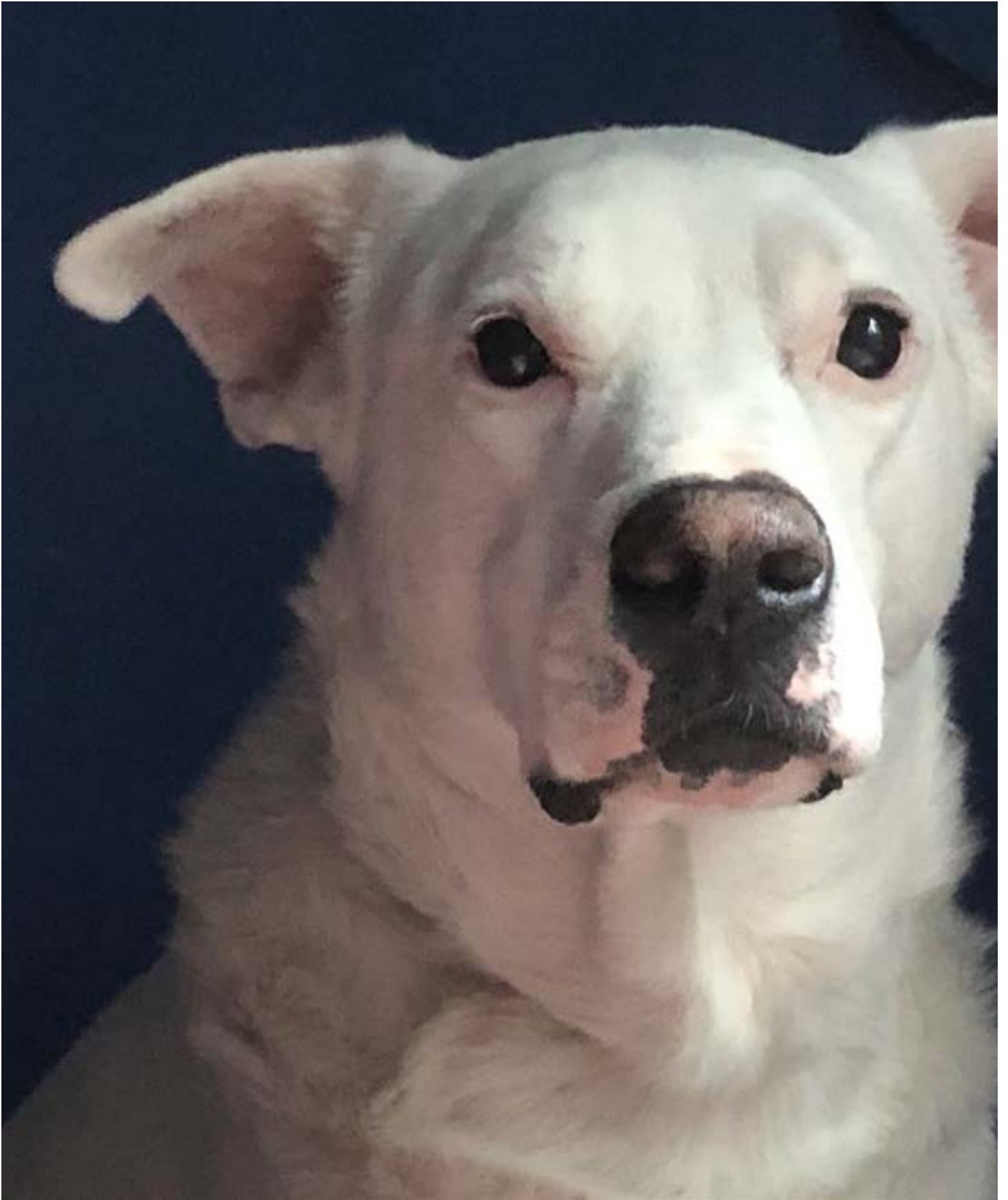




# 2020 End of Year Report



## Our History

The Shelter Playgroup Alliance was formed out of a conversation about best practices for managing inter-dog play among Lisa Mullinax, Kiem Sie, and Mara Velez. When presented with the idea of assembling shelter professionals from Northern California to discuss approaches and share best practices, Lisa and the behavior team at Sacramento SPCA graciously offered their education room for just such a gathering, which took place in the late spring of 2018. Those two days of discussion and presentations drew nearly 45 shelter behavior professionals from multiple states and across California.

