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An evaluation of a shelter dog training class:

Outcomes for volunteer trainers and for dogs

Paula M. Ramirez

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## **Introduction**

Are the best things in life really free? Volunteers are valuable people who work for free because they simply want to help. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2014 almost sixty-three million people volunteered (Volunteering in the United States 2014, 2015). The sizeable percentage of people wanting to help may indicate that there are mutually beneficial rewards for both organizations and volunteers. Volunteers are from all age ranges and help a large variety of different organizations with their causes. In 2014, 33.3% of the reported volunteers spent their time helping religious organizations, 25.1% volunteered with educational or youth services, and 14.4% volunteered for social or community service organizations (Volunteering in the United States 2014, 2015). Volunteering for humane societies or local animal welfare organizations did not appear to make the list of the most popular types of volunteer opportunities. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) suggests that people should volunteer at their local animal shelter because there are many benefits one can receive from working with shelter pets. Benefits can include learning new skills, working towards a good cause or even developing new relationships (Top Reasons to Volunteer at your Local Animal Shelter, 2012). These are only a few perks of volunteering for these types of organizations. There are many more including helping homeless animals find their forever homes.

There is a large body of research funded by the National Institute for Health (NIH) that focuses on the health benefits humans can receive from interacting with our furry friends. Benefits include lowering risks of heart attacks, lower heart rates and lower blood pressure. Pet owners often receive more exercise and develop better relationships with people (Can Pets Help

Keep You Healthy: Exploring the Human Animal Bond, 2009). It is likely that volunteers who work with animals can gain a few of these benefits as well.

Shelters across America are in need of volunteers to help their many homeless animals. At the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles (SPCALA) there are over 150 volunteers who help in a variety of ways (SPCA, 2016). Their website lists the many different tasks that volunteers can do while working with the shelter animals. What is unique about this organization is that they offer group training classes for volunteers to attend with shelter dogs. The classes use positive reinforcement training, so shelter dogs receive treats, praise, toys, and affection. The classes are not only for volunteers, but are most often taught by volunteers. New volunteers attend the classes along with other volunteers who make a routine of attending once or twice a month (SPCA, 2016). It can be assumed that shelter volunteers assist in making animals feel in high spirits while they also accrue benefits themselves. However, it is important for animal welfare organizations like the SPCALA to take a closer look at those benefits that are associated with volunteers interacting with shelter dogs, for both the dog and the volunteer. This type of further investigation would allow animal welfare organizations to make something that may seem obvious a little more concrete.

## **Literature Review**

### **Human- Animal Interactions: Effects on shelter dogs**

As previously discussed, human-animal interactions contribute to health benefits for the human involved. Studies show that the humans are not the only ones to benefit from the interaction. In a study performed by Coppola, Grandin & Enns (2006), shelter dogs' stress levels

were reduced after the dogs interacted with humans, and the stress levels remained at reduced levels days after the interaction. Their research investigated whether a 45-minute human interaction with a dog on the animal's second day at the Weld County Humane Society assisted in reducing stress up to 9 days later. The shelter environment is very stressful for dogs, as there are many factors that are beyond their control. Aversive stimuli contribute to the stress in shelter dogs; this can be noise levels, sights, and the kennel itself (Coppola, Grandin & Enns, 2006).

There were 54 dogs in the experimental group. Each of these 54 dogs included in the study interacted with the same female evaluator on the dog's second day in the shelter. Interactions occurred throughout several weeks, as not all the dogs used in this study entered the shelter on the same day. In order to measure the stress levels of the dogs, researchers collected samples of saliva from each dog using a cotton bud with a string attached. Cortisol is known as an indicator of response to stress and is used as a sign to identify poor welfare in animals. Typically, cortisol levels are measured via saliva. Researchers collected saliva samples on four different days: day two, day three, day four, and day nine of the animal's stay at the shelter. Saliva samples were taken from dogs two hours after the interaction on day two. Dogs who did not receive human interaction had saliva taken on day two as well; all samples were collected between 9 A.M. and 12 P.M. Between the two groups of dogs, researchers were able to measure cortisol levels of 105 different adult dogs from a variety of breeds. However, dogs left the shelter for a variety of reasons during the study, and as a result only 55 dogs had samples taken on all four days. Because of this, only the saliva of 55 dogs was analyzed. Of the 55 dogs, 25 received human interaction and 30 had no contact with humans. Researchers discovered that there was an overall tendency for dogs that received human interaction to have lower cortisol levels on day two, three, and day four at the shelter. However, by day nine they saw cortisol levels jump higher than

those of dogs who had no contact. The researchers also felt that in addition to reducing stress levels with human interactions, more information regarding the dog's overall temperament could be collected. This information could then aid in facilitating the right match for potential adopters.

Based on the Coppola et al. (2006) study, one can suggest that more human interaction is needed in animal shelters. However, more research is needed to specify what type of interaction is most beneficial for dogs. Several different types of interaction were used in this study, including: playing, walking, and training, but by narrowing down the type of interaction it could help visualize what type of interaction is most highly correlated to the reduction of stress. Another limitation of this study is that cortisol levels were only collected on four different occasions up to a certain date. The increase in cortisol levels on day 9 may very well be from lack of human contact, a traumatic event at the shelter, or overall stress from the shelter continuing to build up. Collecting cortisol levels for longer periods of time could assist in identifying stress triggers. An additional limitation of this study would be that there was only one interaction. Animals were interacted with on day two and cortisol levels stayed lower up to the animal's fourth day at the shelter. A study where animals receive interaction every 4 days would assist in identifying how often shelter dogs need human interaction in order to keep cortisol levels low.

