**Why access to animal care resources is a social justice issue**

Thank you for watching our workshop

on why access to animal care resources

is a social justice issue.

I am Amanda Arrington

, the senior director of The Pets for Life program

at the Humane Society of the United States.

We also have Lori Hensley,

the Director of Operations

of Beyond Fences

and Gabrielle Chapman,

Pets for Life senior analyst Social Justice.

I’m going to talk through

a big picture overview

of the layers of inequities (00:00:30)

that exist in every facet of our society

and why it is important for us

in animal welfare

to understand these issues.

Then Lori is going to share

the work of beyond fences

and what it looks like on a local level

to incorporate social justice

and animal welfare work.

And gabbie will then finish

with guidance on how

we can each deepen our commitment

to make animal welfare

a more just and fair movement. We unfortunately don’t have all the time

we’d like to dive deeply into everything

we will cover in this workshop (00:01:00).

But we hope

that it is either the beginning

of a journey

to learn more about the history of inequity

in the us

or it provides encouragement

to actively and continuously

seek out information

on how we arrived at

where we are

and what role each of us has to pay

in effecting change today and in the future.

It’s extremely important to have context of the larger systems

and structures that animal welfare is a part of (00:01:30).

And how our work with companion animals

necessitates a consideration of the human conditions.

We have done things,

many things,

really well in animal welfare.

Over the last few decades

we’ve made huge strides for animals.

We’ve brought animals into very sharp focus.

The dog or the cat we see very clearly.

What we now need

is to bring the entire picture into focus (00:02:00).

That doesn’t mean making the animal less seen

or the animal moving to the background.

It means growing awareness

to the person the animal is connected to.

To the environment the animal exists in.

To the community the animal is a part of.

When we have clarity on the entire situation,

we will be much more effective

and successful in our work.

There are inequities in ever facet of our society

and those inequities affect people

and therefore their pets (00:02:30).

I want to share data

in just a few of these areas.

Socioeconomics pay a major role

in what resources people have for the pets.

Unfortunately,

poverty is pervasive in the us

and poverty is unevenly distributed.

While socioeconomics is essential to understand

we can’t talk about poverty

without also talking about race.

The two are inextricably linked (00:03:00).

Black and brown people

are disproportionally faced

with all the struggles that come with poverty.

There’s also a massive racial wealth gap in our country.

Lifetime wealth accumulation

depends on where you start

and intergeneration transfers.

Advantage is passed down

generation to generation.

In real terms

wealth impacts everything

from sending your kids to college

to taking care of aging parents (00:03:30)

to whether or not

you can buy a home

and so much more.

There’s no easy fix to the disparities

because our entire system

is built on racial inequity.

As just one example

you can see here the differences

in wealth that still exists

even when controlling for education.

On the left

it’s showing the white Americans

with less than a high school education

still have more wealth

than black and brown Americans

with degrees shown on the right (00:04:00).

There are many reasons

for the racial wealth divide.

One of significant is home ownership,

here is where we can see direct correlation

between policy making of the past and present-day outcomes.

I’m sure that all of you have heard about

or are familiar with the new deal.

To help the US recover

from the great depression in the 1930’s (00:04:30)

the government created

the largest welfare program

to date in our country’s history.

A major piece of the new deal

was government backed mortgages.

Before the new deal

home ownership was much more limited

as someone had to provide

about 50% down on their loan

and could only pay out over 5-10 years.

The new deal

opened up home ownership

to towns of millions of people

by offering no down payment

or little down payment

and 30-year loans (00:05:00).

In todays dollars,

a little over 2 trillion dollars

is provided for home ownership support.

Unfortunately,

about 98% of recipients were white.

The way mortgages were provided

and approved

was through a national appraisal system

set up around towns

and cities

around the country.

That appraisal system guided

where the government backed funds

were given.

The areas that were deemed hazardous (00:05:30)

for mortgage support

would not be provided,

were marked in red,

known as redlining,

and those areas were black

and brown communities.

White people were given an advantage

when people of colors

were kept from the opportunity

of building generational wealth.

The government sanctioned policies

of the 1930s

are not just something of the past.

It has set up the racial

and economic segregation

we still see today (00:06:00).

A study was conducted in 2018

that shows of the redlined areas

in 1937 and 1938

75% of those are still

the most economically distressed communities today.

And that the vast majority (00:06:30)

of people living in those communities

that were redlined

are still people of color today.

Conversely 91% of the areas

marked as best

and received the government support,

those are the middle-

and upper-class communities today

and the vast majority of people

living in those community

are predominantly white.

This is why we see

in just about every community

in the country

there are still areas

of concentrated poverty with little

to no access to pet resources.

When home ownership is made difficult

or impossible,

renting is the only option.

The challenges for low income renters are extreme.

