

Transcript

0:00:00 Rachel: *I'm happy to introduce you to Paula Wallace from the Liberty Foundation. Paula, can you introduce our listeners to the Liberty foundation and how you came to found the charity?*

0:00:11 Paula Wallace: *Hi. Thanks very much, Rachel. I'm very pleased to be with you today and thank you for asking us along. I'll just explain a little bit about who we are. Liberty Foundation Australia is a company which operates as a not for profit and our main objective is to organise the release and rehoming of animals from research facilities in Australia. We focus mostly on domestic species that people can adopt, like dogs and cats and small animals like rabbits, guinea pigs, rats and mice.*

0:00:42 Paula Wallace: *And we've been operating since 2017 and over that time we've successfully rehomed nearly 900 animals, mostly from research facilities in New South Wales and the ACT. And we provide essentially a pathway for animals from research into the community that's been happening in different parts of the world for some time now. There's a fairly well established pathway for dogs out of research in the United States, some states in the United States and also in India.*

0:01:18 Paula Wallace: *And there's also some sanctuaries that have popped up in different places catering to all kinds of animals, including primates and farm animals. And I guess I was aware that animals were used in research in Australia and I'd seen vivisection or procedures on live animals in my younger years when I did work experience at a laboratory. And many years later, after a career as a print journalist, writing mostly about business sustainability, I just found myself thinking one day that research establishments could really benefit from including animals in their corporate sustainability frameworks, which would have to take into account the full lifecycle of the animal, including what happens to them at the end of research.*

0:02:05 Paula Wallace: *At that time, many of the animals were still being euthanised young, even though they were young and healthy, many of them. And also given that rehoming is an option under the National Code or, well, the Australian code for the care and use of animals in scientific purposes is the long name, otherwise known as the National Code. But like a lot of sustainability movements, like energy efficiency, for example, it usually starts with a step change, where some organisations become early adopters and then they demonstrate the benefits and it kind of creates a benchmark, if you like.*

0:02:41 Paula Wallace: *So I felt that the animal based research sector needed an organisation like Liberty to help them make that step change. And what we found in the early, from the onset really, was that there was a number of these early adopters, progressive organisations, who wanted to embrace rehoming and provide more sustainable options for their animals and in this context, it means sustaining their lives like the lives of these animals, many of whom show extraordinary tenacity in their efforts to transition from a research setting into the community, into people's homes.*

0:03:20 Paula Wallace: *And you know, what a massive change that must be for them. Not least of which, the littlest members of our Liberty family, the tiny mice, they go from being housed in fairly small perspective boxes in research facilities to living in spacious naturalistic enclosures with branches and leaves and substrate, and they've got the space to run and dig and just live a happy kind of communal existence. And it might be surprising to some people to see how these little mice that are bred specifically for us to use in laboratories like over many generations, that once they're in a different environment, they behave differently.*

0:04:08 Paula Wallace: *So they start to display this range of instinctual behaviors that you would see in maybe a wild mouse, which is extraordinary, such as digging and nest building and climbing and things they just don't have the opportunity to do in a research facility. So I suppose people who work with them might not know that. Well, not that they can't do that, but they wouldn't necessarily display that when they're in a different environment. And you should see how quickly they start to behave in these ways once you see them in a different.*

0:04:40 Paula Wallace: *In a completely different ecosystem or environment.*

0:04:43 Rachel: *Is it a matter of days for the mice? Or weeks?*

0:04:48 Paula Wallace: *It's immediate, so instinctual. Yeah, they just come out of the travel cages, they go into the naturalistic enclosure, they immediately start exploring. They explore the perimeter, obviously first, as most rodents do, and then they just start to get into all the enrichment, what we call the enrichment in the cage, which is all the hiding areas, the problem solving things, climbing on ropes and things like that. But what you'll start to see is they dig almost immediately. So we use a very thick, a deep layer of hemp fiber which is like.*

0:05:18 Paula Wallace: *Oh, it's sort of like. Well, like wood chip, I suppose, but. But it's made from hemp and they get into this substrate and they just immediately start digging and tunneling. And so I just, I really only have to look at the mice just going about their business in the evenings, you know, when they wake up, because they sleep during the day. To remind myself of why Liberty came into being, you know, it's. For them, it's literally like a bridge.*