Stress can lead to a variety of issues in shelter dogs ranging from medical conditions to behavioral problems. Dogs that are not able to adjust to the stress of the shelter encounter some troubles such as staying in the shelter for longer periods of time, being adopted and then returned, or getting euthanized (Kass, Scarlett, & Salman, 2001). For example, one study found that 18.8% of adopted dogs were returned to the shelter, and about 50% of these dogs were eventually euthanized (Patronek, Glickman, & Moyer, 1995). This is a large number, and

unfortunately in other shelters across the country, this number could potentially be even higher. According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), approximately 1.2 million dogs are euthanized each year (Shelter Intake and Surrender-ASPCA). The mass amount of euthanasia that occurs across the country leads researchers to investigate ways to prevent returns and ultimately prevent high numbers of euthanasia.

Luescher and Medlock (2009) conducted a study to explore the relationships between basic obedience training, environmental enrichment, and successful adoption rates. The study took place at the Almost Home Humane Society in Lafayette, Indiana over a period of eight weeks. A total of 180 dogs were used for this study. A variety of breeds were used; the dogs were randomly placed into one of two groups. The first group was a training and enrichment group, which had a total of 92 dogs. A sole experimenter trained dogs in this group once a day throughout the animals' stay at the shelter. The second group received no form of training and enrichment from the experimenter and included a total of 88 dogs. Shelter volunteers did interact with dogs in both groups, but the interaction was too inconsistent to collect data. For dogs in the training and enrichment group, a training session lasted 20-minutes. The session included walking and desensitizing activities such as placing Gentle Leader head halters so they could learn to walk nicely on leash, teaching dogs to sit on command using food lures and clickers, and teaching dogs not to jump up by rewarding when their paws were on the ground. All dogs that received training and interaction worked on the same activities. However, each training session slightly differed depending on the dog's success with the behaviors being taught. The dogs participating in the experimental group all received all of the following environmental enrichment: bedding and toys were added to their kennels, treats were tossed when the dog was

quiet, treats were tossed to bring dogs to the front of the kennel, and artificial plants were placed above kennel areas. Staff assisted in providing shelter dogs with enrichment.

Researchers found that whether the dog was being trained or not, the length of stay at the shelter was about the same. However, they did find that training and enrichment were effective in increasing adoptability. Dogs that were in the training and enrichment group were 1.4 times more likely to be adopted than untrained dogs. Of the 92 dogs in the training and enrichment group, 67 were adopted. Of the 88 dogs in the no contact group 48 were adopted. According to Luescher and Medlock (2009), training provided a more predictable environment that led to less stress and more appropriate behavior, which in the end is what adopters appeared to be looking for. Of all the dogs in the experiment, 115 were adopted (67 belonging to the training and enrichment group, 48 to the no contact group), 57 were euthanized, four went to a rescue, one was returned to its original owner, and one passed away. Of the 115 dogs adopted, only one was returned to the shelter. This dog belonged to the untrained group. Information regarding the number of dogs euthanized for each group was not given, nor was it given for those dogs that went to rescue, were returned to their owner, or passed away. Follow-up to determine returns took place just short of two years after the end of the initial study. However, information regarding details of follow-up was not given. This study showed that short training sessions correlated with the dogs' increased chances of adoption. The authors did state that many shelters are unfortunately limited in staff and volunteers, so strategies for implementing shelter training programs need to be further examined to determine the most successful way to put training programs into action.

This study had fewer limitations than the previously mentioned work by Coppola et al. (2006). The interactions with the shelter dogs were more focused, in the sense that they were

trained specific behaviors. A limitation that Luescher and Medlock (2009) did face was that volunteers who were not involved in the study interacted with both dogs in the training and enrichment group, as well as the dogs in the non-training group. The interactions that these non-study volunteers had with these dogs were not recorded as they were inconsistent. Also, the particular interactions they had with the dogs did not necessarily follow the same training routine the researcher was doing with the dogs. It is possible that because the training and the interaction was inconsistent, the dog may have taken a step backwards in training. Unknowingly, volunteers could have rewarded dogs for jumping, not sitting and pulling on leash. Future research where non-study volunteers do not interact with the dogs, or interact and follow the same training guidelines would assist in determining the dog's success and progress. An additional limitation of this study is determining whether the environmental enrichment factors added to reducing stress and increasing adoptions. Out of the eight weeks of conducting the research only four weeks had environmental enrichment modifications. Researchers did not find enough significant data to support that environmental enrichment increased adoptions. Not including the environmental enrichment in this study would provide more solid results, or conducting a separate experiment to find any possible benefits for the dogs such as reducing stress or increasing adoptions. A key point that the authors made, that many shelter personnel may agree with, is that there are limited resources available to implement programs where staff and volunteers can assist in increasing adoptions and reducing returns.

As the increased interest in lowering euthanasia numbers, accompanied by the term "no kill," has grown in popularity throughout the country, it is likely that there so has also been an increase in the number of training programs in shelters as a way to reduce euthanasia and increase adoptions. The SPCALA, over the past several years has been updating and

implementing training programs to further benefit their shelter dogs and decrease the number of euthanasias (SPCA, 2016). Although it has been difficult, more shelters are implementing programs to reach the goal of providing a better quality of life for shelter dogs and focusing on behaviors that will increase the dog's chances of successful adoption. However, it can be assumed that it may be even more difficult for some shelters to get started due to unavailable time and resources.

