

Innovative Fostering: Saving More Dogs with Behavioral Challenges



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In Memory of Carmella, 2005 to 2013

...and for all the other dogs killed when 'we just don't know what else to do'



Food Guarding: A Very Modifiable Behavior

RESEARCH




Research by the ASPCA provides a compelling new argument against euthanizing dogs in shelters who display simple food guarding. The research shows that an in-shelter protocol of free feeding, combined with post-adoption support, helps keep food-guarding behavior from reoccurring in the home.

Food guarding, according to this latest research, is easy to modify. To read the entire peer-reviewed study, published in the August 2012 open access Journal "Animals," [click here](#).

Using the combination of free feeding and post-adoption support can help "provide a lifesaving safety net for many shelters," say the ASPCA's Heather Mohan-Gibbons and Drs. Emily Weiss and Margaret Slater.

The study also revealed interesting glimpses of how food guarding is handled in some shelters. In a survey to shelters conducted in 2006, the ASPCA found that shelters across the country reported food-bowl guarding as one of the most common reasons for euthanasia. However, only 34 percent of shelters attempt to modify the problem. Shelters also reported the return rate for food-guarding dogs was lower (5 percent) than dogs that did not guard their food (9 percent).




Part I


Background

- Fairfax County Animal Shelter is an open-access, municipal animal shelter that falls under the Fairfax County Police Department in Fairfax, Virginia
- Shelter serves 1.2 million people over 400 square miles
- Average annual intake between 4,500 and 5,000 animals
- Live outcomes 90% in 2015

Washington, DC



Fairfax, Virginia



Prior to 2012:

- Euthanizing for space and time limits for adoption
- **'Pit bull' adoption restrictions 80% of pit bull dogs euthanized**
- Euthanizing for common behavioral challenges
- Euthanized dogs for 'failing' SAFER evaluation**
- Euthanized 25% of dogs

Sample Outcomes List – Open access shelter in Maryland 2015

Reason	Impound Date	Leave Date	Status	Justification
ACIMP-2015-03432 Stray - Other	07/16/2015	08/05/2015	Euthanized	Aggressive to humans or other animals
ACIMP-2015-03452 Stray - Other	07/18/2015	07/29/2015	Euthanized	Aggressive to humans or other animals
ACIMP-2015-03625 Owned/Given Up - Other	07/27/2015	08/05/2015	Adopted	
ACIMP-2015-03721 Stray - Other	07/31/2015	08/05/2015	Euthanized	Overall poor health, several existing conditions
ACIMP-2015-03732 Owned/Given Up - Abandoned	07/31/2015	08/05/2015	Euthanized	Feral/undersocialized/fearful
ACIMP-2015-03746 Stray - Other	08/01/2015	08/19/2015	Euthanized	Feral/undersocialized/fearful
ACIMP-2015-03846 Stray - Other	08/05/2015	08/10/2015	Euthanized	Feral/undersocialized/fearful
ACIMP-2015-03895 Owned/Given Up - Other	08/08/2015	08/08/2015	Euthanized	Aggressive to humans or other animals
ACIMP-2015-03898 Stray - Other	08/08/2015	08/19/2015	Euthanized	Feral/undersocialized/fearful
ACIMP-2015-03997 Stray - Other	08/12/2015	08/22/2015	Adopted	

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Articles in Press

Article in Press

No Better Than Flipping a Coin: Reconsidering Canine Behavior Evaluations in Animal Shelters

Gary J. Patronek, Janis Bradley

Open Access
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2016.08.001>

Article Info

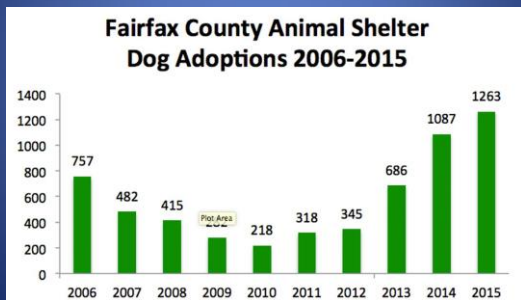
Abstract | Full text | Images | References | Supplemental Materials