0:05:47 Paula Wallace: *And actually there's this funny thing on YouTube I don't know if you've ever seen. It's called guinea pig bridge. And it's worth a look at if you're interested in tiny, you know, little cute, little fluffy things. But every time I see that clip, it's the guinea pigs walking one behind the other across this little bridge to get to their dinner. And I think about the work that we do here. And so we are literally the bridge. On one side you've got the research facility, on the other side you've got, you know, the destiny of each animal to find their place in the world.*

0:06:18 Paula Wallace: *And here they are marching towards that. And, you know, we'll be here as long as they need that bridge to support them. That's why we're here.*

0:06:25 Rachel: *Brilliant. Great. And it's a registered charity?*

0:06:29 Paula Wallace: *Yes, it is, it's a registered charity and we accept, you know, tax deductible donations.*

0:06:35 Rachel: *Brilliant. Thank you for that introduction and explaining what inspires you. And I understand that the Liberty foundation has had some good news recently and has been awarded a grant from the New South Wales government. Can you tell me more about this grant and what it means for the foundation?*

0:06:52 Paula Wallace: *Yeah, well, it's a really good, great time for us to be talking actually about rehoming animals from research because we have been lucky enough to secure some grant funding from the New South Wales government and we believe that will be a game changer, not just for our organisation, but for rehoming of these animals across Australia. What we hope to do with the grant funding is increase our profile so more people can learn about the work that we do and become involved, as well as supporters or volunteers or adopters.*

0:07:21 Paula Wallace: *Because we believe that if we can get the message out to more people, then we can rehome more animals and then we can keep services like ours going into the future. Because it can be really challenging to start a charity from the ground up and particularly in like a very new and niche area like this. It's certainly not for the faint hearted and there's been lots of ups and downs and when you're relying solely on charitable donations, you're always fundraising to keep operating.*

0:07:52 Paula Wallace: *So we're hoping that this injection of funds will help us to reach more people, but also to open what could be what we think could be the world's first rehoming centre for small animals from research. We're hoping to open a centre, a sanctuary for the animals on the central coast of New South Wales later this year and it's only an hour north of Sydney and I think it will provide a place where we can house more animals, being less reliant on volunteer foster carers and really support our little animals to thrive.*

0:08:24 Paula Wallace: *And the centre will be catering mostly for guinea pigs, rabbits, rats and mice.*

0:08:29 Rachel: *Yep.*

0:08:31 Paula Wallace: *So it's a very exciting development for us and I think, you know, really can inspire other small charities and animal sanctuaries who do such amazing work around Australia. And there's hundreds of them that they can really, they can scale up to and achieve their dreams of being able to, you know, provide a lifeline for more animals. And yeah, sure, I mean, it takes a lot of work and it will be a lot of work over the next few years, but we really believe that people will support our rehoming mission and that hopefully, you know, you know, we'll get people to really consider that when they're thinking about adopting a new family member.*

0:09:13 Paula Wallace: *To consider an animal from research, which is something they might not have thought about before. And one thing that we're really on the lookout for at the moment is anyone who might have a building or a property that they're not using where we could set up the rehoming center. So we were exploring different options up here of commercial properties and yeah, you know, looked at a few places and. But our first choice is always to work with people who want to support animals coming out of research.*

0:09:38 Rachel: *So.*

0:09:39 Paula Wallace: *So just great to get the word out for anyone who might have facilities, you know, that we could repurpose and. Because the reality is that for animals from research, they've got. There is. They've got nowhere else to go unless we provide a space for them in our society. Many of them, like rats and mice, were bred for use in laboratories. They're not animals from the wild that have, like, a natural territory. They're animals that are domesticated for use in science, but they also can transition really well into people's homes.*

0:10:11 Paula Wallace: *And I think we've demonstrated that over the last eight years. And that's why the government is supporting us to bring this work to a bigger audience and to provide what is a really vital service to the research sector.*

0:10:24 Rachel: *Brilliant. Well, thank you and congratulations on that successful grant application. I hope that will make a big impact to what you're able to deliver. And I'm interested to know, obviously this might change a little bit with new project in mind. But what would be the typical process from research institute to a new adopted home?*

0:10:48 Paula Wallace: *Okay, well, it's probably not as complicated as you might imagine. We try and keep it as simple as we can because, in essence, it is a pretty simple process just facilitating the movement of the animal from the research facility into our custody to do that though we do need to have a rehoming agreement in place with the research establishment. And that could be a university or it could be a private company that conducts research or even a government run place.*

