

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 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.

Are you a leader or a follower? I think we are all both at one time or another. What matters is what we lead in, or what we follow in order to effect positive change or achieve a positive outcome in our world. With every podcast episode, I continue to be amazed and inspired by the efforts of human beings who get up every day to make it their mission, to educate, inform, and help us change some of those old school ways we are used to, so that we may all do right by innocent loving beings as are our canine companions.

My guest on the podcast today is Cynthia Bathurst, a co-founder of Safe Humane Chicago, a nonprofit organization. After 25 years in mathematics consulting and college level teaching in rhetoric, Cynthia was led to community policing and organizing prompted by the crime and violence in Chicago communities. She joined with others to build an extensive alliance of partners and collaborators, all working toward creating safe and humane communities for people and animals, by engaging them in programs that help heal one another. In my eyes, Cynthia is a true leader. She is looking out for both humans and canines alike. Welcome to the podcast, Cynthia.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Thank you so much, Jackie. I'm so excited to be here with you.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes, and finally getting to talk to you and meet you. And for our listeners who don't know, I did not get to interview Cynthia for our dogumentary series. My husband had the good fortune of doing that, but I had to bring her back and get some updates and talk about Safe Humane Chicago. So here she is, and we're going to get right to it.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Sounds good.

Jacqueline Pinol:

For our podcast listeners Cynthia, tell us how Safe Humane Chicago started, and when.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Well, that could be a difficult question. Safe Humane Chicago started out as another organization called the Dog Advisory Work Group, DAWG. In case, you hear my accent, people think that's how I pronounce D-O-G. And what we were trying to do is share public spaces wisely, so that's what we did. We worked on dog parks and all that sort of thing. But then I got involved in community policing in Chicago when that was rolled out. And one of the things that became quite clear was the abuse and violence that was happening to animals, and particularly in dog fighting at the time in the City of Chicago.

In 2000, actually, we started a court advocacy group as part of DAWG in order to follow cases that involved violence and abuse of animals, and hoping that that then brought together people who cared about safe neighborhoods, their whole neighborhood, violence of any kind with people who really love animals and care about them. And so we were going to follow those in court and see what we could do.

As a result of that, we started a number of programs, and most important for talking about Safe Humane Chicago is that by 2010, and I realized that was 10 years. But by 2010, we realized that we weren't helping the animals directly enough. We wanted to help those victims and those caught up in the court system, because we found out that while the abusers were being tried, the dogs were put away like in an [inaudible 00:04:07]. And that's where Pam comes from, right? Empowerment. As if they are not they're not sentient beings.

So they would be put away in a cage and forgot about. Not touch, because they were part of a court case. Everybody says, "You can't do anything about that." And so in 2010, we had done some research, and before then and in 2010, we started what we call the Court Case Dogs Program, which I know we'll talk about.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes. Definitely.

Cynthia Bathurst:

To help those animals. So it was in 2010 when that core foundation of bringing people who care about safe neighborhoods and people, together with people who care about dogs, and hopefully they can understand the connection to safe neighborhoods. Well, we did that. We started the process towards saying, "It's not just project safe neighborhoods, it's about being humane as well." And out of that came Safe Humane, and the Court Case Dogs, and the anti-violence was part of it. But what really made it safe humane was, we're not about being against something, against violence and concerned about trauma which we are, we're about for something. We want to be safe and humane, how do you do that?

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's so interesting. I didn't know. So when the foundation started, it was to help humans?

Cynthia Bathurst:

It was really to help humans who didn't have dogs get along with humans who did have dogs. So indirectly, it was about sharing public spaces wisely. And along the way, we found out that humans, some humans who did have dogs were abusing them horribly, and that was contributing to, and is part and parcel of the violence against animals. Because as people almost too easily say that there's a connection between violence against animals and violence against people, which there is.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right.

Cynthia Bathurst:

But we wanted to set out and understand that. And how we do that, and so if we could just bring the dog folks together, and the people folks together to focus on being safe and humane, we ought to have a whole lot more people and make an impact. And I think that happened.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. Trying to create a win-win on both sides.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yes.

Jacqueline Pinol:

So you mentioned the Court Case Dog Program that was motivated by a very touching story. Can you tell us about the dog that motivated and why you started the Court Case Dog Program specifically?

Cynthia Bathurst:

Sure. And I'll try to do it without crying, so you won't... Because after all these years, it still affects me.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I'm sure.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Because I had been part of Chicago Animal Care and Control and was on the Commission for the City of Chicago and was working with various agencies. And I realized that there was a dog who had been at Chicago Animal Care and Control for almost two years, and had never been outside his cage because he had slowly gone crazy. And the court case involved was it turns out that a homeless man who was living in an abandoned house had tied this dog up outside. And so he was taken, rescued, quote unquote by good officers. And because it was then a criminal court case against his abuser and against this squatter, they just locked him up. And then the offender was deemed unfit to stand trial. He really needed a lot of help. It was a sad, sad, sad case.