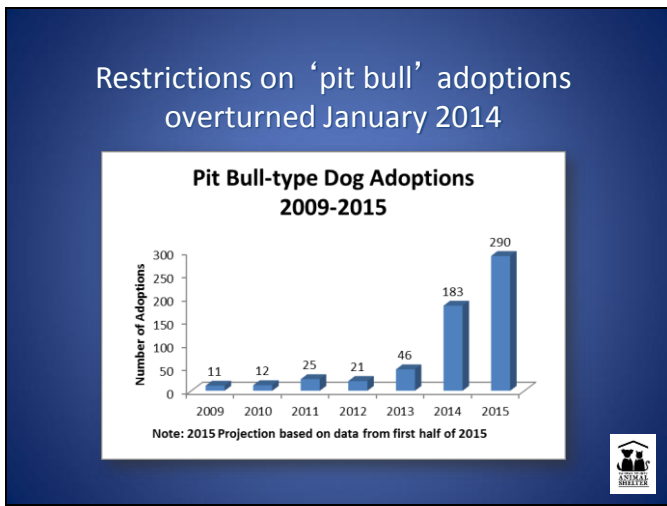
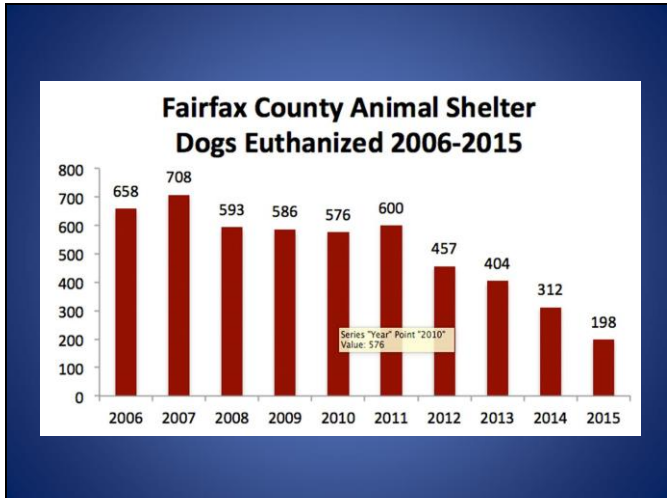
Article Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. Key attributes of diagnostic tests
 - A. Sensitivity and specificity
 - B. Consistency of definitions for behavioral endpoints
 - C. Score tests vs. cutoff tests
- III. Assessing potential predictive value of behavioral evaluations
 - A. The problem posed by uncertainty
- IV. Constructing the simulation – the problem of false positive results
- V. The evaluation of behavior evaluations

Beginning in 2013

- Stopped euthanasia for space or time limits
- Worked towards ending euthanasia based on perceived breed
- No euthanasia for 'failing' standardized behavior evaluation
- Shelter began implementing enrichment, playgroups, adult dog foster program





Programs for adult dogs

- Field Trip ‘Power Hour’ fostering
- Weekend and overnight fostering
- Kennel enrichment
- Off site dog walking led by volunteers
- Group field trips



Aimee Sadler's Dogs Playing for Life shelter dog play groups



Playgroups used to assess and evaluate dogs and also daily for exercise and enrichment.

Dog with behavioral challenges

Declining behavior over time



No behavior staff or rescue placement options

Concerns from staff, volunteers, ACOs

Part II
THE STUDY



Patty's story...



Patty's best friend in her foster program: the family cat.