0:11:16 Paula Wallace: *And once that agreement is in place, which could take anywhere from weeks to years to negotiate that agreement, then we wait until they have animals ready for rehoming because they don't sort of come out in a steady stream. They, you know, they have different projects going at different times and some of them do contract research for other companies. So they'll have a, you know, might have a period of a six week trial or something like that, and then they'll have a cohort of animals that are ready for rehoming.*

0:11:44 Paula Wallace: *So we like to work with establishments that really think about the animals that are scheduled for rehoming and think about it early in the process. So when a research project is given approval, and we're seeing this happen more and more often now that animal ethics committees and management of research establishments are thinking about rehoming at the time when projects are approved and are asking researchers, okay, what are you doing in terms of, you know, the animal's life cycle? What will happen at the end? Are you considering rehoming?*

0:12:16 Paula Wallace: *Would these animals be suitable? That kind of thing? For many animals, like many procedures that occur in research are terminal procedures and the animals are not, not alive at the end. But you know, there are those where animals have, say, minimal intervention in some of them and they're often quite young when, when those studies are finished and quite suitable for rehoming. So we like to plan it properly, so we like to speak to them early on to get to understand the cohort of animals, the individuals, what they might need.*

0:12:51 Paula Wallace: *We like to have them, we like to have them vet checked at the facility before they released and any issues are flagged up with us beforehand because certain, even if an animal is older or has health concerns or issues that require ongoing treatment, that certainly shouldn't exclude them from rehoming. And you know, we've been able to prove that over many years that animals can definitely thrive. And actually, you know, they, they often get a bit of a second lease of life. You know, once they get through that initial transition period, which can be a little bit stressful, and they start to embrace their new life, we find that often their health will improve. But once the animals are ready, we arrange a time to pick them up. And sometimes we do this in a few lots because sometimes there can be large groups.*

0:13:40 Paula Wallace: *We've got one facility that has a really great transition to rehoming program for their rats. And they, where possible, move them into a different area in a larger, larger caging environment when they're getting ready for their rehoming. And those cages are kind of more in line with the sorts of cages that we would use. So they're bigger, they're open, they're metal grid cages, so they're not enclosed plastic.*

0:14:07 Paula Wallace: *They give them more interaction and more handling in that lead up to adoption. And what we found is that it does make a big difference for the animal because it's a less jarring experience, but also it improves their prospects for adoption. They're often quite well socialised by the time they come out. And they need less time with us before they go on to permanent homes. And when those, the animals do come out from the facility, then they.*

0:14:36 Paula Wallace: *They're then in the custody of Liberty Foundation. And so they come under the protection of, you know, the Protection of Cruelty to Animals Act. They're no longer bound by the Animal Research Act. So their status changes from being an animal in research to being a pet or companion domesticated animal in the community. So that's a big deal difference for them. They don't know the difference, but for us it means that they're well on their way to, you know, fulfilling, you know, their destiny as a pet or companion.*

0:15:11 Paula Wallace: *Yeah, sometimes they'll go to foster carers while we find them a permanent home. And we have a really wonderful group of really committed volunteers who have supported our work over years and have opened their homes and their hearts to our animals. And sometimes we already have adoptive homes lined up before they come out and they're transported directly from a facility to their new permanent home.*

0:15:36 Paula Wallace: *We do have a facility set up at my house, which is on the central coast of New South Wales, to house small animals temporarily as they're moving through. And that includes some really great areas for enrichment. We have a great gymnasium area that was set up for rats where they can work out in the gym and really start to hone their skills with climbing and really explore their full. Their full instincts to explore and to problem solve.*

0:16:09 Paula Wallace: *And we find that the time that they spend with us, you know, in those bigger areas really does help them along their way to start improving their confidence with handling and interaction, interaction with humans. And we've also developed a great housing system for mice. And I think, you know, many people may have been put off having mice as pets, which I think is a real shame, because I remember when I was growing up in the 70s, they were really popular pets and, you know, we would really like to create a renaissance in mouse adoptions because they are the most delightful animals and we've developed this*

fantastic, quite large naturalistic enclosure for mice. And when people adopt mice from us, they need to adopt them in the enclosure. It all goes with them and we show them how to maintain it.