A study conducted by Thorn, Templeton, Van Winkle, & Castillo (2006) was designed to convince shelters that training in a shelter environment is not only valuable, but does not take a tremendous amount of time. The research took place at the Knox County Humane Society in Galesburg, Illinois. After five days of being in the shelter, a dog was eligible for being used in the study that took place. Before day five, the dogs were assessed behaviorally and medically to ensure that the dogs were healthy and safe for adoptions. Dogs that were used appeared to be adults over twelve months old, were mixed breeds and weighed over 40 pounds. Three experiments took place with different dogs for each experiment. Nine dogs were used in the first experiment, twelve in the second, and 20 in the third. The first experiment was to determine the speed with which shelter dogs learned to sit. For this experiment, there were three experimenters which included a recorder, a leash handler, and an approaching person. This experiment took place indoors, away from other dogs, and lasted no more than 60-seconds. Nine dogs went through two trials for this experiment. A person approached a dog and when she stopped in front of the dog, the recorder started the stopwatch. The approaching person used no words or hand signals. If the dog sat as the person approached, the dog was rewarded with a treat and the watch was stopped. If the dog started to sit, he/she was rewarded, but the watch was not stopped, and it did not count as a sit. The session ended when the dog sat or when 60-seconds were reached.

This was repeated ten times, and then the dog was then placed back in its kennel. An hour later, the same experiment was performed with the same dogs. The results showed that all the dogs were able to sit in less than 60-seconds and began to sit more quickly as the sessions continued. The second trial showed that the dogs were able to sit in half the time of the first trial.

The second experiment by Thorn et al. (2006) was conducted to determine if training was retained over time in the shelter environment. This experiment, although similar to the first experiment, used different techniques. Twelve dogs were used; six were assigned to a verbal treatment and six to a clicker treatment. Dogs were randomly selected and were different dogs than those in the first experiment. This experiment took place outside away from other dogs in the shelter. There were two testing days, each two days apart. The experimenters were different on the second day than they were on the first day. Individual dogs repeated the session 10 times before being placed back into their kennels. Similar to the first experiment, there were three different experimenters, playing the same roles, the recorder, the leash handler and the approaching person. For the trial with the verbal command, the approaching person walked toward the dog and asked for a sit; if the dog sat, the person said “good dog!” and gave a treat. If the dog did not sit within 60-seconds, the approaching person left the area for 30-seconds and returned to repeat the process. If the dog still did not sit, the approaching person lured the dog, until he/she sat, said “good dog” and then gave a treat. Luring the dog was only necessary for one dog. The same process took place for the clicker trial. A person approached, but did not ask for a sit. If the dog sat, the person clicked and gave a treat. If the dog did not sit, the person left for 30-seconds and returned to repeat the process. If the dog still did not sit, the same lure procedure was used as in the verbal trial. Two dogs needed to be lured for this trial. The stopwatch started when the approaching person stopped in front of the dog; it stopped when the

dog sat. Both of these trials were repeated two days later by different experimenters. The results found that on the first day, both the verbal command and the clicker produced similar results. The dogs began to sit faster as each session repeated. On the second day, the results showed that dogs using the verbal command appeared to retain the behavior, as they sat faster and continued to do so as the session went on. The different experimenters did not appear to make a difference in the dog's performance for the verbal command dogs. In other word, they still continued to get better at sitting despite the fact that there was a new person performing the experiment. The clicker group did not appear to retain the sitting behavior as readily on the second day, and took just as long to sit on the second day as they did on the first day. Not only did they not appear to sit as quickly, but they performed inconsistently through the 10 sessions on the second day.

Finally, the third experiment by Thorn et al. (2006) was conducted to examine if sitting is a behavior that can be transferred to novel environments and novel people. Unlike the first two experiments, the same person performed all the initial training. When it was time to test for the dog's ability to transfer to novel people, other individuals participated. The experiment took place indoors in a real-life room setting, which was meant to resemble a household environment. There were ten dogs who participated in this experimental treatment. The dogs received a food reward each time the dog sat during a 15-minute period. Another ten dogs participated in an experiment where the handler rewarded the dog every 20-seconds for 15-minutes regardless of the behavior the dog was displaying. All 20 dogs were trained once a day for five days. After five days of training, each dog went through four different testing sessions. This was to determine if the environment and a change in trainer affected the dogs. The first testing session took place in the same room with the same trainer, the second testing session took place in a different room with the same trainer, the third testing session took place in the same room with a

different trainer, and the fourth testing session took place in an unfamiliar area with an unfamiliar trainer. Each session occurred once a day for four days and lasted 15-minutes. The results showed that on the first day there was no significant difference between dogs rewarded for sitting and dogs rewarded every 20-seconds. This changed by day two; dogs rewarded for sitting sat much more often and for longer periods of time than those in the other group. This stayed consistent until the end of the training period, day five. However, there were no significant differences in sitting between the two groups when it came to the four testing areas.

Overall, Thorn et al. (2006) found that dogs can be trained to sit in less than 30-minutes. All the dogs in these studies were trained to sit and continued to show this behavior regardless of the person or location, as long as they were being reinforced. Researchers suggest that if shelter dogs are trained for five minutes every other day, a dog can learn and maintain the behavior. The average shelter stay for a dog at the Knox County Humane Society was 14.3 days from arrival to adoption. The study proposed that if a dog can maintain a “good skill level” for a week, it will be very important for shelters to put into practice, as it can increase adoptions. Due to the findings of this study, the Knox County Humane Society put a training program into place. Both staff and volunteers followed the same procedures to wait for a dog to sit before exiting the kennel, before going outside of the shelter, and for an approaching person. Not only did staff and volunteers find that this assisted in increasing adoptions, but it also helped to maintain a quieter kennel environment. Dogs were easier to handle when out of their kennels, and dogs sat in their kennels for an approaching adopter much more often. Exact numbers and information regarding increased number of adoptions was not given. Staff also found that it was helpful in initiating conversation regarding positive reinforcement training methods. Having this organization create protocol based on this study appears to be a success. The challenges with these results are now

convincing other animal welfare organizations to do the same. This study has a tremendous amount of information, as they conducted three separate experiments. A limitation, however, is that these researchers did not use a large number of dogs for the experiments. In addition, a limitation of the study is that all the dogs used were medium to large dogs over 40 pounds. Most animal shelters across the country face the problem of being overwhelmed with large dogs, so this limitation may not affect them. California however, is overwhelmed with small dogs, less than 25 pounds. If researchers could conduct similar experiments with smaller dogs, it might further support that teaching a dog to sit is simple and training programs should be in place. Alternatively, the evidence could show that smaller dogs are not as easy to train in this manner. This information would be helpful because it would allow shelters with smaller dogs to develop a different training program that may be more effective for smaller dogs.