Almost half of the participants joined a working group, led by Mara Velez, in developing what would be known as the first version of the [Shelter Playgroup Alliance guidelines](#). Since launching the guidelines in early spring of 2019, the Shelter Playgroup Alliance was incorporated as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization and has educated people all across the globe on a very small budget, with an un-paid staff and a small number of volunteers.

## Our Mission

The mission of the Shelter Playgroup Alliance (SPA) is to provide animal welfare organizations with education, tailorable guidelines, and support materials for developing and implementing comprehensive enrichment programs. These programs focus on healthy inter-dog interactions, including playgroups, that align to the [Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive ethical standard \(LIMA\)](#). LIMA-based playgroups are devoted to providing dogs with opportunities to consent, physical and mental safety, and avoid the use of aversives.

## Our Vision

All shelter animals will receive daily enrichment both in and out of their kennel or enclosure during their shelter stay. All shelter dogs who enjoy inter-dog interactions will experience physically, and behaviorally healthy interactions, regardless of shelter resources. All staff and volunteers will have the education necessary to demonstrate excellent management of inter-dog interactions and provide multi-faceted enrichment to all sheltered animals.

## **Our Educational Resources**

### **Shelter Playgroup Alliance Guidelines**

[The Shelter Playgroup Alliance written guidelines](#) are a no-cost educational resource on implementing shelter enrichment and managing inter-dog interactions, including play.

### **Shelter Playgroup Alliance Newsletter**

The Shelter Playgroup Alliance newsletter is an educational resource for implementing shelter enrichment, managing inter-dog interactions, and communication vehicle about upcoming workshops and events.

### **In-person workshops**

In-person workshops are hosted by shelters across the country and are focused on developing or enhancing enrichment programs, diving deep into canine behavior as it relates to inter-dog interactions, the Shelter Playgroup Alliance guidelines, and observing interactions and playgroups in action. These workshops are conducted by the Shelter Playgroup Alliance staff, are provided at no cost, and are typically three days in length, depending on the host shelter.

### **Virtual workshops**

[Two-day virtual workshops](#) briefly cover developing or enhancing enrichment programs and dive deep into canine behavior as it relates to inter-dog interactions and the Shelter Playgroup Alliance guidelines. Virtual workshops are conducted by Shelter Playgroup Alliance staff and provided at no cost.