So then the dog was just hung in suspension. And so when we went in, I took a friend and a good trainer, and another person who had been, that's why the Court Advocacy Program is so important. A court advocate who had been working with this. And we went in to see this dog who didn't have a name. It took special equipment, drugs and everything just to get him out of the cage. And I'll tell you, when I found out all, and the three of us, Janice, [Crypto 00:08:10] and Kat Adrian when we found out all the details and Kat had already been following this case and was beside herself as a court advocate.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's really hard.

Cynthia Bathurst:

But nothing had been done for this dog. And he was hung in suspension over a technicality.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And when you say hung in suspension, I'm just going to clarify for our listeners. It's not literal, it's...

Cynthia Bathurst:

Thank you.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And we use hung and suspension. And I mean, suspended sort of like his life didn't matter and didn't exist, but he was in a cage. Where it was in a four, by four, by five cage or something like that, and it hadn't gotten out. And so when they finally were able to get him out to humanely euthanize him, which was the right thing to do, we all looked at each other. And I had already been working with the police and community policing. We had the court advocates for 10 years. We said, "We can't do this. We can't go to court and stand up for some sort of justice while the animal that did nothing wrong." And the court system, which didn't understand its own laws and procedures did nothing for this animal. We can never let it happen again. So we named him Francis.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And I did see a picture of him on the website and on your YouTube channel.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And on our website, the video, that one of our awesome volunteers put together about how the Court Case Dog Program began, interviewed me about that, but also showed a few pictures and so beautiful dog who just had whittled away to nothing. And you know what, if that's not enough to say to somebody, "How can we be rescuing an animal from a situation and let that happen?"

Jacqueline Pinol:

And only to put him in that situation. What year was that?

Cynthia Bathurst:

That would have been in 2009, really, because it was in 2010 that we got the program started. We immediately started talking about what are the procedures, let's find out what the laws are. Let's do a better job support advocates. We'd already been training police and others, and figuring out what the laws of procedures were. So we said, "What do we need to do to make sure that we're giving a voice to the other Francis's out there."

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right.

Cynthia Bathurst:

So we put the program together and in 2010, that might've been 2008 because it took a while to get all of this setup and to get the city to agree, to let us first of all, advocate for the animals in that way. But second of all, to be able to handle the animals, because at that point nobody could.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And you made him an ambassador, his life mattered, and you made sure that still today in 2021, we are talking about Francis.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Which moves me so much. I'm actually getting choked up thinking about it.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yes.

Jacqueline Pinol:

But thank you for sharing that. So when you talk about nobody, you say the court system didn't even know its own laws. Is it possible also that at that time, that Chicago Animal Care and Control also didn't have the proper training or tools to have helped him and to rehabilitate him right when he came in?

Cynthia Bathurst:

Absolutely. Because they thought, because there are a lot of technical issues here, but they thought because he had not been declared by the court, which the court didn't realize they could do. He had not been declared city property. So he was still the property of the defendant, even though the defendant was not really the owner, he was the caregiver of the dog and under state law. And you can see how this starts going, I could go on and on. I know it very well.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And sometimes it's about just dotting I's and crossing T's, but things get overlooked, it's paperwork. And then the dog sits there for two years.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's right. So it was lack of training and also people who just thought it was common sense that if there was a dog who wasn't city property, who was being maintained for the pendency of the trial, which by the way, there's no reason to do, because these are sentient beings.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Of course.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Because no one realized that they were doing what they really truly believed was the right thing to do legally, even if they didn't agree with it. I mean, I have people who are at Chicago Animal Care and Control right now. I must say, including the current executive director who remembers, he says still has PTSD when he was having to do the euthanasia of these animals.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Of course, I can imagine.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And it was his job and he didn't agree with it, but the law thought they had to do that. You know what? We just need to help everyone get educated, no matter what community. And that's what we set out to do.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes. And through this podcast, I also like to share these stories, to empower our listeners, to know that we can change the laws.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yes.

Jacqueline Pinol:

You, me, that we all have a voice in how these laws get written, changed, and when they can move forward and progress with the times, which is really necessary.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And it's all about collaboration, Jacqui. I know when you were putting all of the dogumentary together, you understood that it was about organizations of various kinds coming together to make life better for the animals and their people in our society. It's the fabric of our society. So it was huge that we were able to work with the court system, animal care and control, law enforcement, and a number of other child and animal rescue groups. And then with the national organizations who help change laws, both nationally, as well as within our state. So that now, by the way, Illinois has seen by the Animal Legal Defense Fund as having the strongest animal welfare laws in the country.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's fantastic.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And it is fantastic, but it's all in the enforcement and it's all in the restorative justice. And that's another whole conversation, but people can do it. Your listeners need to understand that they can. And we are currently in the process of putting together some webinars and moving out a little bit more to explain what our Court Case Dog Program is, combine it with Lifetime Bonds Program, with people who are affected by violence and trauma, and what they can do in their communities. They don't have to start with the police. They can start with any number of organizations as some have. We all need to do that. We can do it.

