, she actually get just did. She ended up becoming a hospital therapy dog. She also ended up becoming the pitbull ambassador for Second Chance Rescue New York City dogs and we used her at every single event when we were doing humane education for three years in the New York City Schools. She was the dog that we bought there to do the humane education with five year old to 13 year olds.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh my goodness, I love it.

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah, and she never spite peed in my house. We always went running in the woods every afternoon, Saxon Woods in White Plains and I gave her direction in what she needed, then she didn't need much at all, so.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

What's her name?

**Denise Diaz:**

Her name is Mama.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Mama. Oh, that's so sweet.

**Denise Diaz:**

And her face is now gray and she's my life partner. And to me, an example like her debunks that myth of I couldn't buy a dog like this from a breeder. Mama is an incredible dog who is just so gentle-spirited, so well-behaved, such a kind, gentle animal. So that's one. Occasionally, the shelters who have us rescuing all these pitfalls and other medical dogs will say, "Hey Second Chance. Thanks so much for helping us with these tough cases. Would you like these mini poodles?" Miniature little poodles was my new ... My new obsession are miniature poodles.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh my goodness.

**Denise Diaz:**

And I'm like, "Sure I'll take some mini poodles." We call them bomb poodles because they're so solid. So we do end up getting these breeds several times a year, dozens of these, maybe close to 100 of these designer breeds whether they're Yorkies or Maltese or Maltipoo. We don't go sourcing them, the shelter just says, "Thank you for taking all these tough cases. Here's our gift to you so you can have these highly adoptable animals." We do come across them and we recently adopted out one that was running loose in the bluff in Atlanta which is a tough neighborhood. An apricot miniature poodle, one years old, no behavior issues, adopt them out to an awesome couple in Brooklyn.

His name is Zoodle the Poodle, and he's perfect. She sends us Instagram updates probably two times a day. She's like, "He can sit, paw, he's potty trained, he loves other dogs, he's already rocking out at the dog park, loves our cat, sleeps through the night." You don't have to go to a breeder to find a great animal, rescues have them. We've known people who have bought dogs from breeders where it's been the opposite, they've had aggression issues so I think it goes hand in hand. Dogs are individuals and I don't think it really matters whether you get them from a shelter or a breeder, regardless 99% of dogs do need training and that's really what it comes down to is how much you're going to invest as an owner in order for a dog to behave, "appropriately." They seek guidance and direction from their owners. If you don't give them that, they don't want the responsibility of being in charge and that's when things go downhill.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

They don't know what to do, but they have to figure something out. So then you're right, they start trying to figure it out, but then we see that as acting up or not listening.

**Denise Diaz:**

Exactly.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And I'm glad you brought that up because I noticed that your website has this wonderful section called decompression and I honestly wish that page, I read it from top to bottom. I wish it was a Bible to every dog adopter in the country, can you share with our listeners what this decompression means and why it is crucial information for every dog adopter in order to set themselves and their newly adopted dogs up for success?

**Denise Diaz:**

Absolutely. Before I get into the decompression, I do want to add that we are reconstructing our website and one of the things that we're reconstructing on it is that now, if you want to adopt a dog from Second

Chance Rescue New York City dogs, we do require upfront at the time of contract \$100 refundable training deposit and you have 60 days to get it back. We want to give it back to you. Second Chance Rescue, we take back all of our animals that they get returned. And if we adopt out, we adopt out a little bit over a thousand animals a year and less than 1% come back.

And usually the ones that come back, it's because they had zero training. We don't want to see these dogs come back. It's so heartbreaking to see an animal in a house for seven or eight years. You gave them no training and now they're under socialize and you want us to immediately put them in a home and not at our small rescue shelter, it's very heartbreaking. So I thought, "Let's get ahead of the problem. Let's make them do a training deposit." And again, we want to give you back this money, we've got a list, we got a spreadsheet, we've got your name and who to mail that check out to.