### **YouTube Channel**

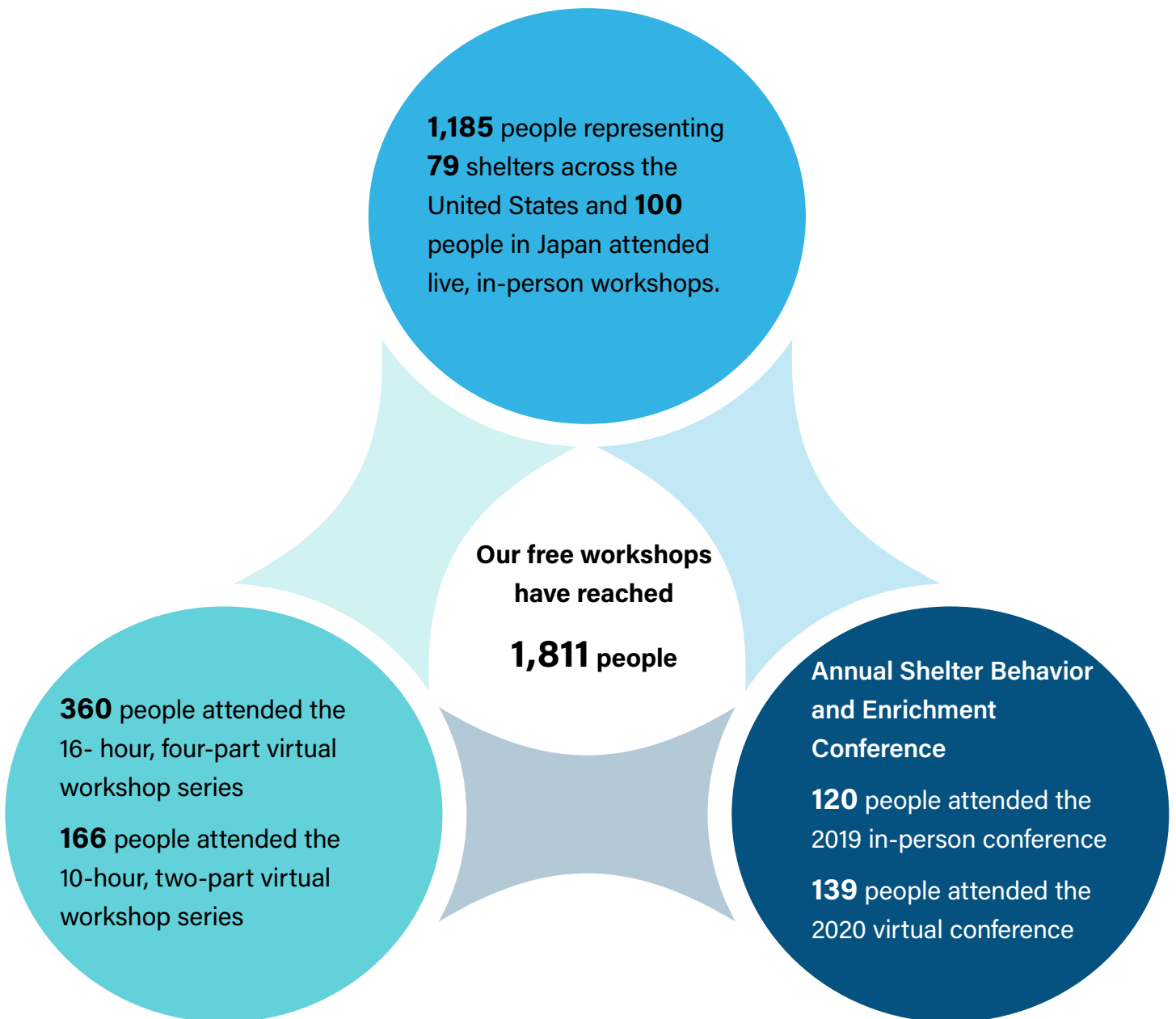
[The Shelter Playgroup Alliance YouTube Channel](#) features videos on deploying enrichment, canine behavior and management of inter-dog interactions using the Shelter Playgroup Alliance guidelines. There are currently over 550 subscribers to the Shelter Playgroup Alliance YouTube channel.

### **Annual Shelter Behavior and Enrichment Conference**

We host an [annual shelter enrichment and behavior conference](#) during which we explore current science and the theoretical foundations upon which the Shelter Playgroup Alliance Guidelines are based. At our annual conference, attendees learn about shelter welfare, enrichment, and inter-dog interactions. We host speakers who are well-respected in the field, including researchers and behavior consultants.



## Our Educational Resources by the Numbers



## Participant Feedback

Thank you so much for putting on these workshops! I've learned so much!

Your workshops are amazing! Really the best. Thank you.

I so admire the work you do, and your workshops are brilliant.

I attended the recent four session on-line workshop and found your approach refreshing. After having attended another organization's training and having three dog fights in two days, with injuries and injury to the trainer that required a trip to the hospital, your slow methodical way seems workable.

Thank you so much for an amazing workshop! I was definitely a little daunted by the length of the workshop going in, but it was all extremely insightful. I'm very excited to try everything you showed us out in the shelter.

I LOVED the playgroup training! It was so enjoyable for me. The last playgroup training the shelter had employed a very hands-off approach. We were discouraged from talking with each other or the dogs. It was really hard for me to be comfortable in playgroups because I felt myself constantly anticipating what would come next and feeling sort of helpless in preventing situations from escalating. The Shelter Playgroup Alliance approach is much more hands-on and preventative.