### **Human- Animal Interactions: Volunteers**

Evidence to support why it is important to train shelter dogs throughout their stay in the shelter has been discussed in all three of the above studies. This shows that there is evidence to support the need to train dogs in shelter settings. The outcome of implemented training interactions and training sessions appears to be very beneficial. So how can animal shelters implement a training program that will lead staff and volunteers to be most effective? A study by Howard and DiGennaro Reed (2014) explored these questions by testing the following: What method of presenting information to volunteers did volunteers respond to best? And did the information that was given to the volunteers result in better outcomes for the dogs? Volunteers are important aspects of many animal welfare organizations, and as mentioned in previous research, training programs can be very time consuming and possibly expensive. Volunteers can

reduce cost and time constraints experienced by paid staff. However, it is important to focus on quality over quantity, so effective training is important. Howard and DiGennaro Reed (2014) had four main focus areas in their study. First, they evaluated the level of training required for volunteers to be able to teach shelter dogs specific behaviors. The second focus area was an evaluation of the effects of obedience training on shelter dogs to measure the dog's compliance. The third focus area was an assessment of the generalization of volunteer performance and dog compliance on people who have little to no training, i.e. the adopter. The final goal was to measure the dog's desirability to the customer before and after it has been trained.

In order to conduct this experiment, Howard and DiGennaro Reed (2014) used the assistance of three volunteer college students. Each volunteer was assigned to train a black shelter dog who appeared to be having difficulty with adoption. All three dogs appeared to be lab mixes. The dogs and the volunteers were filmed to show how the dogs behaved before receiving training and after learning sit and wait. These behaviors were taught using discrete-trial obedience training, which teaches behaviors in small steps rather than all at once. In order to identify "the most effective training with the least amount of resources, sequential application of increasingly intensive methods of volunteer training was evaluated," (Howard & DiGennaro Reed, 2014, p. 348). Sessions took place in a small closet like area one to four times a day, two to three days per week depending on the availability of the room. The first trial consisted of volunteers being given only basic written instructions on how to handle animals safely. They were instructed to use their discretion to teach the dogs the specific behaviors. This was known as the baseline trial. The next training day, volunteers were given written instructions regarding specifics of how to teach the dog the desired behavior. Volunteers received this information 30-minutes before interacting with the dog; this was the written instructions trial. This trial differed

from the first trial because in the first trial, no instructions on how to teach the dogs the behaviors were given. Following the written instructions trial, volunteers were provided with a video model. This was a fourteen-minute film that included step-by-step instructions. Volunteers viewed this video only once before interacting with their assigned dog. The final trial was feedback and modeling. For this trial, volunteers received one-on-one training with a trainer, who demonstrated step-by-step instructions on how to teach the dog the cue, and also provided feedback on how they were doing as they worked with other shelter dogs. Using the footage of the volunteers and a survey that was given to the volunteers, Howard and DiGennaro Reed (2014) found that performance feedback was shown to be the most successful in teaching volunteers what to do. They also found that when the volunteers did not fully understand what to do either, thus poor volunteer training leads to little or no compliance from the shelter dog. In other words, when volunteers were properly trained, shelter dogs were more successful at learning a behavior. This information is extremely important in understanding how training should be given to volunteers in order to improve the impact they have on shelter dogs. Howard and DiGennaro Reed (2014) found that although it was simple to generalize teaching the sit cue; it was not the same with wait. After the trials were complete, footage of the dog's performance during the baseline training, and footage at the final trial were shown to customers, professional trainers, and shelter staff; all provided feedback on the dog's behavior before and after training. Trainers and shelter staff provided feedback to suggest improvements in training volunteers, to assist in determining whether the discrete-trial obedience training was effective, and to determine whether the training was performed correctly. Feedback from the customers showed that they preferred the trained dog to the untrained dog. This feedback from the customers showed that dogs in this study were found to be more desirable when they are trained. Overall, this study

showed that basic training can assist in making shelter dogs more adoptable and that training the trainers directly rather than via written instructions or video was the most effective method for teaching volunteer trainers.

This research is very important in assisting with the development of training and enrichment programs in shelters. One limitation is that only three volunteers and three shelter dogs were used. All volunteers were young students, and all of the dogs were medium to large lab mixes. These may be weaknesses in the research as different ages of volunteers can contribute to understanding what teaching methods work for volunteers, as well as determining how well different aged volunteers respond to different size dogs. Neumann (2010) found that most people who volunteer at animal shelters are not college students, but women between forty and fifty-nine years old. More research needs to be done to determine exactly how training volunteers should be accomplished in order to increase shelter dog compliance.