0:17:01 Paula Wallace: *What's great about it is that you can have them in your home in these naturalistic enclosures. And because of the hemp fibre substrate, it absorbs all odor and all moisture. So, okay, you don't get any smell coming off the mice because that's what sort of puts people off, I think, these days. And yeah, I mean, I have several of them in my living room and you only have to clean them every four weeks.*

0:17:24 Paula Wallace: *And the stuff that we put into in there for them provides them with a great amount of enrichment. And if you. And they've also got glass panels at the front of them so you can actually see the mice come out at night and start going about their business and doing all the things that they do. They spend a lot of time exercising, running and, you know, climbing and, you know, we have all sorts of, you know, ropes and, and things in there for them, hammocks and things.*

0:17:55 Paula Wallace: *And yeah, like, they just make wonderful pets for kids. And I remember the joy that we experienced with them growing up. And I recently rehomed a group of mice in a naturalistic enclosure to one of our adopters and her children really wanted them. They were there. They were, I think, aged nine and five, I think, okay. And they just were squealing in delight, like watching the mice run around and just absolutely squealing just with excitement watching them.*

0:18:23 Paula Wallace: *And. Yeah, so we really like to bring that back into every home, you know, having. Having mice there and. But, yeah, they take very little maintenance, but they just, you know, reward you so much with how fascinating they are, really.*

0:18:39 Rachel: *And that's the same enclosure for the mice and the rats?*

0:18:44 Paula Wallace: *No, the rats need a bigger space. So we, we like to. We've got a preferred cage, actually, that you can buy in Australia retail, which is really great for rats. And we actually often adapt them and put a big digging box into the bottom of it, but you don't need to do that. But the rats have. Yeah, it's like a big double level kind of cage with big opening doors at the front. We find it's really easy to clean.*

0:19:07 Paula Wallace: *So we give lots of recommendations for people who want to adopt rats with the best kind of enclosure. And we. Yeah, we prefer to adopt them into those. And then, you know, the rats have free, free time outside of the cage.*

0:19:19 Rachel: *Yeah.*

0:19:20 Paula Wallace: *Sometimes people will set up a room and they open the doors at night and to the cages and then the rats have got, you know, boxes and things that they can play and run around in the room. For those people who don't have the luxury of a whole room for their rats, that's fine too. They can just bring them out and spend a bit of time with them on the lounge of the evening. Half an hour or an hour, that's usually enough for them. It just gives them a little bit of out of the cage time and helps with that bonding process.*

0:19:48 Rachel: *Brilliant. Thank you. And from the perspective of the research facilities that you work with, what would you say are the benefits to them in partnering with Liberty Foundation?*

0:20:02 Paula Wallace: *Well, I'd say the main benefit is that we deal with all the rehoming of the animal. You know, if they are interested in rehoming their animals and providing a more sustainable outcome for them at the end of research, then we make that easy for them. We're able to form a working partnership with them where we can take those animals that they would really like to see released to the community for, you know, a second stage of their life.*

0:20:33 Paula Wallace: *And we do everything that's required for them to find the perfect loving home. It takes a lot of administrative burden off research facilities to be able to work with someone like us who can deal with all of that side of it, from the point where the animal leaves the facility. And we provide comprehensive reporting back to research facilities to let them know about the outcomes for those animals, whether we're seeing any issues with behaviour or we're seeing an incidence of, you know, any health issues that are appearing in any of the animals.*

0:21:07 Paula Wallace: *And we always feed back that information. And what we find is that the research establishments we work with, very transparent and very open to sharing information and really do see it as a genuine partnership. And I think, you know, through that process, we're often working with animal technicians who are working with the animals every day and who really do get a lot of satisfaction from, from knowing what the outcome was for that animal.*

0:21:36 Paula Wallace: *And for example, we rehomed they wanted to retire a colony of guinea pigs from a research facility in the last few years. And we were able to help them to, for them to stop the research that they were doing there, which had come to its end, and then provide a really great outcome for all the animals that were left there, which were their breeding animals, their breeding colony of guinea pigs that were supplying the guinea pigs for the research.*

0:22:09 Paula Wallace: *So we were able to help them to re home 135 of those guinea pigs and to provide reports back to them, including pictures and videos of some of those animals in their adoptive homes to show also the early stages where they first came to Liberty foundation and they were some of the, for instance, the breeding males who were like adults were all just sexed so that then we could pair them with females and then they could have companionship for life and be rehomed with together as a group.*

0:22:37 Paula Wallace: *So we're able to show the happy outcomes that occurred for animals that had been there for some time and who the animal techs, you know, did have a relationship with. And they were really pleased to see what we're able to, to achieve for those animals and to also take, take that, that administrative burden from them of having to like try and find homes for all of those animals. And some of them are still with. We've got a little permanent herd of guinea pigs with us who've remained from that group who for whatever reason, health or behaviourally needed to stay with us.*

