

## CommunityCatsPodcast\_Ep415\_Wysocki\_210803.mp3

**Kristen Petrie** [00:00:02]

You've tuned in to The Community Cats Podcast. Ready? Let's go.

**Stacy LeBaron** [00:00:13]

Welcome to The Community Cats Podcast. I am your host, Stacy LeBaron. I've been involved helping homeless cats for over twenty years with the Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society. The goal of this podcast is to expose you to amazing people who are improving the lives of cats. I hope these interviews will help you learn how you can turn your passion for cats into action. Today we're speaking with Lisa Wysocki. After working with local shelters for years, rescuing and transporting cats and dogs, Lisa, along with her best friend Suzanne Steinberg, decided to focus their energy at getting at the root of the pet overpopulation problem. So in two thousand twelve, Fido Fixers was created, a not-for-profit all-volunteer organization that provides low-cost spay and neuter services using mobile clinics for cats and dogs in economically disadvantaged areas, typically located in the South of the United States where the euthanasia rates for companion animals are highest. Currently, Fido Fixers has seven surgical mobile clinics and has performed over eighty-three thousand surgeries, significantly reducing the number of unwanted litters of kittens and puppies, born just to suffer or die. Lisa, I want to welcome you to the show.

**Lisa Wysocki** [00:01:24]

Hello, Stacy. Great introduction. I forgot I wrote it.

**Stacy** [00:01:33]

Yeah, no, it's great. Yes, you've done some wonderful things Lisa. After listening in on your own bio there. So thanks again for joining us today. And before we jump into Fido Fixers, I want to find out more from you. You know, how did you get passionate about cats, passionate about dogs? You know, what was it that drove you to creating this program?

**Lisa** [00:01:56]

Well, I've always been an animal person. Even, you know, when I was a little child, I was rescuing dogs and cats and, you know, have always had pets my entire life but my record was nine, and they've always been rescues and I started getting involved

with some organizations in Greenwich, Connecticut. And I began as a cat cuddler and I would go in and spend time with the shelter cats, of course, adopting them, you know, along the way and adding to my own menagerie at home. And so I got more and more involved, starting as a cat cuddler and then getting involved with adoption events and transports, bringing in mostly dogs from Southern states. And during that time, I met my best friend Suzanne Steinberg, who was also an animal advocate. When I met her, she had thirteen rescue dogs, and we together became very entrenched in the transport of dogs from high kill areas in the South and bringing them to the Northeast where we worked with some of the larger groups and had adopt-a-thons and you know, and one year, we were able to get six hundred, over six hundred fifty dogs adopted. But what happened is the more we got involved in that, the more, you know we were very happy in the beginning because it's really very joyful to find forever homes for these dogs and some cats, who would have been killed if we didn't bring them up here, but it also got very frustrating because we knew that we were leaving thousands behind and we couldn't do it fast enough. And we had heard stories of the people who had been bringing the dogs up and you know, and the cats, how many were being euthanized. And in some areas they were, probably still are using gas chambers to do it. So as time went on, we just realized like, you know, we're just treading water here. We don't have a big impact. We had impact for the dogs we saved but we were never going to solve the problem and certainly at that time there were not enough homes for all these animals. So I, it's so funny because I actually serendipitously was listening to a book on tape by Bob Barker and as, you know, he ended the Price Is Right with spay and neuter, and when I was done with it, I called his charity, his foundation I should say, and I wanted to speak to him and his girlfriend called me back. I spent a long time on the phone with her and I told her what we were doing and that my partner and I wanted to spin off and do it on our own. And she said, don't even spend any more time or energy on transports or rescuing. Focus on getting to the root of the problem. If you want to do your own thing, do spay and neuter. That's where you going to have the greatest impact. And she told me, you know, it's one of the reasons why I called was not only to get some information and to introduce, but I wanted to see about funding, if they would fund it and they said, no, we don't fund anything except spay and neuter. And she told me how they had gone into areas in New Mexico with mobile clinics and stayed for months, and months. And by the time they left, there were no puppies and

kittens like, if someone wanted a dog or a cat, they had to go outside of the area to find one, that they had made such a major impact and saved so many lives from being destroyed, you know, if these litters were just allowed to continue. So that being said, we realized that that's what we wanted to do, to focus on spay and neuter and have a bigger impact. And so we came up with Fido Fixers and started our own 501(c)(3) organization and in two thousand thirteen, the first Fido vehicle hit the road. And since then, you know, we've added seven to our fleet and we have an eighth on order. So we grew, we took a U-turn and we went in a totally different direction, but we, Suzanne and I, feel that we made the right decision to go that way and since we founded this organization, as you said, you said eighty-three thousand, but you know, I wrote that a couple weeks ago so now it's eighty-five thousand surgeries. And if you've seen the chart where you say one un-spayed cat or dog could, you know, a dog could be sixty-five thousand offspring, a cat eighty thousand offspring, you know, we think our impact is just millions of animals that have not been born to suffer and die.