Jacqueline Pinol:

We can all do our part in our own circle, in our own community. You've used the phrase dogs that have done the time, but not the crime. And that says a lot to me. My heart goes out to these innocent beings who didn't ask to be put in these positions. So what does the Court Case Program do specifically. Take me through the journey of a case maybe that you can talk about. That is not too heart-wrenching for our listeners since it's hard, when we only listen, can't see. Sometimes it's more impactful. So I just want to give an idea of what this program does and the journey that Safe Humane Chicago takes when a dog is saved.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Thank you so much for asking that because I think it's important to have. I'll just pick one story to tell you and give you a few statistics that will set the stage.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay.

Cynthia Bathurst:

When we started the program in 2010, 2%, I really am saying one to 2% of dogs that came in from an arrest and rescuing from an abuser, 2% got out of alive.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh my gosh.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Because they stayed there so long, because on average, those dogs were at animal care control for 256 days without, except maybe seeing the vet, ever getting outside their cage. And so the reason why everybody is not going to be just heartsick over this is because as we speak the average length of stay for a dog, that's in that situation is around 30 days. And it's hard to get it less than that because there are court procedures and there are criminal court procedures you have to go through. And so we also instituted a lot of quality of life programs, which I can talk about within the shelter. And the court system started giving the city leave to let us do those programs, whether those dogs were the property of the city yet or not. So 30 days is pretty darn good.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Pretty darn good compared to two years. Absolutely.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And also, while 2% got out alive in 2010, 98% get out alive now. And not only that, but we have 1,402 dogs out there in homes living well and being managed.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's great.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And what we do for them is, the other phrase we use is that people always consider them damaged goods. And I'm sure people do this too, is when someone has been abused, they've been damaged somehow. Yes, they have, there's a lot of trauma. But if we can have trauma informed programming, and for the dogs that's what we were doing. And often then we bring together people who've been impacted by trauma. You bring them together, let them connect and heal and then give them the skills. So that's what we would do within Chicago Animal Care and Control while they had to stay there.

Once they're outside, we give them free lifetime behavioral consultation or support wherever they go. If someone wants to take advantage of it, and that means that we have less than a 3% return rate for dogs because we provide that support. But let me hasten to add, I shouldn't say, because we aren't a rescue or a shelter. We're not a dog rescue or an animal shelter ourselves. We partner with Chicago Animal Care and Control, but we've partnered with over 170 organizations over the years, since 2010.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Wow.

Cynthia Bathurst:

But in a given year, maybe 50.

Jacqueline Pinol:

This is that collaboration you're talking about.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yes.

Jacqueline Pinol:

So you collaborate with other dog rescues, which means the places that are fostering and taking the dog to prepare it for adoption.

Cynthia Bathurst:

So they transfer it from animal care and control into their care, whether it's a bricks and mortar shelter, but most of them are rescued groups that are foster based. They work with the dogs. We give them support if they want. And medical support if needed as we'd been able to with money. And wherever they go, they can have that support. So that helps them stay in homes and it helps manage. We can say to people, "These Court Case Dogs, these dogs that have done the time, but no crime, not the crime. Are not damaged goods. And maybe they need a little help because they're under socialized. They'd been under serviced like so many stigmatized groups, that it helps them stay in those homes." So we're really proud of them.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And sometimes, just back to what you were talking about earlier with dog fighting. Sometimes these dogs just live in a scenario where they might be chained up outside. The dog itself, they weren't abused, meaning physically, but they were neglected or abandoned in some way because their owner was doing things that clearly were elsewhere against the law. And they were apprehended for that situation. But because the dog belonged to this person doing, God knows what, then the dog gets involved and is held as a Court Case Dog.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Right. So we included those dogs as well. So whether they're being directly abused or just seriously neglected, or like you said, held by someone who was doing something else, who was arrested for something else and they had no family members who could take care of them, we will include those dogs as well.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay. And given the number of dogs that you've saved, are there that many that fall under this predicament that your program has enough just by saving them in Chicago?

Cynthia Bathurst:

Well, you know what, the whole country needs to be doing this. And I talked to people from time to time who say, "No, our attorneys say we can't do this." Well, then there's some laws maybe that they need to enact, and we're happy to connect them with the right people. Again, this is about collaboration. I don't have everything in my head that can solve every problem, but we have a lot of connections with

excellent organizations that can help each place. And these dogs don't deserve to be, I haven't even used this phrase before, but they don't deserve to be the example, or the role model for how we can further abuse dogs when we get them in our systems, because we're going after a criminal activity.

And by the way, our group also helps people who don't know what our laws are. Who come here and don't know that we require that dogs have food, water, shelter, vet care, and they get arrested for whatever reason. For that, and rather than lose their animals and the dogs lose their life, we want to help that family. And we connect them with organizations who can. There's so much people can do. We should not be incarcerating these dogs, and then let them sit there, slowly go crazy, away from other people and other dogs, even if they had been in a dog fighting ring and then pay the ultimate price with their life. Does that make sense?

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. Because then at that point, it's almost impossible to rehabilitate them or like with Francis, it just wasn't safe and easy.