This map shows

that there’s not a single state

in the country

that has a sufficient supply (00:07:00)

of affordable and available

housing for low income renters.

The numbers represent

how many rentals there are

for every 100 low income families.

And this of course

does not even get into

the additional barriers

of pet friendly housing.

A person’s income

and a person’s wealth

almost always dictate if

a person owns or rents

and where the person lives.

With the US public education system being structured (00:07:30)

around property taxes

that means where children

are education also depends

on these factors resulting

in children of color

going to high poverty schools

at a much higher rate

than white children.

The inequities continue on

how people are engaged in the criminal legal system.

Study after study

task force after task force

investigation after investigation (00:08:00)

it has been shown

that racial implications

are in every facet

of the criminal legal system

whether its traffic stops

noise complaints

or length of sentencing.

Here you can see just one example.

That white and black Americans use

and sell drugs

at very similar rates

and yet black people

are much more likely

to be arrested for drug related offenses.

It is imperative for us

in animal welfare

to recognize the differences in experiences (00:08:30)

and engagement

with law enforcement

that communities of color have.

and to know we aren’t exempt

from this in animal welfare.

There’s no way that enforcement

around animal laws

and ordinances

is somehow more fair and balanced

than any other area of the system.

Naturally

all of this discrimination

leads to very imbalanced

rate of incarceration

which destabilizes communities and has way more of a negative impact (00:09:00)

on people and pets

than we have time to discuss today.

But you can see here

the percent of the US population

by race and ethnicity

compared to the percent of the prison population.

And I’ll leave you with one final set of data.

The rate at which our government

spends tax payer dollars for educating children

vs incarcerating people.

Every state spends more on punishment, blue dots,

than on education, orange dots, (00:09:30)

this is not only a concern on what’s valued on our society,

but we see this as another direct parallel

to animal welfare and how we invest in our work.

We have to begin a transition

to increasing equity

and access to pet services

by providing more support

and resources to people for their pets

instead of reactive sheltering and punitive measures.

And now I’ll pass it to Lori. (00:10:00)

Beyond fences was founded

in Durham, North Carolina in 2007

by Amanda Arrington.

We deliver free services,

supplies, information

and support to people and their pets.

We work within the animal welfare field

to bring attention to how poverty

and structural inequity

create obstacles to accessing

affordable veterinary

and pet wellness services.

And we participate in

and bring our experiences

to efforts addressing larger systemic issues

on institutional discrimination and injustice (00:10:30).

We’ve never had a shelter rescue rehome component.

From day one 13 years ago,

our mission has been to help people and pets

through our offering support.

And especially in that time in animal welfare

it was a really innovated idea to be about that

and only that.

As I said we operate in Durham, North Carolina

and Durham has a population of about 265k.

We are home to Duke University

and this box (00:11:00)

is where our focus area

where we do our work in Durham is located.

Durham has an overall poverty rate in the county of about 17%,

and in our focus area the poverty rate is 45%.

Also, while Durham’s population

is about 50% white and 50% people of color,

in our focus area it is about 80% people of color (00:11:30).

Amanda and I live over here,

so how do we connect with

pet owners living in our focus area?

We do it by walking the neighborhoods in that area

and talk to the pet owners who live there.

We visit them in their homes

and talk to them on their front porches.

We’ve been doing this weekly

for 13 years,

and we still do it weekly.

Because it’s the only thing we have found

that allows us to build

trusting relationships and make connections with people (00:12:00).

Connecting with people over their pets

is easy even if we have little else in common.

Everybody loves to talk about their pets.

Connecting with people

and listening to them

is how we were able to see first hand

the love and concern people have for the pets.

And spending time weekly

in that community

opened our eyes to the lack of access

for pet care resources

for the pet owners living there.

I know your familiar with

the concept of communities being food deserts (00:12:30),

those same communities

are pet care resources deserts.

You can see here in the map of Durham

in the area we serve

there are no veterinary practices.

There also no pet care supply stores.

And there are no groomers.

These community deficits

are often misguidedly seen

as people deficits

and they’re even used to judge

and punish the people who live there.

So, we have this area of Durham

that has a high rate of poverty (00:13:00),

concentrated with people of color,

that is also a resource desert.

Amanda and I wanted to start figuring out

how that part of our community got that way.

So, we started reading every book we could find,

listening to every podcast we could get to,

and attending workshops.

We learned through all of this

that poverty is not an individual problem

it’s a system problem (00:13:30).

Amanda and I recently attended

a two-day workshop

through the racial equity institute

and they really summed up

all we had been reading from these books

and podcasts about poverty and race.

It went something like this-

if you walked by a lake

and saw a dead fish in the water

you might ask yourself about that fish.

Wonder what he did wrong,

why didn’t he work hard,

was he lazy,

but if you walked by

and nearly half the fish were dead

say 45%,

you might start to look at the water (00:14:00)

instead of the fish.