Patty's mom and dad



The Dogs



May 2013 to March 2015

52 medium/large shelter dogs of various breeds and types

- No viable placement options because of behavioral challenges in shelter
- Not severely aggressive towards people or animals




16 Foster Families

- Characteristics
- Number of dogs they fostered
- What the foster families agreed to



Study objectives

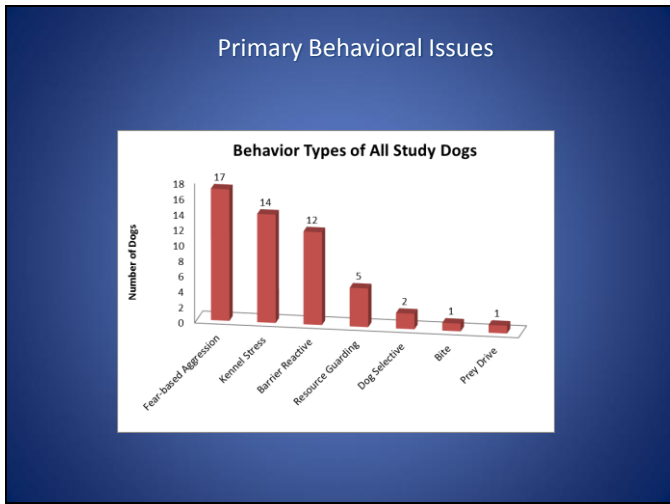
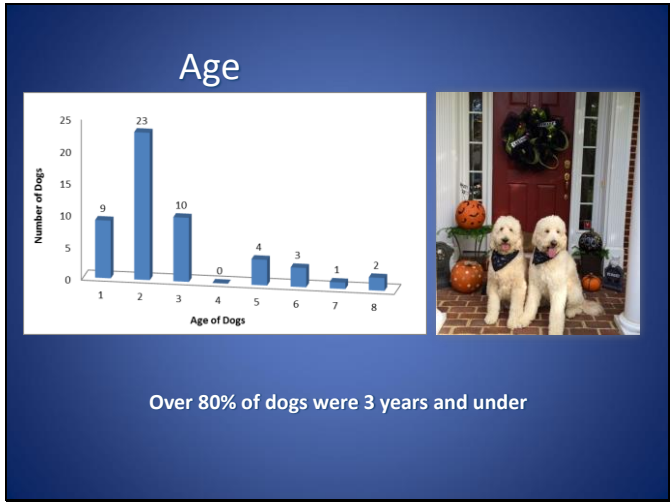
1. Could we place medium and large dogs with behavioral challenges in foster homes and see their behavior improve?
2. Could these dogs eventually be adopted into permanent homes?
3. Could we do all of this safely?



What we studied

- Ages
- Primary and secondary behavioral issues
- Duration of stay in foster
- Outcome - adopted or euthanized
- Reasons for euthanasia
- Rate of and reasons for return
- Any behavioral challenges experienced by
 - Foster families
 - Adopters
- Status of dogs six months to 18 months after adoption





Buddy's Story



Came in as a stray. Exhibited kennel stress, barrier reactivity and extremely high energy.

He was in a constant state of anxiety and frustration at the shelter and was difficult to handle, particularly around other dogs.

"Buddy was our fourth foster and became a foster failure. He came with the charm of a dog with zero manners and we were smitten! Flash forward to today: He's taken several obedience classes, still has no manners, but now knows some pretty cool tricks and we couldn't be happier" -Alyssa, Buddy's mom



Just a couple of our favorite Buddy pics...

Buddy's best friend, also adopted



Now Buddy has his own job: Fostering puppies!