**Stacy** [00:06:48]

Yeah, that's incredible. Absolutely amazing what you're doing and it sounds like that Bob Barker's girlfriend there got you in the idea for the mobile clinic. So you have seven that are out either on loan or on the road at this point in time. You know, how do you work that relationship with an organization that might be interested in using one of your mobile clinics?

**Lisa** [00:07:11]

Well, what we do is that we do a lot of networking because it's an issue. We have to find, we have to find a group. I work in Greenwich, Connecticut in my office, my home office, and by the way, I should say that, you know, I'm not paid, and Suzanne, she and I have never taken a nickel out of the organization. She is the largest donor, and I'm one of the largest donors and we get very little grant money. Very low grant money, if I should say only, one grant and that was out of the UK, believe it or not. But that being said, how do we find these groups? We find these groups through word of mouth. Esther Mechler has been a very important person with helping us find good partners but that's one of our challenges, you know, where small people don't know who we are. And how do we find a good partner, but we found some very good partners over the years. And so what we bring to the table is we buy these, you

know, fully- equipped mobile clinics, from La Boit, and they're twenty-six feet and they are just, you know, they have everything, autoclaves, an operating suite and the group, our partners have to provide the vet and they actually operate it. So we give them this asset which now costs one hundred eighty thousand dollars. We also pay for the vehicle insurance, and major repairs, and I do all the DMV work and make sure that's all taken care of. And then for a dollar a month, they have to operate it and perform over two hundred surgeries a month on dogs and cats in their neighborhood, in their area. We give them a lot of flexibility. And we're very easy people to work with because as long as they make their numbers, we leave them alone. They have to report to us monthly even though some groups, you know, report weekly, that's fine, but they're allowed to set their prices, but it does have to be low priced. It has to be considerably lower than a vet, and they have to work four days a week. So two hundred surgeries a month, four days a week, preferably remotely, that they move around so they can go to underserved areas where there's little access to veterinarian care and these kind of services. And then they give us a dollar a month, which I say, none of them do. It's just, it's just there for, you know, it's a symbol of goodwill, but they even that they don't pay us which is pretty funny. But we love our partners and we've had some terrific ones, and we have very good ones now, but you know, there was a lot of, we had a lot of startup issues and learned a lot of lessons over the years. So we've gotten better at finding partners and also, you know, we have to be flexible because stuff happens with partners. Sometimes they burn out, sometimes the vet quit, that happens a lot. And then we have set it up so that we start off with the one-year contract but if they can't make their commitment or something changes, we can move it. So we never buy a Fido for any specific group. We maintain title so we have control over it because things change and I can't tell you how many groups we've been involved with where, for many reasons, the most typical is that the vet leaves and you know, everybody knows there's a vet shortage, and they can't operate and run the program anymore so we have to move it.

**Stacy** [00:10:54]

Is there a minimum amount of time or maximum amount of time that organizations can have a mobile clinic with you?

**Lisa** [00:11:01]

No. I mean the minimum is that if, you know, we had a few groups, three of them, that took Fido and never could get the program off the ground. The vet didn't like it or they weren't really serious about it and so if that's the case, we'll pull it. We don't leave it there for a year just because there's an annual contract. We will pull it and try to put it in another area where it can be productive but we do have some groups that have been with us for years. Our group in South Carolina, The Humane Society of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina is just a wonderful partner and they've been with us since two thousand fourteen. And then we have SNIP-IT in Tennessee, and they've been with us for probably four years. So, we have some long-term relationships and then we have short-term relationships because as I said, it's not for every group and, you know, certainly, you know, stuff happens with the vet. Like we had it in Mississippi for a while and they used it for two years and then Mississippi State University, or somebody else, funded a much larger unit so they gave it back. And then we sent it to Texas to work with PetSet. So we're constantly moving them around but then again other groups, just, it really sticks, like they are able to have a sustainable program for years. But even when, Stacy, even when we send it to areas and it doesn't work out, I still figure well, you know what, that's good because they learned a lesson. I mean we learn to not, you know, we're not going to go back with them again, but they learned a lesson too because a lot of groups, you know, they fantasize or whatever. They think this is going to be terrific and it's not for everybody. It's very hard work, and the vets can get claustrophobic and it's for a different kind of person or, you know, it's a highline vet that doesn't mind being that, you know driving, and its really very, very difficult. So even if when we send it to some groups, and they can never get it off the ground and we take it away, they give it back. What happened is the positive is that they didn't go out and raise a hundred eighty thousand dollars to buy this expensive mobile clinic just to have it sit there and then what?

