

APPENDIX L

Enrichment for Dogs in Shelters

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At Salt Lake County Animal Services, the largest no-kill municipal shelter in the state of Utah, we have witnessed firsthand the unparalleled benefits of enrichment for animals in the shelter. Having an enriching environment is important for all species and should include items and activities that enrich all of the five senses: sight, smell, sound, touch and taste.

Because of the space, time and resources constraints of the shelter environment, dogs housed in shelters are often lacking adequate physical exercise, choice, variety, mental stimulation, control over daily activities and, of course, enrichment. However, creating a dog enrichment program in a municipal shelter does not have to require funding and this type of program can use minimal staff time. By utilizing donations, volunteers and group projects, you can start an enrichment program quickly and easily. Not only will you improve the quality of life of the animals in your care, you can also enjoy other benefits of enrichment. The most notable changes we have found are calmer, quieter kennels and happier dogs, which means animals who are more adoptable.

First and foremost, we use our enrichment program as a preventive measure for behavior issues. Can and do we use enrichments to address problems that already exist? Absolutely, but enrichment is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to an animal's welfare. The dogs also need to receive proper housing, a consistent routine, social interaction and training based on positive reinforcement.

DIY food puzzles

Many everyday objects can serve as enrichment items for dogs. You can create simple and free food "puzzles" by putting treats or kibble in paper towel tubes or empty boxes, and sealing them up, or using empty plastic jugs as the container and leaving the cap off. Most

dogs are highly motivated to find food, so they enjoy finding ways to access the food by batting around the containers or tearing up the cardboard.

Muffin tins with treats in them are another cheap and easy food puzzle we use. To add another level of mental stimulation, place tennis balls or crumpled paper over the treats in the cups. Food puzzles such as these encourage problem solving, consume mental and physical energy, and simply redirect some of the frustration we see in many kennelled dogs.

Every day, our dogs receive “pupsicles,” which consist of various food items mixed in a plastic cup and then frozen. The ingredients can include dry food, wet food, pumpkin, applesauce, sweet potatoes, broken-down treats, and either apple juice or broth mixed with water. We also add a large Milk-Bone as a handle, so that the pupsicles are easier to pop out of the cups after they are frozen. Because the pupsicles are frozen and can take a while to eat, they give the dogs something to work on in their kennels, and staff don’t need to remove anything from their kennels afterwards. In fact, pupsicles can serve as a midday meal. At our shelter, we have found that the pupsicles help the dogs feel satiated and alleviate stress.

We also stuff Kongs (donated via our wish list) with kibble, canned food and a bit of peanut butter. The Kongs are then frozen and given to the dogs who need some extra enrichment. We feed the frozen Kongs to all our dogs with behavior issues, as it takes some time for them to retrieve the food, which increases mental stimulation.

One caution: To reduce the chance of resource guarding, make sure that any food items you place in a dog’s kennel aren’t accessible to other dogs.

Other sources of enrichment

Toys. Another successful enrichment method is placing a special toy in each kennel for an hour or so. You’ll want to remove the toys after a period of time to prevent the dogs from destroying or ingesting them, and you’ll also need to sanitize the toys before reusing them to reduce the spread of disease. As with food items, make sure the dogs are separated from each other when they are enjoying toys, so that resource guarding does not occur.

Flirt pole. Another great enrichment opportunity, and one that staff or volunteers can make themselves, is the flirt pole — a long pole with a string and a dog toy at the end. Playing with the flirt pole allows dogs to tap into their natural prey drive. What’s more, this activity can be paired with teaching the dog “take it” and “drop it” cues, so it’s great for confidence-building and impulse control.

Scent therapy. Aromatherapy has been incorporated into our enrichment program, thanks to a donation from a local essential oils company, which provided oils and dif-

fusers to use in the kennels. We rotate different scents each week, but lavender is the best to start with, since it has been shown to have a calming effect on most dogs. Staff dilute the oil with water and use it to spritz each kennel daily, using one diffuser per room. We've noticed a significant reduction in barking when lavender has been applied to the kennels.

Book Buddies. Shelters can be stressful, frenetic environments, so it's essential for dogs' well-being to have quiet time, in addition to playtime. It also helps them to develop an often-overlooked life skill — being able to be calm — which sets them up for success when they transition to homes.