And so if you provide to us proof of training, positive reinforcement, we also have little terms and conditions on what we define as acceptable, appropriate training in less than 60 days, we give you that back in less than a week because we're trying to tell you that dogs aren't plug and play.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

I love that. I love that you've said that term. I've never heard it and I'm I'm going to have to use it from now on because so many people expect that, not just upon adoption. But if they're fixated on buying, they think they're just going to buy the perfect little puppy and plug and play.

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah, yeah, so that's now creating the segue into the whole decompression. So dogs aren't plug and play. And dogs are familiar with their own territory of what they are known, what they're used to, then when we transport them, or put them into a home, whether it's a foster home or adoption, this is really sensory overload for these guys. The smells are different, the sights are different, they don't know what's going on. They're super confused. So they require a decompression period for the first couple of weeks.

Some dogs might take longer, some dogs might take a little less, but usually we require a minimum of two weeks decompression for when a dog first arrives to your home. It's imperative that this time is utilized to help the animal adjust into their own home environment and it'll make or break that relationship in the beginning in a lot of these cases. People don't realize how crucial it is and we just want folks setting up the animals for success. What we don't want to see is and I'll give an example again.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Please, yes, examples are good because then it's based on experience that if something has happened, how to prevent it if it didn't go well with that experience.

**Denise Diaz:**

Right, and especially when you've got resident dogs involved. There's a there's a lot at stake here. We want to make sure this is a safe and happy process, not only for the adopter, but for the dog that you're responsible for now that we're giving you, that we're trusting you to do the right thing and keep safe, but also for your resident animals. We love dogs and cats. We don't want to see anybody get hurt and if you don't do the decompression right, that could very well happen.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And if you don't mind, I've just wanted to interrupt you for a moment because I know a lot of people when we were talking about fostering, you were saying there's that month requirement. I find that to be so important and why I say to people, "Please adopt from a foster-based rescue." If other types of

facilities make you uncomfortable, people don't want to sometimes adopt from a shelter. So I say, "Fine, go to a foster-based rescue because you've already had the dog in a home fostered and that foster has helped start the decompression process." Right?

**Denise Diaz:**

Right. Right. But then again, you change the environment. So the foster has helped start the decompression process in the regard and yeah, I'm going to agree with you 100% on this. You already know what kind of food they like, what they don't like. You already know that they're crate trained. So you've got a lot of stuff to start on a baseline about, the crate training, do they sleep through the night, where do they sleep at night, what kind of food they like, what don't they like, what are they allergic to, do they bark in the home so it might not be suitable for apartment placing and things like that.

So yeah, it's always best to adopt from a foster-based rescue, but also, there are ... For example, we have a Georgia vet, Dr. Terry. You can't transport an animal across straight lines less than two weeks out of a shelter. It's just-

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Not safe.

**Denise Diaz:**

It's not safe, you're putting other animals in danger on that truck, they could break with a URI, upper respiratory infection, kennel cough, parvo, distemper. So it's like a quarantine period, and also medical discovery. So we have a lot of our dogs at Dr. Terry's that we pull from different shelters in the area, a few here and there come up as strays that will do the stray hold on before we can adopt them out and they'll spend about three to four weeks with her. So we actually do get a lot of knowledge from her. Is it the same as a home environment? No, but it's better than going from shelter to adopter.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

So you were saying when the environment changes with the decompression, it's important to still think even though it comes from a foster home, we're starting the process again in a different environment as an adopter?

**Denise Diaz:**

Right. Because again, sensory overload, different smells, different people, different variables. Did the old foster home have children? Did the old foster home have dogs and cats? What is this new home like? Is it in the city? Is it in the suburbs. So many different variables, no foster home is exactly the same as an adopter home. So many people don't realize that this takes time and cannot be rushed, especially when introducing to other animals as well. You don't want fights erupting over food, you don't want anybody being claimed, anyone being territorial.

So the resident dogs need as much decompression to acclimate to these newer dogs and vice versa. So they should always be met outside on neutral territory, keep their world small, the rescue pet in the beginning, keep them in a crate or behind a gate for the first couple of weeks, short, brief walks, and then start adding to that process, adding a couple more minutes every single day and then eventually, those gates come down and then supervise play time. Never, ever leave your animals alone if you're not home, that is one of the most devastating things you can ever go through is-

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Come home to a disaster.