Cynthia Bathurst:

It just wasn't going to be. He was... Oh, I can't hardly think-

Jacqueline Pinol:

I know. I'm sorry, I don't mean to take you there.

Cynthia Bathurst:

No, no. It's good, because we do also as many cases that have followed and there's probably 3000 cases, at least.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Wow.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That we followed and none of them are pretty. But some of them could be helped more than others, but knowing that, we should not forget him. But I actually got off carried away with my statistics, so I apologize for that and saying that, here's a story of a dog that is useful. And that's Capri who was renamed Nola. And the reason she's on my mind is because she just passed away a few days ago, after being a long time in an awesome home from a really aggressive and quick case of cancer. And so we're all sort of grieving her loss.

Capri came in 2014 to animal care and control. She was brought in with nine or ten other dogs. It was a dog fighting ring. She herself came in with gaping wounds that they had to have stitches in. She was thin, she was petrified. It took us, we had a very involved, wonderful team who took the time because we could work with her. But 2014 we had a lot of programs in place, she was able to come into our program. She worked with some of our VALOR veterans who have PTSD and they worked with her and really-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, yes. We're going to talk about that program. Can't wait.

Cynthia Bathurst:

So close with her. But she would have to be eventually carried from her cage just to get her into the auditorium or to take her outside in the grass. She eventually came around, and one of my very good friends who I got connected with on the Southside from a group called the K.L.E.O Community Center, K.L.E.O standing for Keep Loving Each Other, that came out of a domestic violence situation.

We got connected there and started other programs. He and his significant other came to meet some of the Court Case Dogs. They met Capri and fell in love with her, within a month they had her in their home and this was at the end of 2014. And after that, she just kept coming around. She was in our Lifetime Bonds Program. She helped Steven and his significant other Rochelle have a great life.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh that's wonderful.

Cynthia Bathurst:

She just had a great life. She got to start coming to Safe Humane Programs. Recently she went through our assessment. And if you can believe after all she'd been through, actually passed all the evaluations and things to become a Safe Humane ambassador dog.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh Capri, what a special dog.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Was just a wonderful community. And she was on our Diamonds in the Ruff Gala last year, one of the three dogs in our dogs studio for the dog a fund, [inaudible 00:25:01]tele fund.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, I love that.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And did an interview with Jean Sparrow, whom we love. And there's a picture of them where they're just mesmerized by each other. So she's going to be sorely missed, but we're so proud of her. But if you think she came from a dog fighting situation.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Amazing.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And came that far because of all the support by her loving family. And so that's why when you hear a Court Case Dog, you shouldn't just think about poor Francis who didn't get to make it, but all dogs like Nola who have, and have great lives.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. And like you said, because of what happened to Francis, it'll never happen again.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

As long as you have anything to say about it, and can get involved.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. Which is, I would love for other states and other organizations to see how a Safe Humane Chicago could be started in other cities and states.

Cynthia Bathurst:

I'd love that. And we hope we can get together the money and the webinar and the stuff to just help other people.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Absolutely. I wanted to ask you, as you're discussing, working with other agencies, when my husband John, interviewed you for the documentary, you spoke about these police and dog encounter educational videos for law enforcement training. Can you tell us what the main message of those videos is? And what has the response been from the police departments that have received them?

Cynthia Bathurst:

It was a wonderful opportunity to work with police who we had been working with in order to try to do something about the large number of police shooting dogs and pets, when they looked the least bit aggressive. The reason that we did it was to get them to understand just basic things they could do, not become dog trainers, not to become experts, but what they could reasonably do when they encounter a dog in a community to deescalate any situation, to keep from using their ultimate weapon when it was not needed and to keep everyone else safe.

So it is a series of six videos that the U.S. Department of Justice, COPS Office put out, and it was put together with Animal Farm Foundation. It was Safe Humane Chicago, working with the Chicago Police Department. And it really is for cops. Some people would think, "Oh my gosh, you're talking about using a taser. You're talking about using all these other things." But what we're trying to do is say, how do you keep yourself safe? How do you make sure that you don't injure or kill an animal, a dog?

Jacqueline Pinol:

Exactly.

Cynthia Bathurst:

So it takes them through all kinds of things about, if the only thing you have is, I mean, I have to say in this time, and particularly in this time in our country.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Exactly.

Cynthia Bathurst:

This is such an important thing with any marginalized group, and particular with humans and someone might say, "Oh my gosh, why are you talking about dogs when..." But we're all connected. This is all connected.

Jacqueline Pinol:

But we are. And I see the videos every day. I see humans enraged because there was an incident where a police officer, I don't know details. I know there was one literally this week as we speak, where a dog was shot and there no reason for it, and nobody can understand why the police officer felt that that had to happen. It wasn't in Illinois, but these are important things because they affect human lives. That family is so distraught and now, there's a police department and a case open and it just involves everybody.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Right. And often other people can get hurt. And this has ramifications for all kinds of things. And I definitely do not want to minimize any of the concern about violence, and also the concern that many law enforcement officers had and asked us to help. So as a result of those videos, it showed them dog body language. It talked about stereotypes. And just because of another of our all dogs are individuals, and just like all humans are individuals.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Exactly.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And we need to see what's in front of us. And yes, you can be afraid, but let's figure out what tools you need in a split second. So make sure you have them there. And then we would use the phrase, looks don't determine behavior, and that goes across all species as well.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes.