## Our 2020 Budget

Category	Line Item	2020 Actuals
Workshop expenses	Workshop travel	-\$7,053
Marketing and Communication ex- penses	Website maintenance	-\$800
Workshop expenses	Webinar software	-\$3,500
Office expenses	E-mail accounts	-\$200
Income	Conference income (less expenses)	\$13,000
Income	Donations	\$1,198
Income	T-shirt sales profits	\$1,104
Income	Grants	0
EOY Balance		\$3,749





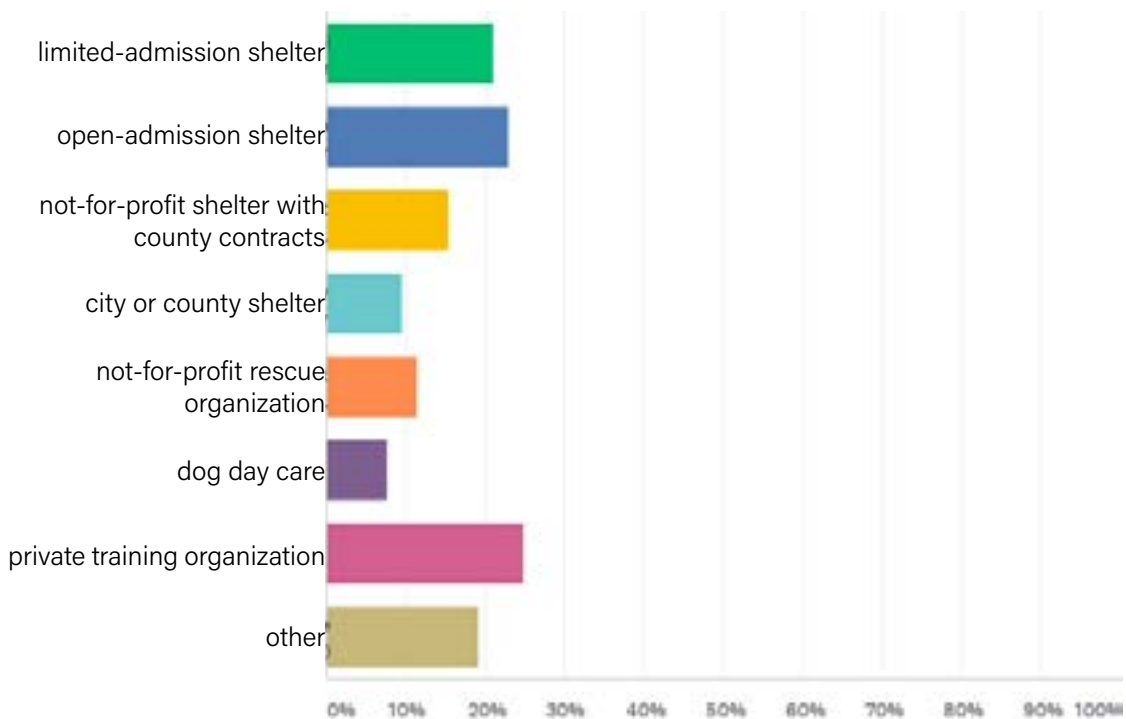
## End of Year Survey Results

### Survey overview

The purpose of the Shelter Playgroup Alliance End of Year Survey is to gather information on workshops and the implementation of the Shelter Playgroup Alliance guidelines in shelters. Key findings of the survey include a significant adoption of non-playgroup based enrichment for sheltered animals and a low incidence of inter-dog conflict for adopters of the Shelter Playgroup Alliance guidelines.

### Respondents

52 individuals responded to the survey. These respondents came from a variety of types of organizations, the majority of which were open-admission shelters and private training businesses. Individually, the respondents were primarily from behavior departments, shelter behavior staff or are



### Workshop and Conference Attendance

79% of the respondents have attended either a live or virtual workshop on the guidelines and inter-dog play and 20% of the respondents have attended a Shelter Playgroup Alliance Shelter Enrichment and Behavior Conference. Nearly 40% of the respondents noted that others from their organization have also attended Shelter Playgroup Alliance educational offerings.

### Guidelines Implementation

32 of the respondents are currently running playgroups; 20 of which have indicated that they are implementing the Shelter Playgroup Alliance guidelines. 31 of 32 respondents, even if they are not fully implementing our guidelines, are avoiding the use of aversives. Tools that are being used during playgroup include food, leashes, squeakers, and breaker boards.

Below are two charts with the frequency of conflict and injury to handlers and dogs. When compared to data from another popular playgroup model that uses aversives, these figures indicate that adoption of our guidelines, or at the very least removing the regular use of aversives, reduces the risk of conflict and injury.

