Life for Dogs Living in Shelters

Dogs are often housed singly to prevent injury & disease. Shelter housing likely restricts dogs' ability to engage in species-specific behaviors.

Shelter noise levels can range from 65-125 dB and have been found damaging to dogs' hearing.

This lack of control & predictability likely has significant psychological impacts.

In all, the novel shelter environment with its sights & sounds, spatial restrictions, limited social contact with dogs & people, & separation from attachment figure(s) may all contribute to decreased welfare.

Why does this matter? 3.9 million dogs enter shelters each year. As dogs are kenneled longer awaiting homes, animal shelters are becoming more like orphanages.

References:
Improving Shelter Dog Welfare

Petting has been shown to reduce cortisol in shelter dogs after blood draw\textsuperscript{20} – with interventions of petting resulting in less anxiety-related behaviors\textsuperscript{21}.

Less than \(\frac{1}{2}\) an hour of walking & human interaction can result in decreased salivary cortisol & improved behavioral scores\textsuperscript{22}.

Just hanging out, petting or play reduces cortisol (vocalizing & panting) as compared to remaining in kennel or being removed without a person\textsuperscript{23} with repeated interactions possibly having greater impact\textsuperscript{24}.

\textsuperscript{20}(Hennessy, Williams, Miller, Douglas, & Voith, 1998) \textsuperscript{21}(Hennessy et al., 2002) \textsuperscript{22}(Menor-Campos, Moketa-Carbonell, & López-Rodríguez, 2011) \textsuperscript{23}(Shiverdecker, Schiml, & Hennessy, 2013) \textsuperscript{24}(Coppola, Grandin, & Enns, 2006)

Fostering is a Human-Animal Interaction Intervention

Presently, little is known about how fostering improves shelter dog welfare – but it’s possible that prolonged exposure to humans & reductions in disruptive sounds could reduce stress.

When dogs are adopted from temporary & trial adoptions\textsuperscript{25} – as well as novel programs, like Adoption Ambassadors (AA)\textsuperscript{26} – they’re returned less frequently than traditionally adopted dogs.

AA adopters more often report information from dog’s foster was helpful in their decision-making\textsuperscript{26}.

\textsuperscript{25}(Normando, Stefanini, Meers, Adamelli, Coultis, & Bono, 2006) \textsuperscript{26}(Mohan-Gibbons, Waters, Garmon, & Allison, 2014)
Foster Sleepovers: How Temporary Fostering Can Improve the Lives of Shelter Dogs

March 8, 2018

Testing Temporary Fostering

In a pilot study at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary – we investigated whether a one-night sleepover affected shelter dog welfare as measured by cortisol response & could be predictive of future in-home behavior.

Methods

Urine Collection: 7:30-10 am.

Time points:
1) Before In-Shelter
2) During Sleepover
3) After In-Shelter

Just 1 overnight with a foster (either on & off-site at Best Friends) significantly reduced dogs' cortisol levels.
In an effort to learn more about how temporary fostering benefits shelter dogs, we embarked on a 4-shelter study across the US.

With these shelters, we collected:

* More urine: 2 days **Before**, 2 days **During**, and 2 Days **After** to learn more about the physiological effects of sleepovers.

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**Arizona Humane Society**

![Graph showing urinary cortisol: creatinine ratios](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before 1</th>
<th>Before 2</th>
<th>Sleep 1</th>
<th>Sleep 2</th>
<th>After 1</th>
<th>After 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cortisol: Creatinine Ratio</td>
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<td>35.51</td>
<td>42.91</td>
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</tbody>
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* Urinary cortisol: creatinine ratios two mornings at shelter **before** sleepover, **during** sleepover, and two mornings **after** 2-day sleepover.
The Evidence is In!
Our 5 shelters have demonstrated that temporary sleepovers of 1 & 2 nights result in CORT reductions without significant increases upon return compared to baseline shelter levels.

Are There Other Benefits to Sleepovers?
Our observations over the course of a year working with five very different shelters, spending one month carrying out data collection with each

What We Observed Behaviorally
After sleepovers, dogs were:
- Less frantic in-kennel
- More relaxed
- Less apathetic & more engaged with people

It's possible that there's longer-term behavioral benefits than just cortisol reduction (& maybe they're related!)

Can brief sleepovers preserve behavioral health? Programs like these could be useful for behaviorally healthy dogs, not just problematic dogs.
Increasing A Dog’s Social Network

During sleepovers, foster parents regularly:
- Posted dogs on Facebook, shared photos
- Took dogs around town & to social events
- Sent in photos, videos, & behavioral descriptions to enhance dog’s shelter bio

Advocacy After the Sleepover

Foster parents continued to:
- Check in on dog’s status after sleepover, becoming an in-shelter advocate
- Network dog with friends & family
- Some even continued to foster their dogs after study was completed because of dog’s need & good fit in home

Turning Up Foster Recruitment

“I can do anything for a day and a half” – Arizona foster volunteer

Open-ended fostering can be daunting – but short-term fostering can:
- Allow low barrier to entry to “hook” fosters into longer-term fostering
- Capture new group of volunteers & work around their schedule
- Assess fosters’ likes & dislikes, & abilities

And adopted dogs! And so did their friends
Overnight/Weekend Foster Planning

- Who can foster?
  - Fosters only, fosters & volunteers, the public?
- Who is available to go?
  - All dogs, dogs with long shelter stays, etc.?
- How can you run the program most efficiently?
- Who can you recruit to help?

Tailor Your Program to Your Shelter’s Needs

Fairfax County Animal Shelter
- About 4,500 pets per year
- LOS <14 days
- Less than 2 dozen dogs on the adoption floor at any given time
- Adopts out more pets than it takes in; regularly transfers in pets from other shelters
- Dogs get walked 3-5 times per day

Austin Animal Center
- About 18,000 pets per year
- Several hundred dogs on the adoption floor at any given time
- Dogs get walked 1-3 times per day

Overnight/Weekend Foster Logistics: Austin

- Current volunteers and fosters can participate
- Process is managed by customer service personnel, just like an adoption
- Very little added work for foster coordinators
- Dogs can be overnight/weekend fostered anytime
Weekend Foster Logistics: Fairfax

• Shelter closes on Saturday at 5pm; reopens Tuesday at 12 pm
• Program is open to volunteers & fosters
• Candidates for weekend foster are chosen several days in advance and an email is sent out. If those dogs aren’t adopted by Saturday at 5pm, they will be available for weekend foster.

Weekend Foster Logistics: Fairfax

• At 4:30pm on Saturdays, weekend fosters arrive to pick up pets
• Foster assistant answers questions and helps to gather needed supplies
• Paperwork is signed
• Dogs can be returned Sunday evening through Tuesday morning, depending on foster’s availability

IRL (In Real Life) at Humane Rescue Alliance

• Purpose of program:
  • To gather out-of-shelter information on their medium and large dogs
  • To recruit and build the confidence of fosters for big dogs
  • Targets dogs with long shelter stays, seniors and those exhibiting signs of shelter stress
  • Emphasis on data collection
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Supplies
- Martingale collars
- Foster tags
- 1-2 types of harnesses
- Carabiners
- Sturdy leashes
- Ziploc bags of the food the dogs have been eating
- “Weekend foster” laminated kennel signs
- “Adopt me” vests, bandanas, or leashes
- Crates
- Bowls, treats, toys, etc.

Thank You

Questions?
Email us!
lgunter@asu.edu
duer@maddiesfund.org

SPCA of Texas
Best Friends
Animal Society
Arizona Humane Society
Humane Society of Western Montana
Lifeline Animal Project
Maddie’s Fund