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah, and some of them can be life-ending and life-altering. And that's the whole goal here is adopters have a responsibility. As a pet owner, you have a responsibility to keep your animal safe. And keeping an animal safe is making sure that no one can be hurt, secure your garbage. It took me a year to really know my dog before I felt comfortable leaving her out loose with my hospice little cancer Muppet that I had for four years. And again, they end up getting along really well. But dogs change, the hierarchy changes also when you add a child or a new birth or a new animal, the pack dynamic can change.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

It's like having a child. They grow, they change. So you have to adapt to those different stages of their life.

**Denise Diaz:**

Right. My little cancer Muppet, when I first got her, she was very sick and she was the lowest on the totem pole and she always kept her head down and looked down, was very unassuming. After having her by the second year, yes, she was in hospice for that long because she kept kicking cancer's butt, she ended up being the pack leader, the thunderous Muppet. She ended up being the one that was in charge, but she wasn't aggressive. She was just the top of the pecking order. She put herself there, but it was again proof that every three months, every six months, every year, that dynamic can change.

And one of the most alarming things that I find, especially in the New York City streets, especially with dog parks who I will not attend. I've had a couple of situations my dog being attacked at a dog park when I first got her and I learned very quickly like, "Maybe this isn't a good idea." Is a lot of people think they know their dog. And in reality, they don't. That is a huge problem. So you'll see a woman adopt a pitbull or whatever kind of dog and they think that socializing them after they just adopted them or got them from the shelters, bringing them to the dog park. "Oh no, that's the worst idea in the world. You don't know your dog yet." And just because she's kissing you and loving you in your home and licking your face doesn't mean that she's going to be like that with all people or all dogs.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Or that she's ready.

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah, usually when you see a dog fight happen on the street or a dog park and the owner says, the first thing the owner says, "But she's never done that before." "Well, she never did that before because you don't know your dog and you haven't had heard that long." So that to me is something that needs to be pressed on educationally more and more is how well do you know your dog? Because if you don't, you're going to end up having another animal get hurt and that's a very serious thing.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Right. And I'm glad you touched upon, you just reminded me that you said crate your dog especially when they first come into your home. A lot of people feel bad, they don't want to crate. I learned with my first dog because she was a 67 pound pitbull Great Dane, the first one I adopted, I had to crate her. And it was for sleeping, for eating, for treats and eventually, I'm leaving the crate door open and she's going in and out of that like it's her bedroom. She loved it.

**Denise Diaz:**

You created a safe space for her.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yeah, and I wish more people would trust that advice that creating is a positive as long as you use the crate for positive.

**Denise Diaz:**

Exactly, not as a punishment. And that's again, another misconception, Jacqui that a lot of people have is and I have a brash personality type sometimes. I would joke around, I'd say, "I'm going to make a T-shirt and I'm going to give it to everybody and it's going to say, but I feel bad, kill my dog is the reality." We're just asking you to crate your dog. If you create a positive association with a crate, you'll be good to go. What that does is you're keeping your animal safe when you're not home, they could be getting into the garbage, they could be getting a foreign object, they could be getting some poison, they could be eating your shoe or if they have lack of enrichment and exercise, they're going to be tearing stuff up and again, this goes with a breeder dog as well.

If you don't give your dog enrichment, plenty of exercise, they're going to be tearing stuff up which could lead to a foreign object. Dogs can smell 1,000 times stronger than humans can. My dog can it can break into four child locks to get the garbage from under my sink.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh my gosh.

**Denise Diaz:**

So when I leave the house, I lock my garbage in the bathroom, but and the other reason for crating again is you don't want this dog fight to happen when you're not home. No one wants to sit there and be out to dinner hoping that things are okay at home. It's like, "Make sure things are okay at home, put your dog in a crate."

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Give them that comfort and that safety that the crate is a happy place and that you'll be back.