Because if you just try to fix the fish

and not the water,

the next set of fish that come along

will need fixing to

because there’s something wrong with the water.

So, we had to start looking at the water

which represents the systems of inequities

that are in play

that are creating a place

where 45% of the people living

in our community

were living in poverty.

For example.

Amanda shared information earlier

in the presentation about redlining.

This is a 1937 map of Durham

created by the federal government (00:14:30)

redlining the areas of Durham

where they would not insure mortgages.

You can see how this map

overlays with our focus area

and again 80% living in our focus area

are people of color.

Also, in Durham

60% of the residents

are property owners

and in our focus areas

only 20% of our focus area are home owners

leaving 80% to be renters (00:15:00).

When people are locked out of home ownership

they live as renters

at the mercy of their landlords

who make decisions about how they can have pets,

what pets they can have,

where those pets can live,

and how much it will cost them

to have those pets.

Not only that

they’re under constant threat of evictions.

I see these images in our area of focus every week.

People locked out by the sheriff

and their personal belongings

placed at the curb for the world to see (00:15:30).

In his book, Evicted,

Mathew Desmond says

black men are locked up

and black women are locked out

and he’s right.

This is what I see

week after week

in our focus area.

And in Durham were experiencing an urban revelation

and our downtown is booming.

Our mayor estimated about 20 people

a day are moving to Durham a

and guess where they want to buy houses?

In our focus area.

The current eviction rate in Durham (00:16:00)

is 900 families per month.

I want to focus on housing

even though there are many issues

affecting pet owners living in our focus area

to talk about.

but I want to focus on housing

because it is the one issue

finding affordable housing

that seems to have the most devasting

and permanent effects

on pet ownership with our clients.

Finding another place to rent

when you get evicted that is available (00:16:30)

and affordable

and pet friendly

is nearly impossible

and often people who are in the middle of losing everything

they have also face losing their pets

at a time when they need them most

because they can’t find housing

where they can keep their pets with them.

This issue is very important

is why I want to focus mostly on the housing issue

in my segment today

hardly a week goes by that I don’t get a call (00:17:00)

from one of our families

saying they’re being evicted

and asking me if we can hold onto their pets

until they find another place.

I hate these calls

because I know now that

it takes up to 6 months to a year

to find another place to live

and we just simply can’t hold onto peoples pets that long.

Here’s what it sounds like for some of those calls that I receive.

The first call comes from Wanda

who is pictured on your left (00:17:30)

with her cat and

this is Wanda’s message that she left

\*Portions of voicemail in audible due to sobbing\*

“hey Lori This is Wanda

sorry to bother you in the morning

I need you really bad

because she did go through with the eviction

and said she’s going to start putting our stuff out

and she said she was going to put Nova in the pound.

Please come and get Nova for me

for 3 or 4 days for me

please

I mean I think I can get…

I’m going to end up in a motel

but I have a place (00:18:00)

to go for rent coming up

a social worker is working with me right now

asap to come up with the money...

the other $200

so nova can be there

but just in case

please call me right back

please don’t let them put my baby in pound.

Please call me right back please.”

And on the right is Alicia with her 2 dogs (00:18:30)

and this is the call,

the message I received from Alicia

“Hi Ms. Lori this is Alicia

umm the young lady that stays at the hotel.

I was just calling to let you know

that I appreciate everything

you have done for me

and I just want to let you know

that I can know longer afford

to keep staying at that hotel

and I have no where (00:19:00)

to take my dogs

and so I don’t know what to do

I don’t know how to surrender them

I don’t really want to take them to shelter

cause I’m in fear of them killing them

and umm

I just don’t know what to do.

I still been working out

and figuring out the foster thing

or the lodging thing just really at a loss (00:19:30).”

Brian Stevenson is the author of the book “Just Mercy”

that has just been made into a movie

and I hope if you haven’t seen it yet

you will check that out.

These are some

of my favorite quotes from Brian Stevenson.

The first is…

“You can’t understand

most of the important things from a distance.

You have to get close.

To be change agents we need to get proximate-

that is, get closer to the issues (00:20:00),

we are trying to address”

the second one is…

“The opposite of poverty is not wealth;

the opposite of poverty is justice”

For us in Durham

and the work we do

we had to proximate to the problem,

we had to get close to people

living in our community

that we might not have otherwise met

so we could understand how

the systems were working against pet owners.

From all that we’ve read so far,

the data we’ve seen,

the podcasts we’ve listened to (00:20:30),

the courses we’ve taken,

we’ve realized we have a systems problem

not a people problem.

Instead of fixing the fish

we’re working on fixing the water.

We work to change the systems

instead of judging the people

who are victims of this system.

Thank you and now

I will hand it over to gabbie.

Thank you, Lori.