Cynthia Bathurst:

You've got to learn to be savvy. So we were just trying to provide the basic tools. And it was used, I think in the first year, by well over 200 law enforcement agencies.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, that's fantastic.

Cynthia Bathurst:

There have been a lot more trainers and a lot more videos from other things coming in, thank goodness. And so departments use different things, but those were really the start. And I'm so proud to have been involved in that [inaudible 00:29:57] don't just keep complaining. Let's show them what to do, they don't know. They're afraid of those teeth.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. Yes. And like any of us, if you see a dog that's barking at you and seems angry, he might just be protecting the home or alerting the family, "Hey, somebody's at the door." But on the receiving end, you're like, "Ah, I don't know what to do." But don't shoot the dog please. Let's educate the officers.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yeah. And instead of even saying that, don't shoot, what I do like about the videos that it says, here's what you do. You give more distance, you back up, you are aware of your surroundings. Here's how you can turn your body slightly. Don't have direct eye contact. This is how dogs interpret that. And it helped a number of people.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Do you know of police officers that have ever carried dog treats? I know that seems like a silly question.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Oh, we tell them.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Do you?

Cynthia Bathurst:

They do. And a lot of the officers here in Chicago after seeing that, because of course they were the first test cases of our videos.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay.

Cynthia Bathurst:

People would say, "If you got any dog treats, I can put in the trunk of my car." And they would go out and buy them. So many officers were really so good. So it was partly just saying, "This is part of your job too."

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And you need to understand what it is, but not to judge and go after them. But to say, "This is important, the community cares about safe neighborhoods."

Jacqueline Pinol:

Absolutely. You're sending them out there to do a job, but you're not giving them enough training and tools.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And sometimes it's just fight or flight. You know.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And for pet owners, I say, I'm really responsible. I know for example, that the post office and postal workers are not allowed to come near your dog. So we have a pack of dogs. I'm sure you've seen.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yes.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And I know that when the postman comes to our door, and most of mine are pitty mixes. So I know they get labeled or identified by their breed, and they do judge a book by its cover with my dogs.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

But my dogs are the friendliest. They just want to say hello. However, because I know that postal service is allowed, at least in my city, they can pepper spray your dog if they feel threatened. I just don't allow my dogs to be near the front door or the gate, when I know the mail is coming.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Right. Very smart.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's a way for me to keep my pet safe.

Cynthia Bathurst:

You know what, it is our responsibility to keep our pet safe. And yes, there's a lot we can do when things are not going right. And there are other kinds of issues, training, so we should work on that. But you know what, your pet's first line of defense is you.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes. If we make them feel safe, they never have to go cross that boundary to go protect us against [crosstalk 00:32:30].

Cynthia Bathurst:

That right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And so, yeah. Well, thank you for sharing that. I really wish that every police department was able to get their hands on these videos because I think police officers would welcome them.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yes. And they have been. I will just go ahead and say this though, the problem with what's happened with COVID is there's just a lot less training and you almost need personal interaction, to show some of this. So, we're going to need to do all that again.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Got you. You need more boots on the ground, like trainers, actually visiting departments and having sort of classes. Yeah. Well, hopefully we're on our way.

Cynthia Bathurst:

I know. I'm excited.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Slowly but sure that we're reopening, so that's good. So you mentioned the VALOR Program. And for our listeners, I just want to let you know that the VALOR Program is Veterans Advancing Lives Of Rescues, which I just love so much. I love that. It just worked out for that word to mean that. It's really neat. Yeah. It's one of the most moving and compassionate missions I've seen. Can you describe for us how a veteran in need of this type of program comes to find out about it, or qualify for it and what the program does for the dogs that are involved?

Cynthia Bathurst:

Thanks. In fact, right now we're in hiatus, so we're not running the program right now. And the reason is partly COVID, but it's also because one of the things that we do is we always make sure we have experts who can deal with the needs of the participants. And in this program, the dog participants, Court Case Dogs, as much as possible or other animals who find them, say dogs who find themselves in shelter for whatever reason. And then the veterans, and most of them have been diagnosed with PTSD.

So we are as volunteers and even our staff are not trained to be social workers, case managers, and whatever else is needed to help their clients through these difficult periods of PTSD. So to run the program, we insist that we partner and collaborate with a group that can provide us with that kind of professional in our classes, with the dogs and the veterans every time, so that if anything happens, inadvertently they're there to help the veteran. And so we insist on that. So we'll be getting back to doing that, but the program was so successful. As one veteran said, "Here I come suffering from sleep disorder and maybe substance abuse and fears and things from triggers like, you take a picture of us in the flash goes off and I'm on the floor petrified."