Neumann (2010) used surveys to characterize the people who volunteer at animal shelters and investigate why they choose to volunteer. Of the approximate 10,000 animal welfare organizations in existence at the time of the research, two organizations from each state were randomly selected. Only 26 organizations chose to participate. 426 animal welfare volunteers submitted surveys, 380 participates were recruited via email, 43 participates were recruited via the “snowballing” technique. Organizations responded by answering two questionnaires. One was titled *The Animal Welfare Organization Information Sheet*, this questionnaire was completed by a shelter representative and it asked the organization questions such as: their location, how many volunteers they have, whether they practice euthanasia, and how their volunteers are recruited. The second questionnaire titled *The Animal Welfare Volunteer Survey* was completed by individual volunteers. Volunteer surveys included demographic questions such as age, race,

and economic class. There were also questions regarding reasons why they volunteer, how it makes them feel, and what they mainly do as a volunteer. Results from the first questionnaire found that those who responded were primarily organizations from southern states, which had less than 20 volunteers, employed paid staff, and practiced euthanasia in certain situations. Of these organizations, the number one reason volunteers came to their shelter was because the volunteer had the idea, and he/she approached the organization. In other words, most volunteers were not recruited by the shelter. Results from the questionnaire specifically for volunteers showed that those who volunteer are typically female, white, pet-owning, married, democratic leaning, employed, are between the ages of 40-59 years old, and make between \$50,000-\$99,000 a year. Of these volunteers the most popular form of work done at the shelter was spending time with and giving attention to animals (68%). The information that was obtained through these surveys can be very useful in creating successful training programs, but also in recruiting more volunteers to assist at the shelter. As mentioned earlier, animal welfare organizations are not among the most popular volunteer areas (Volunteering in the United States 2014, 2015).

Although this information is significant to understanding more about animal welfare volunteers, there is a large limitation to this study. Only 26 organizations responded of the estimated 10,000. Perhaps if organizations were recruited in other ways, in addition to email, more would have responded. Social media has grown quickly. If surveys were sent out via Facebook or Instagram, more responses could possibly have been received. Another limitation observed in this study is the location of those who primarily responded. The main location of people who responded to questionnaires were from southern states. Although this may have had some effect on this particular study, the author, Neumann, mentions the importance of being able to look outside these demographics and reach out to people of all ages and backgrounds to recruit

volunteers. The fact that the majority of animal welfare volunteers come to the organization on their own shows that they may care about animal issues. However, it also shows that these types of organizations need to reach out more, rather than waiting for the volunteers to come to them. One way this can be achieved is to further explore the benefits volunteers receive by volunteering at animal welfare organizations. This information can then be used to recruit more volunteers.

### **Methods**

As demonstrated in some of the studies reviewed previously, volunteers can play an important role in the life of a shelter dog through training and interaction. This study evaluated the use of volunteers to train shelter dogs. This evaluation looked specifically at the advantages the dog received from these volunteer interactions, and the benefits the volunteers received from these interactions.

### **Location**

This study was conducted at two urban adoption facilities in Los Angeles County. Both sites are property of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles (SPCALA). The two facilities where this study took place have some similarities and differences. Site A is located in Long Beach. It is a large facility that has one hundred dog kennels. 75 of these kennels are for dogs available for adoption, while the remaining 25 kennels are for isolation dogs that need to remain away from the general population for various reasons. Stray dogs that are not yet available for adoption are housed with Long Beach Animal Care Services (LBACS), which is located on the same property, but operates separately. When animals are available for adoption, they are transferred from LBACS over to the SPCALA

kennel area. Here, there are four buildings that are connected to one another, each housing 25 kennels that are set up in a square shape. Kennels are situated on the perimeter of the square and the center is used as a large walking area for customers. Dogs are able to see one another from across the building, and through their kennel bars, but they are not able to see those directly next to them, as they are separated by a metal wall. A guillotine door separates the indoor area from an outdoor area of each kennel allowing dogs to go back and forth freely. Inside the kennel, each dog is provided with fresh bedding, toys, food and water. The dogs primarily use the outdoor area to relieve themselves and the guillotine doors assist in separating the dogs during cleaning of the kennels. This facility has four outdoor grassy yards where staff and volunteers are able to interact with the shelter dogs. These areas are also used to show animals available for adoption to prospective adopters. Three of the yards are 15 feet by 15 feet; the remaining yard is 60 feet by 65 feet. In addition to these areas, there are three indoor rooms available for volunteers and staff to work with the animals. Two small rooms measure 8 feet by 7 feet and one large area known as the Training Center measures 21 feet by 18 feet.

Site B is located in Hawthorne. It is a smaller facility that has 55 kennels, 10 of which belong in the isolation area. Of these 55 kennels, 35 provide both indoor and outdoor access similar to site A. The remaining kennels do not provide outdoor access, but are only used to house small dogs and puppies. This facility is shaped like a cross with the exception of the isolation area. Isolation dogs are away from the general population. Unlike at site A, there is no other animal care organization on site, so animals available for adoption and strays are housed together. Indoor and outdoor areas are used in exactly the same manner as in site A. This facility has several yards available for staff and volunteers to interact with shelter dogs. There is one large concrete yard, 20 feet by 25 feet and five small Astroturf yards. These yards are 18 feet by

18 feet, and three of them are located towards the front of the shelter. These yards are right next to one another separated only by a chain link fence. The remaining two yards are behind the shelter and are next to one another similar to the other three.

### **Volunteer Training**

The SPCALA currently has a volunteer training program known as H.E.A.L. (Helping Enrich Animals Lives) which operates at both locations. The organization's volunteers attend different levels of training depending on the volunteer's interests. All volunteers attend an initial information session and an orientation. Volunteers, who would like to work with shelter dogs attend a Level One training class (L1). Here volunteers learn basic skills needed to enrich the lives of shelter dogs from outside of their kennels. After completing eight hours within a 30-day period, volunteers can attend a Level Two training class (L2). Here volunteers learn safe handling and basic dog training skills. Volunteers are able to take dogs out of their kennels and train on specific obedience cues. These volunteers are also able to attend shelter dog training classes such as Adoption Academy (a shelter dog obedience class), All-Star Agility(a shelter dog agility class), Hollywood Hounds (a shelter dog tricks class), and Shelter Scents(a shelter dog sent detection class). After completing 20 hours of L2 activities within a six-month period, volunteers can choose to attend a Level Three training class (L3). At this level volunteers learn the skills necessary to assist with internal and external dog training classes, work more closely with the behavior and training department, and work with dogs that have special behavior needs. After completing 40 hours of L3 activities within a 6-month period, volunteers can choose to attend a Level Four training class (L4). This is the highest and final level that a volunteer can achieve. L4 volunteers are those primarily interested in pursuing a career as a professional dog trainer. These volunteers learn additional skills needed to teach dog training classes and conduct

