



Statement on Foster Dog “Jenny”

Aug. 19, 2015

We appreciate the care and concern people in Seattle and beyond and have shown for Jenny, her foster parents Amie and Olli, and the Seattle Animal Shelter. On July 31, Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist Dr. James C. Ha evaluated Jenny at Amie and Olli’s home. Dr. Ha does “not at this time feel that Jenny is a significant threat to public safety, any more so than any average dog on the street.” He suspects that Jenny may have undiagnosed medical issues causing her pain.

We now believe that management of any medical issues, combined with training, will help correct Jenny’s reactive behavior. At this time, Amie, Olli, and Seattle Animal Shelter staff are working together to seek further veterinary attention for Jenny in order to diagnose any medical issues she may have and will soon start the official adoption process. Amie and Olli will be making Jenny a permanent part of their family and will ensure she is given the necessary medical attention, training and boundaries to be comfortable, happy and safe.

Jenny’s case was difficult for everyone involved. Euthanasia decisions at the shelter are never made lightly, and shelter staff find it very hard to see an animal put down. When this determination was made, it was based on multiple staff assessments when Jenny first arrived at the shelter, as well as written information provided by Amie and Olli. The language they used to describe Jenny’s behavior and situation led us to believe that Jenny’s behavior had not improved. One of the Seattle Animal Shelter’s primary responsibilities is to protect public safety, and we sincerely believed that Jenny was a safety risk for the community. With the information we have now, we’ve come to a different conclusion. We are sorry for the misunderstanding that took place and appreciate the effort it took from the public and our volunteers to bring this to our attention.

Jenny’s case highlights our need for better communication between us and our volunteers and a shared vocabulary and understanding about dog behavior and euthanasia protocols. It also demonstrates a need for a team-based approach to foster care management. The Seattle Animal Shelter had already been working to address some of those issues, and we are committed to applying what we learned in Jenny’s case to that process and how we operate moving forward. Some of our current activities include the following:

- We’re filling our volunteer coordinator position to improve communication with and be a resource for our volunteers.
- We’ve implemented PetPoint, software that replaces an email and paper system with a case management database, allowing all information about an animal to be available in one place.
- We are revising our euthanasia protocols to promote transparency and a clear understanding of the criteria staff use to make these incredibly difficult decisions. It will help lay out the step-by-step decisions and actions we take before going there. We are gathering input from a wide variety of sources, including staff, outside consultants, volunteers, and several veterinarians, and we will facilitate draft review sessions with our volunteers.

Our staff and volunteers are all playing on the same team – the one that exists to protect and care for the thousands of orphaned animals and critters that come to the shelter each year. We are confident that lessons learned from Jenny’s case will result in positive changes for other animals as well.

*Don Jordan, Director
Seattle Animal Shelter*