**Figure 1: All respondents running playgroups**

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS	TOTAL
Inter-dog conflict that needed to be interrupted with a hose	78.13% 25	21.86% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	32
Inter-dog conflict that needed to be interrupted with a breaker board	75.00% 24	25.00% 8	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	32
Inter-dog conflict that resulted in injury to another dog	59.38% 19	40.63% 13	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	32
Inter-dog conflict that resulted in injury to a person	87.50% 28	12.50% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	32

**Figure 2: Respondents who have adopted the Shelter Playgroup Alliance Guidelines**

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS	TOTAL
Inter-dog conflict that needed to be interrupted with a hose	75.00% 15	25.86% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20
Inter-dog conflict that needed to be interrupted with a breaker board	65.00% 13	35.00% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20
Inter-dog conflict that resulted in injury to another dog	55.00% 11	45.00% 9	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20
Inter-dog conflict that resulted in injury to a person	80.00% 16	20.00% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20

## **Looking Ahead to 2021**

### **Learning Management System**

In order to continue to scale our educational offerings, yet offer a no-cost, high-quality interactive learning experience for shelters, we require the purchase of a subscription to a learning management system (LMS). With the implementation of an LMS, we will be able to host courses related to canine behavior, building shelter enrichment programs, and implementing inter-dog playgroups that adhere to LIMA.

### **Feline Enrichment**

Expanding our impact also means expanding to multiple species. Incorporating feline enrichment into our guidelines will be an important step for increasing animal welfare in shelters.

### **2021 Shelter Playgroup Alliance Shelter Behavior and Enrichment Conference**

Supporting shelter staff in using LIMA also means providing high-quality educational offerings beyond our workshops.



## Shelter Playgroup Alliance Leadership

### **Mara Velez, Executive Director and Co-founder**

Mara Velez is a certified professional dog trainer (CPDT-KA) and has spent more than a decade in sheltering at both open-admission and limited-admission facilities. Mara is also the executive director of Humane Dog Training Advocates (HDTA), an owner-education focused nonprofit that aims to keep dogs in homes through education and support. Mara holds both a bachelor's and master's degree in psychology and completed all of the course work for a doctorate in education. She completed Trish King's Canine Behavior Academy (CBA), levels I & II; Dr. Susan Friedman's Living and Learning with Animals (LLA); The Karen Pryor Academy Professional Animal Training program (KPA); and more than 2,500 hours of animal-related continuing education. Mara is also a learning and development consultant to corporations across a variety of industries, where she advises and works on projects related to leadership development, process improvement, and learning program management.



### **Kiem Sie, Operations Director**

Kiem is a certified professional dog trainer (CPDT-KA) and for the past decade, Kiem has been working across two sectors: animal welfare and higher education. Her commitment to assisting open-admissions shelters started when she was an active volunteer at Berkeley Animal Care Services (BACS). While at BACS, she trained incoming volunteers and provided adoption counseling. Kiem also served as a board member with Friends of Berkeley Animal Care Services, where she helped raise funds for educational and enrichment programs, adoptions, medical care, equipment, and other shelter necessities. She has also been a part of local rescues helping in various capacities, from coaching potential fosters, adoption counseling, fostering, training, and community support at pet health and wellness events around the Bay Area. In 2016, Kiem was asked to join the Behavior and Training unit at the Contra Costa Animal Services (CCAS) where she conducted behavior evaluations, implemented behavior modification plans, and trained dogs using positive reinforcement.



## Shelter Playgroup Alliance Board of Directors

### Marissa Martino, Board President

Marissa Martino, CTC, CPDT-KA is the board president and has worked for the Humane Society of Boulder Valley in Boulder, CO as their behavior & training coordinator, the East Bay SPCA, as the Director of Behavior and Training, and the Behavior Manager at Dumb Friends League in Denver. She has developed and implemented a behavior modification programs for shelter dogs with various special needs: such as fear, separation anxiety, resource guarding and dog-dog aggression. Marissa has also presented at several shelter-focused conferences, including the HSUS conference and the Animal Care Conference. As part of her role at Dumb Friends League, Marissa provides technical assistance to other shelters across the country.