0:23:12 Paula Wallace: *And it really is that it's a great morale booster. So it's great for staff who people in management, people working in animal ethics, people on the animal ethics committee, the animal techs who are working directly with the animals. I mean it really is a feel good and win win story for everyone involved and it is very morale boosting, particularly for the staff that are working directly with the animals. Certainly that's the feedback that we've had from the research establishments we've worked with.*

0:23:43 Rachel: *Yep. Yeah, well, it does seem very logically a good outcome for them in that you're really facilitating so much and doing that administrative burden and feeding back and providing examples of how things could be if there is any issues with health status and stuff. You're really doing so much to assist them there. So definitely seems like a partnership which they should be open to. Definitely. So that's great to hear.*

0:24:19 Paula Wallace: *And also too it's worth mentioning that I think that it's a great way too for research establishments, particularly those that have signed up to the openness agreement to be able to demonstrate sustainable outcomes for animals in research and to be able to share with the general public, the wider community, some of the work that they're doing with animals, that their life doesn't just end at the conclusion of research, that they are making efforts to make provisions for them for their full life cycle. And I do know that some establishments have been able to include some of the pictures that we've provided of animals either in care at Liberty foundation or in their, you know, their adoptive homes and provide a bit of data as well to the community about the number of animals that they've rehomed.*

0:25:11 Paula Wallace: *And I, I guess too just to show that the animals are transitioning well and even though these are animals that are bred for use in science, that's not just what, that's not, that's not just what they're about. It's not the whole animal, you know, and I think so reputationally has terrific advantages.*

0:25:32 Rachel: *Yes, definitely. I mean for New South Wales specifically. My understanding is that there is more requirements in terms of institutions providing data on the number of animals that they rehome as a comparison to other States. So it's definitely in their interest if they can provide that positive data that they are rehoming animals.*

0:25:53 Paula Wallace: *So particularly in the use of dogs and cats as well. I think we're probably going to talk a bit about that as well.*

0:25:59 Rachel: *Yes. So I guess for the benefit of our listeners who may not be familiar with the situation in Australia, there are a number of groups advocating for what would be termed as right to release legislation. This is typically confined to dogs and cats to be rehomed after their use in research. But as Paula mentioned, the code in Australia recommends that animals are rehomed after research but doesn't have a legal requirement. But in New South Wales and hopefully soon in Victoria, legislation has been passed that after so many years dogs and cats are to be rehomed.*

0:26:42 Rachel: *This doesn't include small animals at the moment, but do you see a day where small animals will be covered by right to release legislation?*

0:26:51 Paula Wallace: *Well, it's an interesting question and I think it's certainly something that would have been thought about by some of the people that were responsible for putting together the legislation and getting it through Parliament. I mean at the moment we're looking at a three year limit. I think the legislation prescribes a three year limit for the use of dogs and cats in research in New South Wales or they cease to be used either one, they need to be rehomed.*

0:27:19 Paula Wallace: *And I think we'll start to see the full effect of that, you know, as of the end of this year when that three year limit starts to kick in, three being three years from the time that the legislation was enacted. So I think, you know, I'll be watching that with interest and you know, hopefully we'll see some more dogs and cats start to come through our doors in terms of the smaller animals. I don't think it's practically possible that we would have mandatory rehoming. I mean, I would love to see it obviously, but there's just the sheer volume of animals I think would prevent it from ever being mandatory.*

0:27:57 Paula Wallace: *However, I think that we could certainly do things, maybe even at a legislative level perhaps that would perhaps provide greater incentive and, or encouragement for research establishments to consider the rehoming of small animals. We did release, the New South Wales government did release a fairly comprehensive rehoming guideline for research establishments at the end of 2020. And after that we did start to see more inquiries coming through from research establishments and I think it did actually have an impact to start to bring it into, you know, the everyday sort of vernacular, I suppose, of people working in research establishments and their animal ethics committees and certainly raised awareness of the possibilities for rehoming and the benefits not just to animals, but the benefits to facilities as well. And so I'd like to think that, I mean, it's certainly a growing movement here and I think with us possibly getting more exposure and widespread awareness about what we're doing with rehoming that just start to see that grow more and more incrementally, which can only ever be a good thing.*

0:29:15 Paula Wallace: *And who knows where that will lead to in the future.*

0:29:19 Rachel: *Yep, exactly. Maybe if we start to see a reduction in animals used and the volume's a bit lower, it might be a bit more practical or as the code is being reviewed, maybe there's some options there in terms of, as you mentioned earlier, considering the rehoming paths at the animal ethics approval stage and so on. So definitely ways to try and improve the system if it's not possible to be mandatory for all animals at this time. There's definitely ways that the situation could be improved.*