I just want to thank everyone on the call

and I just want to reiterate (00:21:00)

that what were about to talk about

is not exhaustive,

it’s just the beginning

and we also just want to acknowledge

that these conversations

are very hard to have

and this is just the tip of the iceberg.

I usually open up these types of discussions

with this quote and it says

“if you want something in your life

you’ve never had,

you’ll have to do something

you’ve never done.”

That’s by JD Houston.

Usually we’ll explain a lot of definitions

but for brevity were going to talk about equity today (00:21:30).

Equity is defined

or we define it

as a fair and just distribution

of resources and opportunities.

We really like this picture

because it shows us the reality

vs what maybe liberation would look like.

On the left

we see that people of color

or folks of marginalized populations

are on unequal footing,

and then we often times (00:22:00)

hear folks that talk about equality,

we want to reiterate that equality is

when one person or everyone gets the same amount of resources.

The difference between equality and equity

is in fact

that we want to make sure that folks

that are getting the least

or have been getting the least historically

are getting the most.

On the right side we see liberation,

and maybe in this example

that means there aren’t any barriers (00:22:30)

for what were trying to accomplish.

The next thing we’re going to talk about is implicit bias.

We define implicit bias

as an attitude or stereotype

that affects our understanding,

actions, and decisions,

in an unconscious manner.

Really important piece to think about here

is that sometimes our implicit bias

is unconscious

and often times

its informed by stereotypes or the media (00:23:00)

and often times certain groups of people

are paired with characteristics

that may or may align with actual reality.

It’s important for us to also notice

that in this photo

implicit bias informs what we talk about

and call institutional discrimination

and that in turn affects system discrimination.

The way I like to usually explain this is like a pizza. (00:23:30)

Institutions might be education systems,

it might healthcare,

it might be institution of animal welfare

and that’s just one slice of our pizza.

In turn the system discrimination

is the whole pie

it’s the whole pizza.

And what’s in the pizza

it informs our entire system.

Now, its time to talk about how do we address bias (00:24:00).

We’ll start with talking about internally,

the first thing to do

when you want to address bias

is just acknowledge your own biases,

what are you hearing on the inside

what is unconscious

what comes up for you

and being okay in that discomfort

when you start realizing

what those biases are.

The second thing that you can do

is literally just interreacting with people

who look different than you,

also you can look for examples (00:24:30)

that break stereotypes.

I always describe this as,

one way to do this,

is there’s this really awesome Huffington post

positivity news outlet

that shares news that breaks down stereotypes.

It shares thing that we would not

necessarily see in the media on the everyday.

And also pay attention to messaging.

The second way to address bias is externally (00:25:00)

and this is really important

especially for folks who recognize

maybe their privilege to call out negative messaging.

It’s important for us to call out people

that are reinforcing stereotypes

that are negative about different groups of folks

and again amplifying stories

and really taking control of narratives

that are breaking down stereotypes

and shedding positivity around marginalized groups (00:25:30).

And then being aware of what we call choice points.

This is basically you know there are moments

where something comes up for you

and it might be in the workplace

or in your family

and you have to make decisions

whether or not you’re going to call that out or stay silent.

So being aware of those moments

where you have a decision to make (00:26:00).

So, we have a couple things

that we want to leave you with as considerations.

We want to ask ourselves

as animal welfare

are we criminalizing poverty?

Are we maintaining and perpetuating systems

of discrimination and oppression?

Is animal welfare at odds

with other social justice movements?

And how can we actually increase diversity

equity and inclusion in our organizations (00:26:30)

and across the field at large?

And then finally,

its important for us to ask

what we can do to become a better field.

I think it’s really important

for us to learn to extend compassion

and understanding to other people,

putting ourselves into other folks’ shoes

and practicing humility.

Its also really important for us to become informed on issues (00:27:00)

of racial inequity,

Lori mentioned there’s a great reading list

and we’ll send that out after the presentation.

But really just taking time to understand the issues.

It’s also important for us to identify

and remove barriers to services and engagement.

Making sure people from marginalized communities

feel comfortable coming to you

as an animal advocate or provider for services.

And one other way that were able (00:27:30)

to move the needle is connecting with other movements

and creating equity and access across movements.

And then again

as I mentioned before

really committing to hard and long-term work.

This is a conversation

and like I said this presentation is just the tip of the iceberg

but making sure your organization

is making that commitment

to the hard work and knowing that

its not just a one off and you have to really build it

into the fabric of your organization (00:28:00).

It’s really a long-term commitment.

So, we want to thank you for joining us today for our presentation.

I wanted to leave you with our contact information

here we have Amanda’s email,

Lori’s email,

and mine.

If you have questions

you want to reach out privately after the Q&A

please feel free to just send us an email and we’d love to chitchat.

Thank you. Thank you every one. (00:28:30)