behavior modification plans for shelter dogs (Volunteer Training, 2016). The SPCALA has a training program that is very specific as to what volunteers should do. Although this organization has had this program for over ten years, within the last four years the organization has revamped the H.E.A.L. program focusing in on key elements that will assist shelter dogs in having a better quality of life. (SPCA, 2016)

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were SPCALA volunteers and available shelter dogs. Volunteers were recruited by the Volunteer Services Department and the researcher to attend a shelter dog training class. Recruiting volunteers to attend shelter dog training classes was done through email newsletters and announcements, as well as personal interaction from the researcher. Volunteers who wished to attend a class enrolled via email to Behavior and Training Department, while other volunteers enrolled the day of the class. Before the start of the class the researcher individually approached volunteers, explained the study, and asked the volunteers if they were interested in participating. Only volunteers with an L2, L3 or L4 rating were eligible to participate in this study. Shelter dogs were individually selected by the volunteers. All shelter dogs selected to participate, were available for adoption.

### **Procedure**

After volunteers had been recruited and agreed to participate in the study, volunteers who signed up to attend classes at site A were asked to meet in the training center or the large adoption yard depending on the particular class. Those who signed up to attend classes at site B were asked to meet in the front Astroturf area.

At the time of the class, those who agreed to participate in the study were asked by the class instructor to venture through the section of available dogs and choose a dog they would like to work with. Once they found a suitable dog or were given a recommendation, participants were asked to bring the dog to the area where the class was held. As the dog entered the yard, the researcher individually approached each volunteer and asked them to fill out a pre-class questionnaire (See Table 1 for specific questions). Having participants fill out the questionnaire before starting the class allowed the instructor more time to prepare for the class. The questionnaire was typed, printed out, and placed on a clipboard with a pen prior to the start of the class. This preparation assisted in saving time and made it easier for participants to complete. Once the questionnaire was completed, the researcher collected the questionnaires, and directed the volunteer to the instructor's attention. When all dogs settled into the class area, the class began. The researcher observed the class by taking notes on: participant to dog interactions, behavior of the dogs during the class, and behavior of the participant during the class, as well as any other interactions that may have arose while the class was in session. Once the class had finished, participants were asked to place their dogs back into their kennels and to meet back in the class area in order to fill out a post-class questionnaire. When participants arrived back in the class area, the researcher handed out the second set of questions (See Table 2 for specific questions). The questionnaire was typed, printed out, and placed on a clipboard with a pen prior to the start of the class. This preparation again, assisted in saving time and made it easier for participants to complete. Once completed and collected the researcher thanked participants for taking part in the research and informed them that they were free to leave.

The researcher then gathered additional information on the shelter dogs that attended the class. Using PawTrax software, the following information was collected: the dog's breed, age,

whether they were altered, the date they entered the shelter and became available for adoption, and the reason they entered the shelter. This study ran for a period of 4 weeks and took place at both site A and site B. Shelter dog training classes will take place at site A on Saturday mornings, and site B on Sunday mornings. Only one class was taught per day. The classes averaged an hour in time. At the end of the 4-week period, follow-up information on each dog was gathered to determine each dog's status, specifically: whether or not the dog was adopted, was still available for adoption, was returned, or was euthanized.

### **Analyzing Data Collected**

After the 4-week study period, all data were collected, transcribed and analyzed. Questions one and two on the pre-class questionnaire are close ended and were, therefore, tallied. All other questions on the pre and post class questionnaire are open ended and were, therefore, analyzed for patterns and themes in the data. Themes were then categorized and charted. Participant names remained anonymous throughout the study. Each participant was referred to as a letter. Letters go in order of day and order in which pre surveys were handed out. For example, the first participant who received a pre-survey on day one of the study is referred to as Participant A. Participant B, C, and D will follow. Letter order will continue until the completion of the study.

**Table 1. Pre Class Questionnaire**

<p><b>Pre class questionnaire</b></p> <p><u>Volunteer information</u></p> <p>Volunteer Name:</p> <p>Age:</p> <p>Length of volunteer service:</p> <p><u>Questions:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have you attended this class before? (please circle) YES or No</li> <li>2. Have you worked with this dog before? (please circle) YES or No</li> <li>3. What made you attend this class?</li> <li>4. What made you choose the particular dog you will be working with today?</li> <li>5. So far, are there any important behaviors you have noticed the dog displaying? (Example: sitting, jumping, barking, panting, etc. Please write as many behaviors as you have noticed.)</li> </ol>
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**Table 2. Post Class Questionnaire**

<p><b>Post class questionnaire</b></p> <p><u>Volunteer information</u></p> <p>Volunteer Name:</p> <p><u>Questions:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you feel the class went?</li> <li>2. Did you benefit from the class? If yes, how did you benefit? If no, why?</li> <li>3. Do you feel the dog benefited from the class? Explain.</li> <li>4. What if any behavior changes did you notice in the dog from the time you took them out, to the time you put them back in their kennel?</li> <li>5. Would you attend this class again? Why or why not?</li> </ol>
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## Results

### Who Participated:

Throughout this study 12 pre and post surveys were collected. Four shelter dog training classes were observed, 10 volunteers participated. Two volunteers attended two different shelter dog training classes; therefore, these two volunteers were asked to complete a second survey. In addition to volunteers participating in this study, the All-Star Agility classes and the Hollywood Hounds class were instructed by Level 4 volunteers, Shelter Scents was instructed by a member of Behavior and Training Department.