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh my goodness.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Because of memories. But we come up to these dogs who say like Capri, or a dog like Francis who'd been abused, who was afraid to come out. Or a dog that's even asserting itself, sort of barking in order to protect itself. He said, "We get an immediate bond. And all of a sudden you're outside of yourself." And

what that program did, was took the dogs and the veterans outside of themselves to help each other, and to see them sit and just touch each other was enough. But then they learned, we use positive relationship based training principles for dogs and the humans, to see them understand what that means and to be able to use the love that the dog is showing in the moment and to be in the moment and not back in Afghanistan or wherever was pretty special. So they would always say, and it was a program that they say was meant for them.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Wow.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Because being in the military, they're very used to sort of regulation, regimented kinds of things. Right? So they did the program quite well, maybe some of the best because they would listen to it.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. They're used to being on a schedule, following a certain type of timeline, or organization. I've noticed that they're very much about staying on point with things and that's what dogs need sometimes, is that structure.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's right. So it was perfect to have a structured program and they fell in, and the difference in this program and some people say, "Oh, did they get to adopt the dog at the end?" Well, we had a few veterans who did adopt dogs from the shelter, not necessarily Court Case Dogs, but they did it for several reasons. Some of them were in difficult home situations, but also because if they've worked with the same dog for a long period of time, they got very connected to the dog. And then there was separation issues when they left the program.

So we help them use a lot of dogs to show that they could help a lot of dogs and the community. And it was not a program designed to give them a service or a therapy dog. And the Veterans Administration, the Jesse Brown is where we last worked, would tell us that some veterans would want to be in our program as opposed to getting a therapy dog or a service dog, because as they put it, they were having their own ego issues and they didn't want anybody to think that they had to have somebody else, even a dog, do things for them. This way, they were helping dogs get homes.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And continually, right.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And they were giving back to the community and it's all about service. And that's what they were in the service in the first place.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Exactly.

Cynthia Bathurst:

So very powerful, very wonderful program that I looked forward too.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh my goodness. I think I would just be in tears.

Cynthia Bathurst:

We had some very tearful, wonderful moments. And we had people who said that we saved them from suicide, they had a reason to help. And then we had others who had a difficult time, but the part that they remembered most was just being able to connect with the dog and all the science that says just petting a dog has certain hormonal reactions that make you feel better. So they would like that. So it was just a win, win, win, win, win, win, win situation.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes. I mean look, you think about you and me, we haven't been through those scenarios of serving our country abroad in these very stressful situations and yet petting our own dogs and being with dogs when I have a bad day. And my bad day compared to a veteran's bad days is nothing, and yet I feel so much relief that I can only imagine what these wonderful doggies are doing for the humans, and what the doggies are now learning to trust and become adoptable dogs. Do the VALOR Program dogs then get adopted? Can they become family pets to another family once they've gone through the program?

Cynthia Bathurst:

Absolutely. In fact, that's what's happened. That's what happened to all of them.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh great. Okay.

Cynthia Bathurst:

They were just pets. A few of them, and actually some of them have gone on, we have a lot of Court Case Dogs that went through it, but also other dogs that became Ambassador Dogs to give back and they're with other families. And we put stories up on our Facebook page, social media, Instagram of some of the stories and how well they're doing and how much they've given back to the community. But even if we don't give back, guess what, they're the world's best companion in their family.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh I love that.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And the veterans who worked with them know it. And they're still very proud.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, that's beautiful. Well, I hope that the program can continue.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Me too.

Jacqueline Pinol:

There's COVID guidelines.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yes.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Become safer and able to get back out there. Tell us also about, because I know you have this other wonderful program on the other side of the spectrum, we have the At-Risk Youth.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And you help at-risk youth in Chicago, also work with dogs. Are they also Court Case Dogs that they work with, and how does that program work or how our at-risk youth better their lives.

Cynthia Bathurst:

We started out by working with a youth that were detained at detention center and basically youth. And there were a lot of just drug-related offenses, but many of them who were in a detention center for anywhere between three months to two years.

Jacqueline Pinol:

What are the ages of some of these at-risk youth?

Cynthia Bathurst:

These are mostly teenagers. But when we first started the program, they could have been anywhere between the ages of 13 and 22, 21.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And what we would do is we developed a whole curriculum and we made it part of a curriculum we call Lifetime Bonds, which we're going to be rolling out so that it can go to any number of places where there's under serviced communities, communities that are challenged by poverty, or don't have the opportunity or the services to have animals or to have a good place to go.

So we developed that curriculum there. And what it would do is, it's about a 10 week program, where we talk about all kinds of issues related to animals, their place in society, and how you take care of them, and what's required, and why you might want to do spay-neuter. All of those kinds of things, as well as introduced them to jobs in the animal industry. Being a vet tech, being a shelter worker, or being anything. We introduce them to a whole range of things while they work first with ambassador dogs, to see what it's like to train a dog, using good relationships.

And then we introduced them to shelter dogs. That's really pretty powerful because while they love the Ambassador Dogs, because some of them can do great fun tricks. They start a session, they're preying, and other sorts of things. Just all kinds of fun things and teach them about how good it is to have good manners, to sit, or to lie down and things like that. Then they get to work with the shelter dogs who basically, for the most part, don't have any manners.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Of course.