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah. Give them a Nylabone Dura Chew, those things are indestructible. They can't get them as foreign objects, feed them their dinner in a frozen kong, give them something to do in the crate. It's also enrichment, makes them work for it.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

All wonderful, great tips and not just for adopters or people thinking to get a dog from a rescue, but also to current dog owners because we forget, we get comfortable, we think, "Oh, we've had our dogs for many years, but accidents can happen so."

**Denise Diaz:**

Stay vigilant. It's like having a baby. Stay vigilant.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Absolutely. And before I let you go, I wanted to just have you mention some of the other programs that maybe followers and supporters can get involved with, especially if they're out of state. What are other ways people can support New York Second Chance Rescue?



**Denise Diaz:**

Ways to help again, we're going to touch on some of the ones that we talked about briefly and then other ways as well. Again, volunteering your time if you can't donate or foster all rescues. We need committed volunteers if you can foster and open your home to an animal in need, again, all rescues we all need fosters especially for the larger breed dog, even some with behavior experience that have had situations with dogs in the past that they've owned or fosters, that they have persevered with, whether it be separation anxiety or leash reactivity, which again, leash reactivity doesn't mean that a dog is dog aggressive, they're just frustrated and can't exchange information.

We've had so many dog-friendly dogs that act a fool and are leash reactivity and that's something to work on. We always need volunteer trainers as well, sharing our posts on social media to bring awareness is helpful if you can't donate or volunteer or foster, even just spreading that awareness is super helpful and obviously donating I think in our organization, 81% goes to the animals. We have administration fees, we have supplies, we have the rescue center staff as well. Got about 10 staff members, but yeah, the majority of the dollar goes to the animal and we try to ... That's something that's very important to us and that we're very transparent about.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Okay. Yeah, and also just so that people understand because I do meet so many organizations that have those extra fees. We have to pay those fees to people who administer and work these centers because they're the ones that are making things happen for the animal so that the animal can move forward in its journey and heal and get to that adopter.

**Denise Diaz:**

Yeah, and we're a larger rescue now. Someone's got to pick up the phone in the middle of the night. We have positions that work seven days a week, and even on Christmas, you can call them at midnight if there's an emergency and this person will pick up the phone.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Right. And to me, that means all the money is really going to the dog because that's what those people in those positions are doing. They're there for the animals.

**Denise Diaz:**

Right.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

So, awesome Denise, thank you so much for this incredible conversation. You've really touched upon some incredible issues and I love the honesty and the transparency of the rescue as well. Thank you.

**Denise Diaz:**

Well, thank you Jackie. A pleasure, a privilege and an absolute honor to be on your podcast. We are huge fans and grateful for you and all that you do for the communities as well.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Thanks Denise, and one last thing, can you let our listeners know what your Instagram handle is or your Facebook and website so we can send them there? I will have all the live links on the show notes for this episode.

**Denise Diaz:**

Of course, our website is [nycsecondchancerescue.org](http://nycsecondchancerescue.org). Our Twitter and our TikTok and our Instagram is NYCSCR. Our Facebook you can find us at and this is super important, the last part of this name, Second Chance Rescue NYC Dogs. So make sure our logos are on it and we also have a YouTube channel that we're trying to grow for monetization. So if you can support us on YouTube and become a subscriber, that's super helpful.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Great. I will add those links and for our listeners, you should know that I am not getting paid to advocate for any 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. New York City Second Chance Rescue has The Canine Condition seal of approval from me. Thank you again Denise. We wish you lots of luck and we'll keep following the rescue and supporting Second Chance Rescue.

**Denise Diaz:**

Thank you so much, very grateful.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Okay, take care.

**Denise Diaz:**

All right. Bye.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

I am always so moved and inspired by each and every guest I am able to share with you on this podcast. My wish is that there be no abuse, abandonment and neglect of dogs, but until that wish is a reality, I hope you will consider giving a dog a second chance. I leave you with this beautiful message from New York City Second Chance Rescue. Why do we do what we do? Because they matter, because you matter. Thanks for joining me on this episode. Please subscribe to our podcast and tell a friend. Until next time, hang on to those leashes. The Canine Condition. Come, sit, stay.