**Stacy** [00:13:25]

Right, right. So they were able to do a proof of concept right there using Fido. When you look and consider organizations is the size of the organization a determinant or can a rescue organization that feels like they can put the infrastructure together, are they just as considered as a larger group?

**Lisa** [00:13:47]

Yes, you know. Larger groups like The Humane Society in South Carolina and we've had Brother Wolf in Asheville, which are considered larger organizations, then PetSet out of Houston. And then we have SNIP-IT in Eastern Tennessee, run by Priscilla, Dr. Priscilla Seaton, and it's Priscilla, and her vet tech, just the two of them. She's a very small not-for-profit. She's highly, highly effective and she is usually, every month, is doubling her numbers, typically four hundred surgeries a month. So we have both. The most important thing, the big lesson we learned was that before we give Fido to any group, they have to have a dedicated vet already hired. We've been burned by groups saying, you know, oh, we're going to hire a vet and then we bring Fido and then they can never find a vet. So, I mean, the biggest, the key is that they have a full-time dedicated vet and that they, that they're able to fund it because they have to pay for the vet, they have to pay for the staff, you know. What they don't have to pay for is a very expensive mobile clinic, and they don't have to get insurance because insurance is very challenging, and we've had some ups and downs with that but now we have a very good insurer that is sticking with us. And, you know, the repairs. So, you know, because of our partnership, they have much less expenses, significantly less expenses, and they also don't have the headache of doing this. Like, you know, I have to do all the DMV stuff which is like, part of my job. I think it's the worst part of most people's life, right?

**Stacy** [00:15:28]

Yeah, even for their own car, they'll be like, you know, a Fix Fido? What is this you're talking about?

**Lisa** [00:15:35]

Every time I go to have to go to DMV, I get like a pit in my stomach, but we do all that, you know, so we like we fund, we do the fundraising to buy it for them, you know, managing the insurance, we're taking care of the DMV stuff. I, we pay the property taxes and major repairs we reimburse. So we make it very, very easy for them to do business with us, but we need them and they need us.

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**Stacy** [00:16:01]

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**Kristen** [00:16:59]

Use offer code COMMUNITYCATS at checkout for a total of thirty percent off your first order at Smalls.com.

**Stacy** [00:17:06]

Are you ready to be part of the solution for feral and stray cats in your neighborhood? If so, then make sure to sign up for our next Neighborhood Cats TNR Certification Workshop. A new workshop is held online each month, generally on the first Saturday of the month, but please check our website for exact dates. For just ten dollars, expert instructors will teach you best practices for trap-neuter and return, TNR. Learn what TNR is and why it works. We'll cover getting along with neighbors, preparations for trapping, trapping itself, including entire colonies at once, feeding, providing winter shelter and more. Take advantage of the interactive format, extensive handouts, and video footage of actual projects. Attendees will receive a certificate of attendance and gain access to an ongoing Facebook group, for networking with other TNR activists. The two-and-a-half-hour workshop is led by Susan Richmond, the executive director of Neighborhood Cats, and Brian Kortis,

Neighborhood Cats National Programs Director. To find out the date of the next workshop and sign up, just visit [communitycatspodcast.com](https://communitycatspodcast.com).

**Stacy** [00:17:57]

As we emerge from the global pandemic of COVID, fostering is emerging as the new normal in the animal welfare industry, but shelter management software doesn't provide the tools or the workflows for communicating with fosters at scale. So many organizations struggle to maintain hundreds of animals in foster homes. If only there was a system that was custom built specifically to solve this problem. Introducing Fosterspace, powered by our friends at Doobert. Fosterspace was custom built to allow you to manage hundreds of foster relationships and to communicate with them via text, email, and even Facebook Messenger. Your fosters have a portal where they can upload videos and photos and updates on their animals and organizations can schedule fosters for meet-and-greets, adoption days, or anything else they need. There's so much more to check out. Sign up for free at [www.doobert.com](https://www.doobert.com) and go to the Fosterspace tab to get started.

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**Stacy** [00:18:43]

So Lisa, going forward, how many units do you think your group will handle?

**Lisa** [00:18:48]

I think eight is going to be pretty good for us. I really do, I really do because it's, it really is. We'll see. I mean, it's hard to say, it's hard to say but you know, it's just the two of us and we're not getting any, as I said, we're not getting any grants. I don't know why, I have applied with all the big groups, but we're not. So I think what's happening is that as the units start aging, our expenses for maintenance is going to get higher and higher and, the insurance gets higher and higher. So I think our ability to fundraise to get like, unit nine, ten, and then cover our increase in operating expenses is going to be pretty difficult. Right, we're going to be, we're going to be very happy to have eight.