Cynthia Bathurst:

As we vet the dogs to make sure they're safe, and then let them work with them. And they have such a sense of pride when a dog who comes in at the beginning of the session has no idea what sit means, and at the end of the session goes out and responds to this young man's request that the dog sit. So they learn what that means.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, it's wonderful.

Cynthia Bathurst:

They also learn what the dogs go through and make them start thinking. I mean, it was tough for some of them. Some of them would say, "My uncle fights dogs, he does this, what am I going to do when I get it out?"

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh gosh.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And go home. And so we'd have discussions about that and about how these are life questions. I'll tell you, taking them, we would always take them on a field trip to Chicago Animal Care and Control. And taking them on a field trip and letting them go up and down the rows, because at that time, the dog population was very high. Since COVID and new sheltering procedures throughout the country, populations are less, we may be full now, but less, because more people are being helped in their homes. They would go down those long rows and look at them and they'd say first, "Oh my God, those jobs look just like us." They don't want to be behind bars. So then we talk about that, then they would say, "Why do you guys kill some of these dogs, that doesn't make sense?"

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's a powerful question.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And will always started the conversation with, "Well, it's not us." They would look at and say, "Whose responsibility is it for these dogs that come off the streets of Chicago and come into the shelter, whose responsibility is it to take care of them and ensure that our government has humane procedures." And after a while they're saying, "Oh my God, it's ours. What can I do to help?"

Jacqueline Pinol:

Wow.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And someone would be in tears over some of the dogs. So all the dogs who went to the Illinois Youth Center and to some of these other programs, for the most part would get adopted. And we would tell

them when they did, and after they left their programs, some dogs got their Canine Good Citizen certificate by working with the young men.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh that's so cool.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And they were so proud of that. And for a while we had an internship program, so that when they got out, they could come work with us. It ended up being not something we could sustain. It was very expensive because we also paid them. But we'll find other models that could work. But those young people learned a lot about themselves.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Helping animals and that it was not uncool to help an animal.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. Or to tell their family, "Hey, you know what, I learned this and this and that, and we shouldn't do that anymore. We can't."

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yeah, exactly, exactly. You can't be too naïve, we would tell some people, "You don't want to confront your uncle in this dog fighting ring or whatever, but here's what you can do. And here's ways to think about it, keep yourself safe."

Jacqueline Pinol:

And to inform them about how to, as they move forward in their journey, how to make a positive difference in their lives as they encounter more people when they get older.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And what's so exciting to me right now in the life of Safe Humane, actually, it's kind of funny because since we sort of did start in 2000, we recently had an anniversary, the founding of the nonprofit. So we finally became of age because we're 21 in 2021.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's good. That's a good one.

Cynthia Bathurst:

What we're doing now is for all kinds of reasons, including COVID and some of those restrictions and other things, police stopped making arrests. And so a lot fewer animals were coming in. Does that mean that abuse stopped? No, but what we realized is now we need to go out and help people in their communities who want to make a difference, help them find the tools they need, and to make their communities safe and more humane. So that's what we're on a mission to do, to go more out into the community.

So we hope to help animals before they ever get to the point of being impounded or sheltered. And we want to help young people be able to make their community safe and more humane by working with families and with the animals they see when they're walking to school or something. That's what we're about to do. And our new mission is, well its not a new mission, it's part of our mission to facilitate creating safe and more humane communities by positive relationships. So we're going to develop some of those. And that's part of this initiative I just mentioned where we're going to put together webinars and talk about how you can use programs that are informed by good practices, for people, and for dogs who have been through trauma or violence and give them the opportunities they need.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's fantastic. And Safe Humane Chicago is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

But tell us what donations do to help further your mission and to save more dogs. And are you always looking for boots on the ground support as well?

Cynthia Bathurst:

Absolutely. What our money does, we are largely funded by individual donations, which surprise a lot of people.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Wow. Okay.

Cynthia Bathurst:

We do get some grants but we have a hard time because we're not a dog rescue, and we're not a people rescue. We're bringing them together and using those two things to come together, so it's hard to fit in traditional granting.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, interesting. They are so specific with grants.

Cynthia Bathurst:

We've had some problem with that, except that we can get the money for the dogs, but when people give money, it goes for a number of things. During COVID it's a lot more people needed help with the Court Case Dogs that were in their homes. So we send free to them, professional trainers to help them with their situation. Also, there were more surgeries, things like that, people notice more because they were around their dogs more. So we were able to help do that.

So on average, when a dog, or a family comes to us to help with the dog, on average, it would be about \$500 per dog. So we need donations to do that. We also use them of course, to buy supplies and equipment for our staff, but we're largely volunteer run, but we do hire trainers, dog trainers as consultants. And we also, in order to make sure the programs go forward, we just have to hire at least a program lead for every program. So we use the money for that as well. We've used it for internships, for people who get out and need help.