In our Book Buddies program, children come and read to our animals, which helps them to relax. To read to dogs, the kids sit outside the kennels on small folding stools; to read to cats, they have the option of sitting outside the cattery or sitting inside and interacting with the cats. This program has been especially successful with our cats, but it's also a great way for dogs (especially shy ones) to enjoy some calm interaction while in their kennels. And it's not only children who love reading to pets; adult volunteers enjoy this activity, too.

A couple of cautions: Not every dog enjoys children or feels comfortable around them. To reduce the risk of increased barrier frustration, some dogs may need to be evaluated before being considered as candidates for the program.

Click-for-Quiet. We introduced the Click-for-Quiet program in our shelter to help reduce barking, provide mental stimulation for dogs and improve kennel behavior. Using a clicker for marking and then treating the dog for not barking, or for keeping all four paws on the floor, increases the likelihood that the dog will be well behaved when prospective adopters come to see them. The more people who can do this throughout the day, the more successful the program will be. It's a great way for staff to participate in enrichment, since clicking for quiet can be done quickly and easily as they walk past the dog kennels. We call this "drive-by training."

Soothing sounds. We provide enrichment through the sense of hearing by playing audiobooks and classical music daily for our dogs. (Check out the "Through a Dog's Ear" CDs.) Research has shown that soothing sounds relax dogs and increase the time they spend lying down in their kennels. Auditory enrichment also helps to mask some noises that certain dogs react to, such as doors opening and closing. One caution: It is important for the animals to have some downtime when it's completely quiet, so please remember to shut down the sound system at the end of the day so the dogs can get a good night's sleep.

Acquiring enrichment items

The simplest way to get enrichment items for your program is to ask for donations. We get most of the supplies for our program through our wish lists. Here are some ways to solicit donations:

- Create an Amazon wish list.
- Post your wish list on social media channels. (Cute videos showing dogs enjoying the donated enrichment items can keep those items coming in from donors.)
- Send out your wish list periodically to your donors or include your wish list in your newsletter to members.
- Tell family and friends what you need.
- Reach out to local businesses, schools or scout groups.
- Create a colorful poster advertising your wish list and put it up in your lobby.

Using volunteers for enrichment

Our enrichment program at Salt Lake County Animal Services is run almost entirely by volunteers, with staff filling in minor gaps as needed. Volunteers come in daily to hand out and make new pupsicles, for example. Making food puzzles or simple toys are great projects for volunteers who may be underutilized, such as small groups, parents with children and senior citizens.

Whenever groups inquire about projects at the shelter, we have them make different toys and puzzles for us. One year, a group of Boy Scouts created food puzzles out of PVC pipe by cutting the tubes into six- to twelve-inch lengths, drilling holes in them and putting caps on either end. Since PVC pipe is very sturdy and difficult to destroy, these food puzzles are something we are able to leave in most kennels with the dogs.

Volunteers can:

- Distribute, retrieve and clean toys
- Make DIY food puzzles, such as pupsicles
- Stuff and freeze Kongs
- Spritz the kennels with essential oils
- Read to the animals
- Train dogs via the Click-for-Quiet program
- Spread the word about your wish list on social media

Conclusion

It's so important for dogs to get mental exercise as well as physical exercise. In fact, mental exercise tires out a dog just as much as physical exercise does. If I had to suggest just one thing to introduce into a municipal shelter for dog enrichment, it would be a food puzzle of some kind (e.g., a frozen Kong, pupsicle). Any kind of enrichment that caters to one of the dog's senses, however, is better than no enrichment at all.

Strive to create an environment that enhances the quality of life of the animals in your care by utilizing one or two of the ideas above, or getting creative and coming up with your own. Ask your volunteers and staff for input; they may already have enrichment ideas. Start small and be sure not to get overwhelmed. Look for free and easy ways to implement your enrichment program, and watch it grow. You will notice a positive difference in your kennel environment, in the dogs themselves, and in the engagement level of your staff and volunteers.

Finally, simple enrichment strategies are beneficial not only in the shelter environment, but after dogs have been adopted. To help your shelter's dogs succeed in homes, explain to adopters what enrichment is all about and why it's a good thing. Enrichment not only gives a dog mental and physical exercise, it improves adopters' relationship with their pet and deepens their bond.