0:29:49 Paula Wallace: *Yes, certainly. I mean, maybe even something like looking at the quotas, the quotas of numbers that a research establishment is using and then, you know, making suggestions around a percentage, you know, maybe bringing in sort of percentage that you would aim for, for rehoming, that kind of thing. Yeah, and I think that would help to also mould perhaps some of the types of research that are occurring so that, you know, there's not, maybe there would be a little bit more of a lean towards research where, which is not terminal, where animals do recover afterwards or have had minimal intervention.*

0:30:26 Paula Wallace: *So therefore lowering, I suppose, the, the level of, you know, fatalities within research for small animals.*

0:30:34 Rachel: *Yeah.*

0:30:35 Paula Wallace: *And, you know, and, and I guess adverse incidents that can occur throughout research as well. Where animals die unexpectedly. Yeah. So I. I don't know. I'm just sort of throwing ideas around here, but I think, yeah, we could possibly look at percentages or. Yeah, just. Or perhaps, you know, looking at animal ethics committees or establishments working together to kind of target a rehoming, a rehoming benchmark for themselves.*

0:31:07 Paula Wallace: *You know, I wouldn't rule that out. And I think some of the more progressive establishments. Oh, I mean, certainly some of them that we work with aim for what they call zero wastage, which is a bit of an unfortunate term, but it just refers to animals that are euthanised, that are surplus to requirements of research facilities. So, I mean, I think any research establishment that's operating according to the code and good ethics would be aiming to reduce their wastage.*

0:31:34 Paula Wallace: *Of course they would be, but some of our facilities that we work with are really aiming for zero. So they're trying to get to a place where they don't have any healthy animals that could be suitable for rehoming that are being euthanized. So, you know, that. That's certainly not unachievable. And I think it's. That's definitely the direction in which we're headed.*

0:31:54 Rachel: *Brilliant. Thank you. And out of your many years in this field, what would you say has been the most memorable animal? And why. It might be hard to narrow it down to one. But is there one particular animal or situation that stays in your mind?*

0:32:13 Paula Wallace: *Yeah, I mean, it's an interesting question, isn't it? It's because when. When I say, oh, you know, we've rehomed nearly 900 animals, and people think, oh, you know, it's a lot. And it is, in a sense, when. When you think about charities like rspca, who've got a high volume of animals that come through, mostly dogs and cats, you know, they would rehome, you know, many, many more animals than what we do.*

0:32:38 Paula Wallace: *But when you think about going back to 2017, where certainly there was, Well, I don't know of any, virtually any small animals that were coming out of research for rehoming. There might have been dogs and cats on occasion, but there certainly wasn't a systematic, you know, there wasn't systematic rehoming occurring. And, you know, for us, when we received the first group of animals that we were astonished and elated, it was like, oh, everyone has been telling us this is never going to happen. It's not possible.*

0:33:09 Paula Wallace: *You know, and then one day it did, you know, and it was possible. And we drove away from a research facility with a group of rats in a travel cage. And, you know, and I remember I pulled over to the side of the road. I was just like, obviously, yeah, just incredibly excited and absolutely terrified. And I thought. I never really believed it was actually going to happen. And here you are. And they were the most precious creatures I had ever met in my life.*

0:33:40 Paula Wallace: *And because I knew what it took to get them out and how long it had taken and how much work and the fact that so many, many, many millions of them before had never come out. And I thought, you know, that's what makes our animals precious. And*

we often refuse that word to describe them. And it's not just because they're a sentient being, of course. That's. That's one of the reasons. But the other reason is that our animals are symbolic, you know, they represent the millions and millions that will never come out, you know, and not just in Australia, but in laboratories all around the world.