A good example of a program that we did at animal care and control was community re-entry, where people were helping. We're actually cleaning the pavilions and we were teaching them. They didn't know anything about dog behavior. So we had them in classes, gave them some skills for training and for working with dogs. And two of our young men from that program went off and got full-time jobs at an area shelter.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Really.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And so we're really proud of that kind of sequence. So it's all about collaboration. The money went to help those men get the equipment that they needed, and also to do some additional training, get training themselves, education. Send them to a conference or a training school.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And if people want to donate and say to you, "Can you please use my funds for medical bills for one of your dogs or anything." Can people be that specific?

Cynthia Bathurst:

Absolutely. We have ways of restricting the funds to that. Obviously we have all kinds of needs, but if someone is their main thing is, "I want to make sure that this dog gets what it needs, or your next dog, or these dogs get all the training." We just put it into, we have a training fund named after one of our Court Case Dogs, Dolly. And we just designate the money to go into Dolly's training.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Dolly's Training Fund. Great. So for our listeners, where can they find and follow Safe Humane Chicago on social media?

Cynthia Bathurst:

We do have a website and it is safehumanechicago.org. But on social media, we use our official and broader name in that sense, which is just Safe Humane because we might have a Safe Humane California someday, you never know.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I hope so.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And so if you go to-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Not a bad idea. Don't get me started. I got a lot on the plate right now, but don't get me started.

Cynthia Bathurst:

So it's just, our Facebook page is Safe Humane, @SafeHumane. It's the same thing on Instagram and on Twitter. And I think Twitter is SafeHumaneChicago, but if you try SafeHumane, Safe Humane Chicago, it will come up.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay. Well, I will have all those live links in the show notes for this episode so that anyone listening can just scroll down and click on them and find and follow Safe Humane Chicago.

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's awesome.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes. And I had one quick little question here that I thought about, the term Courthouse Dogs. This was something kind of cute and funny. So Courthouse Dogs is very different than Court Case Dogs. Can you just tell us what it means and how doggies qualified to Courthouse Dogs?

Cynthia Bathurst:

That's really important. So just listen for the next syllable after court anytime you hear those phrases, the support case means that there's a court case, a criminal court case associated with the dog. Not that they did it, but there's a criminal court case associated with it. And we did that because they used to be called evidence dogs, and that just makes them like property, and a piece of property, so a Court Case Dogs.

Courthouse Dogs are awesome dogs that have been trained either as therapy dogs, or other ways that pass certain kinds of tests that can give emotional support during trying times for people who have to testify for example, or children, or actually participants in a domestic violence situation, those dogs come and just provide emotional support and they're in the court house in order to help people through the very stressful. No matter what it is, very stressful times of dealing with being in a court house and being associated with any kind of case.

Jacqueline Pinol:

So for example, if you're on the stand and you're being interrogated, and you're nervous, or shy, or scared or whatever the feeling may be is that when a Courthouse Dog could be present?

Cynthia Bathurst:

Right. And they usually have to have the judge's consent, but more and more judges and the National Judges Association is actually advocating for that, because actually it makes the whole courtroom better because people are smiling.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I bet.

Cynthia Bathurst:

So the dogs have to go through certain kinds of training and pass. You know, they've got to be able to sit still for a long time and just let someone pet them or touch them while this is going on. It's a hugely powerful thing, particularly in domestic violence and other kinds of cases where people's emotions are running high.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Got you.

Cynthia Bathurst:

And so being a Courthouse Dog is great. People say, "Why don't you train Courthouse Dogs?" And I said, "Well, we got to get this other stuff done." But there are a few organizations that do that. They have to pass certain kinds of tests obviously, but it's a wonderful program.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yeah. That's amazing. I didn't even know that existed and actually came across it as I was reading up on Court Case Dogs, but people sometimes not understanding the term, but that's really wonderful. Thank you for sharing that. And our listeners should know that I am not getting paid to advocate for any one 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. Safe Humane Chicago has the Canine Condition seal of approval from me.

Cynthia Bathurst:

We're so honored.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh gosh. Well thank you so much. We're just trying to build this message and this name to be all inclusive and to help anyone out there who, even if you don't like dogs, but just to understand that the human canine bond is something sacred.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Yes.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And that it is our responsibility to care for, and look after these innocent sentient beings that give so much and ask so little back.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Thank you so much Jacqui. Right on.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Thank you Cynthia. It's been such a pleasure. I'm so happy, I finally got to be the one to interview you.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Thank you.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And thank you for everything that you do.

Cynthia Bathurst:

Thank you.

Jacqueline Pinol:

To live in safe humane communities seems like such an appropriate motto to universally strive for these days. Out of circumstance and sometimes heartache a mission is born. I hope this conversation with Cynthia has inspired you to perhaps take the lead in something that means a lot to you. If so, I encourage you to start creating change. And if you, or someone in your corner of the world is willing or curious enough to start programs like the ones we discussed today, please reach out to Safe Humane Chicago as I am sure they would love to help guide other cities and states through the process of starting their own safe humane organization.

Thank you for joining me on this episode, please press subscribe on our podcast and share it with your friends. It takes a village to achieve true change. Until next time, hang onto those leashes. The Canine Condition. Come. Sit. Stay.