LOGAN: Hello! Today we’re talking with Dr. Jill Kirk about adoption policies for FeLV and FIV cats. Dr. Kirk was a veterinarian at Cat Depot and Animal Welfare League, and most recently served as the medical director at Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center. Thank you so much for joining us today!

KIRK: Of course, I’m happy to be here!

LOGAN: Great! So our first question is what was the policy for adoption of cats with FeLV or FIV infection at Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center?

KIRK: In the time I worked there, it was always open adoption. So we adopted out cats with FeLV and FIV the entire time that I worked there. I believe they started adopting out FIV cats, they started with FIV cats, and around 2014-2015, that went very smoothly for them, so they quickly added in feline leukemia adoptions and that also went off without a hitch.

LOGAN: Very cool. Were there any challenges that you experienced with this policy, either internally with shelter management, shelter staff, or externally with potential adopters and community vets?

KIRK: We prepared ourselves thinking that we were going to hit a lot of roadblocks and a lot of, like you said, community veterinarians who don’t quite understand, or perhaps even internally staff members who were like, “well, we’ve never done this before”. And certainly, there were a few little hurdles to overcome, of we’ve never done this, and disease is going to spread. I think that was the biggest concern, that everyone was like “Well, if we keep them on the adoption floor, how are we going to keep everyone else safe?” And it took education. The veterinarians who were there at the time reached out to the UF program to doctors Crawford and Levy and got their insight and their help in order to combat the questions that people were going to have with the correct knowledge as to how the disease spreads, how adaptable these cats actually are. It was, again, a way to get by from the staff to just meet those questions head on and say, “hey, we know you’re concerned, and here’s the actual evidence. Here’s the scientific proof as to why this is not that concerning of a disease”.

LOGAN: Well that’s great! Did you experience any pushback from any potential adopters or have struggles adopting out these cats?

KIRK: No, we really didn’t. I think once they were made available, the public was ready to take them on. We had printed off little one-page forms about what is feline leukemia, what is FIV, what does it mean to you as an adopter, what does it mean to- can you have other cats in the home? Can you have other animals in the home? Not an overwhelming amount of information but just like “hey, here’s what the diseases are and here’s how you can deal with them and here’s how you can talk to your veterinarian about dealing with these diseases”. So we really, they didn’t sit for any extended length of time, they weren’t languishing on the floor for months while others got adopted in days. And when I was there, it was the same story. They would be gone very quickly.

LOGAN: Wow, that’s really great! And you’ve kind of touched on it, sounds like it was really successful as an initiative overall, but are there any particular successes that you experienced with this policy that you would like to share? Or maybe something about the policy that was so successful that you could share with our veterinarians trying to go into shelter medicine?

KIRK: Well, what this really did for us it really opened the door for us to adopt out animals with all sorts of medical conditions that before, the staff might’ve thought we can’t adopt this out. So, dogs with heartworm disease, those are adopted out all the time now. Obviously, we start treatment in the shelter, but we adopt them out to continue that treatment. We also allow them to do that on their own if they want, but we’ll do it for them happily. But we adopt out and we treat dogs with parvo, we treat cats with panleuk, we do ringworm, we do scabies. So it kind of opened the doors for this to be, just because before it was a barrier to adoption, look how great this program worked. And now we adopt out probably hundreds of dogs with heartworm disease every year. We treat, there’s no disease that comes into the shelter anymore that’s an automatic death sentence. A decade ago, it probably was, but as science and medicine advances and the understanding of these diseases advances, it becomes less scary for us to say, “hey it’s not that big of a deal. It’s not an expensive treatment, it’s not a time-consuming treatment, let’s see how many lives we can truly save.” So, it really, adopting these cats out allowed us to really open our doors to adopting out everything that comes into our doors.

LOGAN: Wow, that’s really great. That’s all of our questions for today so thank you so much for joining us for this little interview!

KIRK: Oh you’re so welcome!