0:34:14 Paula Wallace: *So they are absolutely precious, you know, and we treat them as such because it's an absolute privilege to be able to find a home for a single animal, let alone 900 of them. And, you know, they're all remarkable, of course, Even the ones that don't really want to know me and are generally a bit unimpressed with humans, I probably love those ones the most because I kind of relate to them, I think. But, you know, when you think about animals from research, you think resilience, you know, but once. And of course, they are resilient, but once they become comfortable enough to let their personalities really shine through, you have the privilege of getting to know them as an individual.*

0:35:03 Paula Wallace: *And they really are relationships, you know, I'm. I'm a fairly impatient person. And when I started working with rats, I started first working with them. I used to get. I think, oh, you know, why don't you. Why don't you love me? Why can't you? Why won't you come and sit with me? Like, I'm not going to hurt you. It's fine. Please don't be scared. And I'd get impatient. And then, you know, I had a group that stayed for a while, you know, and what I found was after a couple of months, all of a sudden, they just started to open up to me.*

0:35:34 Paula Wallace: *You know, rats are very clever, you know, and they just. They opened their little hearts and they just started to blossom, and they started to let me in a tiny bit each day, day into their private world, because they all live together, you know, in packs, and so they'd let me in a bit, tiny bit more each day into their private little world of what they were doing in there. And, and you know, it was so special.*

0:35:56 Paula Wallace: *And I just thought, wow. I just didn't, you know, like, I just hadn't hung around longer or they'd been rehomed too quickly for me to really experience the magic of that. Because these rats from research, they often look identical, right? So they're all, most of them are, they're, most of them are albino, so they're white with pink eyes and they do look absolutely identical. So you often can't tell them apart. And what I noticed was when this little group started to let me in, I actually, as they approached, as I approached them each day and talked to them, I could tell them apart by their personality, by the way they approached me when I opened the cage door and the way they interacted with me, I could actually tell them apart, which was a really amazing day. And I thought, you know, I just hope more people get to experience this because, you know, we say all the time, oh, you know, they're all individuals and, and, and what have you, but it really is absolutely the case. And, and rats particularly have these massive personalities because they only live for two years.*

0:37:01 Paula Wallace: *They are just here to make an impact and, and they really are very individualistic in who they are. So you can get to them and they really become little buddies. So you can, for me, they make fantastic companions because they're asleep all through the day. They get up in the, at the night time. Usually when you're coming home from work, you can hang out together, spend a bit of time. They love hanging out with humans and just doing*

stuff with you, human stuff, like watching TV or walking around the house or preparing food or whatever.

0:37:30 Paula Wallace: *They will just happily hang out with you or all run around and do their thing and then they sort of have their special time with each other playing, you know, during the night. So they're fantastic pets. I mean, if I could single out one though, because you did ask me that. There was one, a rat called Banjo and he featured in a lot of our early videos. And he, he was adopted and he formed an especially strong bond with Grace, who was his adopter, who was 14 at the time and her mom adopted the rats. And then Grace formed a very strong relationship with Banjo and they, they spent a lot of time together. And I had the privilege of meeting him many times after his adoption and I was able to see firsthand, like, actually how important the relationship was to him.*

0:38:15 Paula Wallace: *Not just to Grace. And he would choose to be with her, like he, he would seek her out. He actually wanted to be with her. And, you know, that was actually a beautiful thing to, to witness. Obviously we've had lots of lovely dogs and cats. And for the cat lovers out there, one of the really curious things about our cats is that certainly the ones we've rehomed so far is they tend to be unusually affectionate.*

0:38:40 Paula Wallace: *So they really crave a one on one bond with a human. So when they have the opportunity to form that bond, sometimes for the first time in their lives, they are so sincere and vulnerable in it that it's just a real sight to behold. I mean, the dogs can be the same as well. They tend to bond with the first human who they spend any significant time with when they first come out of a research facility.*

0:39:04 Paula Wallace: *And that's why it's so important for us to match them with people who really understand what they may need and that they're not sort of dogs that have grown up in the community in people's homes. And also that those early experiences that they have after coming out of a research facility that, where they may have lived for many years, those early experiences when they come out are so crucial in building their confidence.*

0:39:28 Paula Wallace: *So we try and take everything super slowly so that we don't set them up to fail and that they don't become overwhelmed. And so one way we do that is when we rehome a cat, we always have like a tent, one of those little pop up tents. And it's just an enclosed safe area where the cat can live on their own in a sense of safety until they're ready to venture out into the rest of the home and they have their meals in there and their litter and that. And some will venture out within a day or two and then others may take a few weeks.*

0:40:00 Paula Wallace: *And then it's always very satisfying to follow up with an adopter like a few months down the track and just see the massive changes in those animals and particularly in dogs and cats. It's very striking. And I remember I went to see one of our beagles that had been adopted and her kennel mate from the facility had just been released. And we wanted to reunite them because the adopter wanted to adopt her kennel mate so that they could stay together forever.*

0:40:26 Paula Wallace: *And, and when I came to the home and I, I saw Princess the beagle. And not just behaviorally, but physically, she changed her posture. The shine of a coat. Yeah, the relaxation in her face. She actually looked like a different Dog. And it was like she just kind*

of breathed out and relaxed and it just showed in her whole countenance, in her whole being. And. Yeah, but then, look, there's so many special characters, you know, over the last eight years, and I won't go on forever, but, you know, there's just special ones. And we've got our resident herd of guinea pigs, and we've got one male in that group, Rory.