**Stacy** [00:19:37]

Yeah. Yeah, I, as another owner of a mobile unit, I know that expenses can be significant and I just paid, you know, twenty-five hundred dollars to repair a generator. So it's those major repairs can be a surprise and a little bit painful.

**Lisa** [00:19:55]

Right? And, you know, I learned from the manufacturer that we're already one of the largest groups in the country at least with them. Like we have, and I really shouldn't name names but if you look at like the household names, we're the third largest customer in for the veterinarian mobile clinics from Le Boit. So eight's a lot.

**Stacy** [00:20:17]

Yes, that is a lot. I'm thinking about you taking on the West Coast though but South is fine. I'll be fine with that one too Lisa.

**Lisa** [00:20:27]

I do know a great, a really, really good group on my waitlist in the West Coast so it's not out of the question.

**Stacy** [00:20:35]

That's great. It's good to know. You know, I think that there's a lot changing around the country and some of the things that might be changing too, is that the units might end up doing, it'll do spay/neuter but maybe also, maybe some wellness and sort of community care on the days that they're not doing surgery or something like that also. Just to get even out into the community even more. Have you thought about that or has anyone approached you about using it on the days off as a, as like a vaccination, microchipping type unit?

**Lisa** [00:21:08]

You know, they're already doing it and we don't interfere with how the vets want to spend their time in the sense that, as long as they perform over two hundred surgeries a month, if they want to do wellness, that's great with us. And a lot of them do, while you know, while that animal is there, they do do the wellness visit, and they do microchipping and they do vaccinations. So, all of that's happening. We just don't dictate it. The only thing we absolutely require is two hundred spay and neuters, and that they be low-cost. That's it, but they can, it's entirely up to the vet, if they want to

do, if they want to work five days a week and do wellness on the fifth day or they, if they want to do wellness on weekends, we're good with all that.

**Stacy** [00:22:02]

So Lisa, if folks are interested in finding out more about Fido Fixers, how would they do that?

**Lisa** [00:22:08]

Well, they can go to our Facebook page, which is Fido Fixers Greenwich or they can go to my website, which is, what's the word for it, well, it's homemade, Stacy. I made it in two thousand twelve like in my pajamas and not being very technical and it looks it, and it looks it, and my contact us submission form is not working. And I spent a lot of time with the company, the web building company, and they got back to me and said this is, so your website is so old, you're kind of out of luck. So I'm at the point where, do I want to spend money to redo the website or people can just contact me through Facebook or the Gmail account, which is [Fidofixers@gmail.com](mailto:Fidofixers@gmail.com). And I decided I didn't want to spend the money on the website because we're really like, such a small little organization that does big things but our big thing is like we just don't waste money. We don't waste money on salaries or anything but buying new equipment, sticking to our mission, which is to buy mobile clinics, pay for the insurance, pay for the major repairs and, you know, the licensing and property taxes. That's what we pay for. But we don't do what we just, we're bad at it. We're bad at, like, the social media frills, just bad at that stuff. It's not what, we're not, yeah, I'm not doing it. So that's how people find us. They find us those two ways but, you know, if I could ever get someone to build a website for us for free, I should do that. I would, I should do that.

**Stacy** [00:23:56]

Lisa, is there anything else you'd like to share with our listeners today?

**Lisa** [00:23:59]

No, I think we covered a lot of ground.

**Stacy** [00:24:04]

Yeah, and I mean, it's incredible being what you would consider yourself being a two-person nonprofit. So you call yourself a small nonprofit, but you're extremely

impactful with what you're doing. So, you know for folks that are out there that are like, oh that's just the two of us, you know, we can't, we can't do this or we can't do that, you know, find a solution. Find a way to be able to do it and it sounds Lisa, like, you were incredibly focused, which is also a really great trait to have, which is really stay focused and don't allow yourself to get pushed in this direction or this direction, and I think that that's also a really good lesson for folks to take away with them after this conversation today.

**Lisa** [00:24:42]

We stay in our own line, we stay in our own lane.

**Stacy** [00:24:46]

That's right. Lisa, I want to thank you again for agreeing to be a guest on my show, and I hope we'll have you on again, in the future.

**Lisa** [00:24:51]

You're welcome, Stacy. Thank you for inviting me.

**Stacy** [00:24:54]

That's it for this week. Please head over to Apple podcasts and leave a review. We love to hear what you think, and a five-star review really helps others find the show. You can also join the conversation with listeners, cat caretakers, and me on Facebook and Instagram. And don't forget to hit follow or subscribe on Spotify, Apple podcast, Google podcast, YouTube, Stitcher or wherever you listen to podcasts, so you don't miss a single show. Thanks for listening and thank you for everything that you do to help create a safe and healthy world for cats.

**Kristen** [00:25:25]

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