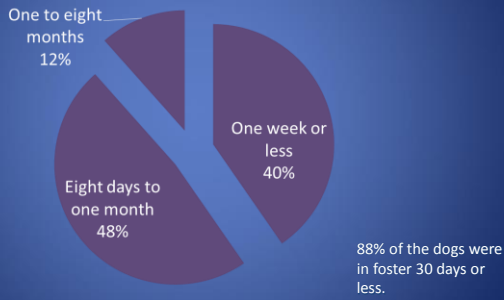


Secondary Behavioral Issues

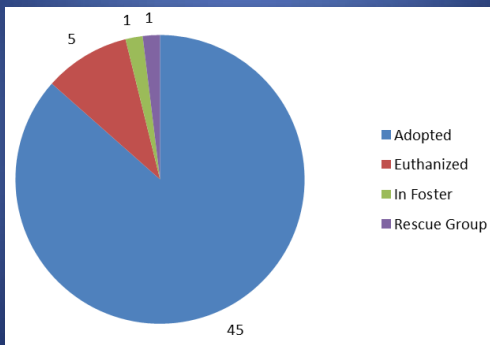
- 10 - extremely energetic
- 4 - possibly dog aggressive
- 2 - dog selective
- 2 - afraid of men
- 2 - under-socialized
- 2 - displayed separation anxiety
- 1 - reactivity



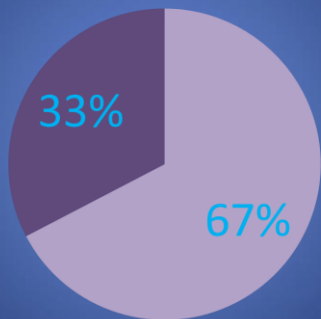
How long did the dogs stay in foster?



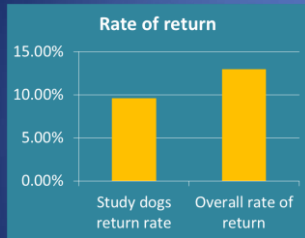
Live Outcomes 90.4%



- Adopted directly from the foster home
- Returned to the shelter and adopted from kennel



Returned Adoptions



Six dogs (11%) adopted/returned prior to foster
 Three dogs (6%) sent to foster, adopted, returned and re-adopted
 Two dogs (4%) sent to foster, adopted, returned and euthanized

Return rate of dogs in study: 9.6%
Overall return rate of adopted dogs: 13%



Part III.

DISCUSSION

Here's what the fosters said about their experiences...

1. They felt well-informed about issues prior to taking dogs home
2. They felt they either did not witness the behavior described to them or they stated the described behavior diminished or disappeared within a week
3. They said sometimes new behavioral issues emerged over time
4. They felt trainer support and someone to consult was key



3. Would you re-adopt this dog?

"Yes. Dogs are dogs."

"No. not knowing what we know now. But we love Mindy and have no intention of giving her up."

"Yes, in a heartbeat."

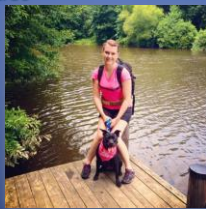
"No. We love her very much but we wouldn't adopt a young dog again because of the need for exercise and training."

"Oh yeah. Absolutely. He's perfect."

"I love him now but in the beginning I would have opted for another dog if I had known about his skin allergies."

4. Could we have offered you more support?

- Basic training
- Training support immediately following adoption
- Someone to call to help them 'troubleshoot' behavior issues





- Six out of the 51 dogs were adopted by their foster family
- **What word did fosters use more than any other to describe their foster dogs?**
- In most cases, fosters met with potential adopters

Dogs Helping Dogs



- **Dogs socialized with other dogs**
- Playgroups played a key role in identifying dogs with shelter-based behavioral issues
- **All dogs were evaluated with other dogs off leash**



Study Objectives results

1. Could we place medium and large dogs with behavioral challenges in foster homes and see their behavior improve?
2. Could these dogs eventually be adopted into permanent homes?
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Part IV
HOW TO START AND RUN A BEHAVIORAL FOSTER PROGRAM

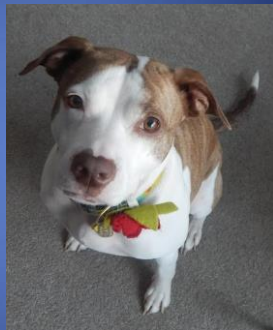
1. Materials for your program

You need to have the following:

- Training manual for fosters
- Written, initialed and signed foster agreement
- Resources for common behaviors
- Quick, one-page guide
- Policy and procedure

When taking home any foster pet, foster should receive:

- Signed copy of foster agreement
- All behavior/medical notes
- Resources, tip sheets, one-page guide
- 24/7 contact information for assistance
- Foster feedback form



2. Build Capacity

Selecting the right volunteers and fosters

- All volunteers are fosters too
- Characteristics of a behavioral foster family



3. Manage expectations and communicate often



Proactive communication with fosters and adopters

4. Provide avenues of support



Resources/Support may include:

- Foster club/walking group
- Free/low cost training groups
- Social media support group
- Trainer support for troubleshooting
- Mentor for hard decisions
- Home visits
- Phone tree
- Follow up with adopters

5. Track your data!



6. Resources

CENTER FOR Shelter Dogs | Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine
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Home / Dog Behavior / Special Adoptions

Special Adoptions

WHY SPECIAL ADOPTIONS?

The Special Adoption Program is designed to facilitate the placement of dogs with manageable problem behaviors. In this program, special attention is given to find suitable adopters and special counseling is given to the adopter to help them more safely integrate the dog into the new home. This special counseling will also consider the likelihood of the dog having a long, happy relationship with the adopter. In general, the Special Adoption Program has five components:

- **IDENTIFYING** problem behaviors through intake questionnaires.
- **OBSERVATION** of behavior in the shelter, the Mark-Up-10 Behavior Evaluation.
- **PROVIDING** problem behaviors through enrichment and training programs to give the dog the best chance of success in the home.
- **FINDING** the right adopter who are able to handle the specific problem behavior of the dog.
- **CONSULTING** the adopter, paying particular attention to management of problem behaviors in the new home.
- **FOLLOWING UP** with the adopter to ensure that the dog and his new family have the right fit.

HOW DO YOU GET STARTED?

WHAT IS THE PROTOCOL?

WHO SHOULD CONDUCT SPECIAL ADOPTION APPOINTMENTS?

Destructive of Household Items
Cage Behavior
Fear of People
Grinding Over Food and Chew Items
Anxiety/Howling
Protective Aggression
Resistance to Handling
Separation Anxiety
Neurosis

Hank's Story

"Hank is a once-in-a-lifetime dog. We have such a connection. He's the best thing that's happened to me in the last 20 years. And he's so smart! When I tell him we're going on a walk, he goes and gets his leash. He's not like a dog; he's like a human. I don't know what I'd do without this dog. He sleeps with his arms around me. And he snores so loudly!"

- Hank's Dad



Find All the Behavioral Fosters You Need

Start with one or two



Kaine's Story

Previous Owner's Observations:

- No behavior issues
- Good with children

Staff Observations:

- "I had to put him directly into a kennel. He lowers head and I am unable to evaluate at this time."
- "Growling at me during walk-through when I stopped to interact with him"
- "He was fearful and stayed toward the back of the kennel initially. Low growl."



Kaine in Foster



Kaine at Home



Adopter Support

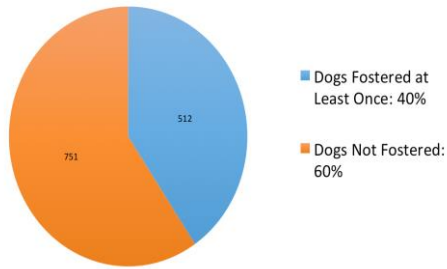
- Understanding
- Demonstrating
- Networking
- Finding solutions



A comprehensive program is born



Fairfax County Animal Shelter's Adoptable Dogs Fostered in 2015



What's next?



- Re-allocation of staff and other resources towards foster-based, rather than shelter-based solutions

- Re-visioning of the role of foster programs in the larger animal welfare movement



- Foster as one solution to end the practice of killing fearful, traumatized and anxious animals because of shelter-based behaviors

THANK YOU!

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and LinkedIn or on
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