0:41:13 Paula Wallace: *And Rory is a rusty colored guinea pig who came in, in that group that I talked about that we retired. And, like, he is literally like a human in a guinea pig body.*

0:41:24 Rachel: *Yeah.*

0:41:25 Paula Wallace: *He is larger than life. And, you know, when you look into his eyes, it's just a soulful experience. So, yeah, I hope that a lot of.*

0:41:35 Rachel: *A lot of personalities over the years.*

0:41:37 Paula Wallace: *A lot of special personalities, big ones, you know, naughty ones, you know, sometimes scared, sometimes a bit timid, but yeah, just to see the progression and just each animal on their own terms, you know, like, we don't rush them. It's like, if you want to stay scared forever, that's okay, you know, that's fine. Wherever you're at, we will just meet you at the place where you're at.*

0:42:05 Rachel: *And I guess from AFSA's perspective, we get a lot of interest from our supporters in how they can adopt or foster an animal that's been previously used in research. What would you say our listeners can do to support the Liberty Foundation?*

0:42:26 Paula Wallace: *Well, they're very welcome to visit our website, but I'd also recommend that they go and watch a couple of our videos on YouTube because they are fantastically entertaining and they just focus on the animal's life after their time in research, all the adventures that they get up to. And you can actually see what we're talking about, all the things we've talked about today, see our animals in action.*

0:42:49 Paula Wallace: *And it's just Liberty Foundation Australia on YouTube, and we've got all the species there that we've rehomed. Some of the wonderful characters that I've mentioned, including Banjo and Rory and others, and you can just get a real sense, I guess, of our values and what we're about. When you. When you watch the animals and our wonderful adopters and volunteers, you know, who are in the videos, working with them, and it just gives you a real flavor, I suppose, for what we do. And if you.*

0:43:18 Paula Wallace: *If you feel a connection with that and, you know, I suspect that some people would find that. Well, I certainly do find those videos quite emotive and moving. And just joyful and uplifting, you know, Then, you know, feel free to follow us on Facebook or Instagram and, you know, we post as much as we're able to and keep our supporters updated. But you can send me a message personally on any of those platforms and I'll respond to you straight away.*

0:43:48 Paula Wallace: *And I would really love to hear from anyone who shares their values and would like to talk about how they might get involved in some of our work.*

0:43:56 Rachel: *Well, thank you. We will link to your website and your social media, including YouTube, so listeners can view those videos. And I've seen some of those videos*

myself and they're really lovely to see the animals enjoying life. So definitely recommend viewing those and they can learn more about how to volunteer or adopt or donate or subscribe. So we'll, we'll link that. So that's available.

0:44:21 Paula Wallace: *Yeah, absolutely. That's, yeah, just loving life and we appreciate that. Thank you. And thank you for AFSA's ongoing support over the years. You know, right from the very beginning and from yourself, Rachel, from all the people that work behind the scenes and the supporters of AFSA and Humane Research Australia before that, and also, of course, to the late Helen Marston. Yes, we just like to, to convey our, our gratitude and yeah, hope that we can all keep working together for these just, you know, really wonderful outcomes for animals. And yeah, if you're ever feeling down and, you know, you, you're looking for, you know, you're looking for a hopeful message, then, yeah, just go onto our YouTube or website and you cannot fail to be inspired and hopeful again.*

0:45:09 Paula Wallace: *Thank you for having me.*

0:45:11 Rachel: *Well, thank you so much. I know it's a really busy time for you and the foundation, so really appreciate you sparing the time to speak about your work. And I really hope that this new funding will open up new opportunities and increase the profile of what you're doing and get more animals into homes, which is what you're all about. So thank you so much for all that you're doing and the difference that you're making for so many animals lives. And we'll hope that there's more progress with right to release and you keep supporting your work.*

0:45:39 Rachel: *So thank you again and we will.*

0:45:41 Paula Wallace: *Keep you updated all throughout the year with what's going on. And thank you so much for the chance to talk today.*

0:45:47 Rachel: *Very welcome. Thank you. Bye, Paula.*

0:45:50 Paula Wallace: *All right, thanks. Bye.*