

The Key to Finding Forever Families for Homeless Pets

According to our newest Pet Game Changer, Becca Edwards, there's more to successfully finding forever homes for dogs and cats than just being an animal lover. You can love animals with a passion, but this important skill will exponentially enhance your ability to save lives.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Today's Pet Game Changer is Becca Edwards, who turned her volunteer work in animal rescue into a full-time career as dog kennel manager at the Humane Society for Inland Mendocino County
- A big part of Becca's job is placing as many shelter dogs as possible into foster homes where they can receive the kind of attention that will best prepare them to find new forever homes
- For people thinking about working at a shelter or rescue, Becca offers some sage advice: it's important to be a people person as well as an animal lover when the goal is to find new forever families for homeless pets

My guest today is Becca Edwards, who was nominated for a Game Changer award by Stacey N. Becca works as the dog kennel manager at the Humane Society for Inland Mendocino County, located in Redwood Valley, CA.

From a Free Time to a Full-Time Passion

"We're located in Northern California in a very rural community," Becca explains. "I'm originally from LA. I've been involved in volunteer work with rescues for most of my adult life. When I moved here, I got an opportunity to become involved in the rescue community, and then this job opened up about four years ago, and I took the plunge."

"I had been working in a different field while volunteering at rescues in my spare time and I was like, 'You know what? This is something I really want to do full time. I don't want to do it as a volunteer, I want to do this every single day.' I've been here about four years now, and I get to work with some of the most amazing people. We've built a really incredible team here."

Foster Homes Are the Key to Successful Sheltering

I asked Becca about the enormous need for shelter services in Mendocino County and how she and her team are tackling the issue.

"We take in about 1,000 animals a year," she says. "This year we're actually projected to take in even more than that. And for a team of anywhere from 8 to 10 staff, that's a lot. We really rely on our community. We are very aware that we can do so much more when we have support. We really rely heavily on our foster team."

Right now, we have 99 dogs in care and only 17 of those dogs are living on site (at the shelter). We really try to give the dogs a chance to live in foster homes instead of kennels here on site, because it just makes more sense. Fostering is something I'm really passionate about. I'm a foster myself and I know first-hand that animals are so much happier when they're not living in cages."

Building and managing a network of compassionate, caring people in the community willing to foster homeless pets is quite an undertaking.

"It's a lot of work," Becca agrees. "We're managing a virtual shelter, essentially. But even if it's more work, and we're dealing with a lot more people, it's so worthwhile. I think it's really important to ask for help when you need it. If you don't ask for help when you need it, you won't make it.

That's why I'm always going on Facebook and asking for help. And people respond. People really do want to help. You just have to ask for it."

Successful Animal Rescuers Must Be Good With People, Too

I asked Becca what she loves most about her work.

"I love just being around the animals and people who think the same way I do," she replies. "I'm really lucky to be here at a shelter where we're all on the same page as far as what we're doing. We're all really passionate about making sure every animal gets a live outcome here.

I couldn't imagine being in a better place surrounded by people who are all thinking the same way and just working so hard to help animals. It's what I've wanted to do my whole life and to be here is really, really nice."

Finally, I asked Becca what one thing she would like the world to know about the important work she's doing.

"A lot of people get into this work because they think, 'I'm an animal person. I love dogs, I love cats,'" she replies. "But I realized very, very quickly that each animal leaves here with a person. So, you must be a people person, too. You can't ignore the human/animal connection. And in fact, your people skills are what will help animals the most.

Coming into this, a lot of people think, 'I love dogs. I don't want to talk to people.' But you have to talk to people. You have to engage them, and you have to support them. You must be a people person in order to save more lives. You can't ignore that aspect of this work."

This is really excellent advice! Rescuers do the work because we love animals, but we also must love the other end of the leash to some extent. To be effective rescuers, we must love both ends of the leash.

If you'd like to learn more about Becca's shelter, you can visit the website **[Humane Society for Inland Mendocino County](#)**, where you'll find info about adoption policies, available animals, upcoming events, and more. The shelter also has **[Facebook](#)** and **[Instagram](#)** pages.