**Table 1: Class Demographics**

Name of class	Class description	Location	Date	Number class attendees	Number of research participants
All-Star Agility	An agility class	Long Beach-adoption yard	May 7 <sup>th</sup>	5	4
All-Star Agility	An agility class	South Bay-adoption yard	May 14 <sup>th</sup>	3	3
Hollywood Hounds	A tricks class	Long Beach-training center	May 28 <sup>th</sup>	3	3
Shelter Scents	A sent detection/ Fun nose work class	Long Beach-training center	June 5 <sup>th</sup>	3	2

### Volunteer Demographics:

The data collected in this study supports Neumann (2010) who found that a majority of volunteers who participated were white females between 40-59 years old. Of the 10 volunteers who participated, all but one was female and white. The one participant who did not fit this description was a Latino male. A large majority of volunteers who participated are new volunteers who have been volunteering less than one year. See Table 2 for detailed volunteer demographics.

**Table 2: Volunteer Demographics**

<b>Volunteer Age Range</b>	<b>Number within range</b>	<b>Service under 1 year</b>	<b>Service between 1-4 years</b>	<b>Service between 4-9 years</b>	<b>Service between 10-14 years</b>	<b>Service 15 years and over</b>
60-80 years	4	2	1			1
40-59 years	4	1		1	1	1
20-39 years	2	1	1			

**Dog Demographics:**

In order for dogs to participate in a shelter dog training class, the dog must be at least one-year-old. This is to prevent any outbreak of germs that dogs under a year may be susceptible to. Dogs can be of any breed or size. Age and breed are determined upon check-in by the shelter managers and the medical department. Veterinary staff looks at teeth, eyes and overall physical condition to estimate the age of the dog. Shelter managers look at the dog's size, markings, and other physical characteristics to try to determine the breed of each dog. Neither the age of the dog or breed is completely certain; both are educated assumptions.

Class instructors prefer and promote that the dogs chosen to attend the training session are food- motivated and have been at the shelter for at least three days. According to the agility instructor (personal communication, Moray, 2016), in order to determine if the dog is food motivated, volunteers typically walk through the shelter and offer treats to the dogs to see how focused on food the dogs are. Although this is what the instructor recommends, the researcher did not witness volunteers performing this food motivation test. So whether the volunteers actually walked through the shelter looking for food motivated dogs is uncertain. Twelve dogs participated in this study, of these 12 dogs 4 were pitbull mixes, 4 were terrier mixes, 3 were Chihuahua mixes, and 1 was a shepherd mix. Ages ranged from an estimated 1 year to 7 years old. Over 50% of the dogs had been spayed or neutered, and 8 of the 12 dogs were female. See table 3 for dog demographics.

**Table 3: Dog Participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Breed</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Male/ Female</b>	<b>Spayed/ Neutered Yes or No</b>
Emma	Chihuahua	5 years	Female	Yes
Leo	Terrier	3 years	Male	No
Lola	Pitbull	5 years	Female	Yes
Brooklyn	Pitbull	7 years	Female	Yes
Rosa	Chihuahua	3 years	Female	Yes
Bluster	Pitbull	2 years	Male	Yes
Cruller	Terrier	1 year	Male	No
Paris	Shepherd	4 years	Female	Yes
July	Terrier	2 years	Female	Yes
Natalie	Chihuahua	6 years	Female	No
Queenie	Pitbull	3 years	Female	No
Graham	Terrier	2 years	Male	No

**Volunteers' experience with individual dogs:**

On each of the dog's kennels there are volunteer/ staff tracking sheets, a pet portfolio, and pet ID card.

- The tracking sheet- is filled out each time a dog is taken out of their kennel, whether they are being worked with by volunteers or shown to members of the public for adoption.

When volunteers come to work with shelter dogs, they are asked not to take dogs out who have already been out of their kennel that day. They are told to "spread the love" and work with other shelter animals that need attention.

- The pet portfolio- is information primarily for adopters. A sheet of paper with the animal's picture and other important information about the dog's age and breed. On the portfolio there is a section advertising whether the dog has attended a Shelter Dog Training Class. If the dog has attended a class, the specific class is checked.
- The pet ID card- is primarily for staff; however, volunteers are able to determine how long the animal has been at the shelter based on the date on the card. This card is used to

determine availability. Any time a volunteer works with a shelter dog they are instructed to take this card with them in the event a member of the public is interested in adopting. This card too includes basic information on the dog. If this card has a red tag attached to it, the dog is on hold and an adoption is currently being processed. Volunteers are asked not to take dogs out who have an adoption pending.

On the pre-survey volunteers were asked what made them choose the particular dog they will be working with, and whether they have worked with the dog before. Out of the 12 surveys, 9 of the volunteers stated that they have never worked with that particular dog before, 3 out of the 12 surveys volunteers stated they have worked with the dog at a previous time. The answers given by the 12 pre surveys show 4 different trends on why they choose to work with a particular dog. See table 4 for details.

**Table 4: Reason given by volunteers for choosing a particular dog**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of volunteers who agreed</b>
Recommended by staff member	4
Long term shelter dog	2
Looks/size	2
Responsive to treats	2

### **Volunteer experience with shelter dog training class**

Volunteer training classes are advertised in the volunteer newsletters, and a list of classes and dates is hung next to the volunteer sign-in sheet. Ideally, volunteers who are interested in attending the class will enroll via email to the Behavior and Training Department. Instructors prefer volunteers enroll so they know how many volunteers to prepare for.