### Lisa Colvin, Board Secretary

Lisa Colvin is the board secretary for the Shelter Playgroup Alliance and is the Senior Product Manager, Computational Programming at Pandora. Lisa has extensive experience in managing large, complex projects and has a background in computational linguistics, data science, and ontology engineering. Lisa brings her project management and critical analysis to the board. Lisa shares her home in Oakland with her three cats and her husband.



### Andee Connors, Board Member-at-Large

Andee Connors is a board member-at-large for the Shelter Playgroup Alliance and is the Manager of Catalog and Creator Services as well as the head of Metal and Punk Programming at Pandora SXM. Andee studied at UC San Diego, focusing on art and literature before leaving to pursue a career in music. He's been a touring and recording musician ever since (30 years and counting) and currently plays in three bands. He's been a music writer, a promoter, ran a record label, is a photographer and is the previous owner of Aquarius Records in San Francisco. Andee has a love of all animals, but cats in particular. While he plans to start his own animal rescue, he currently shares his apartment in San Francisco with three cats -- TONY HARRISON, LUGBURZ, and TUNGSTEN.



## Shelter Playgroup Alliance Board of Directors

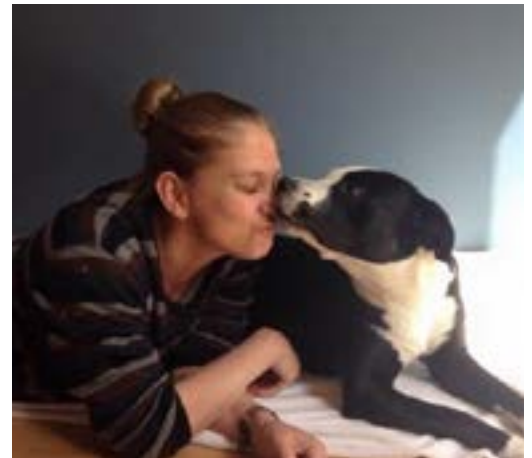
### **Nicole Kohleriter-Perelman, Member-at-Large**

In 2015 after 15 years of leading communications efforts for nonprofits, Nicole Kohleriter-Perelman founded Mission Critical PR to help mission-driven organizations achieve their goals. Kohleriter-Perelman excels at helping organizations define their brand and communications strategy, and then achieve high visibility media opportunities. With her experience, connections, and background in public policy, Kohleriter-Perelman and her associates are equally skilled at helping organizations develop successful partnerships, especially with funders, elected officials, and public policy experts.



### **Jennifer Phillips, Board Member-at-Large**

Jennifer is a professional, certified dog trainer and behavior consultant. She has played many roles in the animal industry: zookeeper, wildlife rehabber, docent, and educator. After adopting two fearful/reactive shelter dogs, she began her educational journey to become a professional animal trainer. Her passion is educating owners about environmental enrichment, training, and helping people develop deep and meaningful relationships with their animals. She currently shares her home with two mixed breed dogs, Green Aracarís (small Toucans), African Grey parrots, and Poison Dart frogs. In addition to training animals, she is an avid theatre goer and docent for the Los Angeles Zoo.





## Shelter Playgroup Alliance Volunteers

We cannot function without the support of volunteers who donate their time and expertise in support of our mission. This past year we have been exceptionally fortunate to be supported by the following individuals whose contributions have been invaluable:

**Laura Mees** has worked to start our grant writing program by drafting our essential documents.

**Yona Rappaport** provides key support for our webinars and is also a content contributor for our YouTube channel. Yona also makes the leashes that you often see in our videos.

**Eliana Senturia** is an essential member of the webinar support team; we couldn't pull off our workshops without her.

**Suzanne Turner** is an essential member of the webinar support team. Suzanne's creative ideas and input will no doubt take us in some valuable directions!

**Ally Verba** is our social media manager, key knowledge support on our webinars, and is a contributor to our guidelines. Many people would never know that we exist if it weren't for Ally. Ally is featured as a handler in several of our videos

**Alyssa Vincent** provides key knowledge support for our webinars and is a content contributor for our YouTube channel. Alyssa is featured as a handler in several of our videos.

**Anna Wong** has provided invaluable support for the webinars and is featured in one of our YouTube videos.



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