Only 4 of the 12 participants in this study actually enrolled via an e-mail to the Behavior and Training Department. The other 8 volunteers were approached by the researcher and asked to attend the class. Although the researcher encouraged volunteers to attend, the volunteer

ultimately made the decision. On the pre-survey, volunteers were asked: 1) if they have attended the training class previously, and 2) what made them attend the class. Seven volunteers had previously taken that particular training class before, and 5 had not. On the volunteers 'post-survey, volunteers were asked if they would attend the class again, 100% of the volunteers said yes.

- “Yes, another exercise to help the dogs become more adoptable.”
- “Yes. To learn how to problem solve for different dogs so as to get them to do some of the agility obstacles and to improve by luring and handling skills.”
- “Definitely! Robert is an amazing teacher. I learn tons and working with the dog in this way is exciting!”

Below is Table 5 which shows the information written in exact words by volunteers as to what made them attend this class.

**Table 5: Reason volunteers attended class**

<b>Volunteer</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Attended before</b>	<b>Enrolled via Behavior Dept?</b>	<b>What made you attend this class?</b>
Participant A	All Star Agility Long Beach	No	Yes	“I have always been interested in training dogs and wanted to experience an agility class.”
Participant B	All Star Agility Long Beach	Yes	No	“The dogs seem to like it”
Participant C	All Star Agility Long Beach	Yes	No	“It’s fun and a good learning experience for both me and the dog”
Participant D	All Star Agility Long Beach	Yes	No	“The instructor is great to work with. He has very constructive suggestions to help my dog handling skills and also to help the particular dog I’m working with and altar the class to the dogs need and he is an expert.”

Participant E	All Star Agility South Bay	Yes	No	“Timing”
Participant F	All Star Agility South Bay	Yes	Yes	“Robert! Love this class because it’s so good for the dogs and lets me use a higher level of my training skills.”
Participant G	All Star Agility South Bay	Yes	No	“Something fun to do with the dogs.”
Participant H	Hollywood Hounds Long Beach	Yes	No	“I haven’t been able to do a Hollywood Hounds for a few years and I’ve been wanting to take it as a lot of training material is covered.”
Participant I	Hollywood Hounds Long Beach	No	No	“Interested in working more with shelter dogs directly and working on specific behaviors.”
Participant J	Hollywood Hounds Long Beach	No	No	“I am really interested in attending this class offered for addition info and experience.”
Participant K	Shelter Scents Long Beach	No	Yes	“I am interested in learning as much as I can as a volunteer and I love working with all animals.”
Participant L	Shelter Scents Long Beach	No	Yes	“Wanted to try a class. Love helping dogs with training to get adopted.”

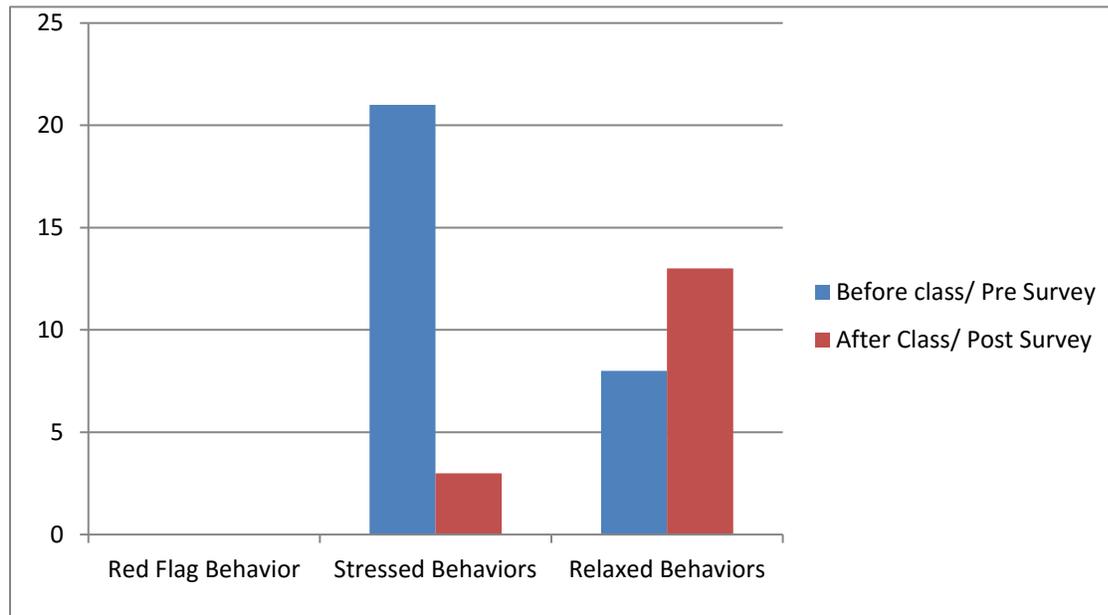
### **Volunteer Training: Step 1, Dog Behavior:**

In order to work with shelter dogs, volunteers must first attend a class where they learn about basic dog body language and behaviors. Sue Sternberg’s “Bite-O-Meter” is used help volunteers become aware of different body language signals dogs may display. The Behavior and Training Department also has videos of their own they show to volunteers along with the use of a live shelter dog. Volunteers are taught to identify several different behaviors ranging from red flag behaviors which are warning signs of aggression, to stressed behaviors, and relaxed body language. Although volunteers are trained on the different types of behaviors to look for, they are not necessarily trained professionals. On both the pre and post survey volunteers were asked to describe and list any behaviors they may have noticed the dog displaying including:

- Red flag behaviors such as: hard direct stares at a person or other animal, the dog showing the whites of their eyes, placing their mouth on the leash or person.
- Stressed behaviors such as: panting, cowering, licking lips, ears back, tail tucked, avoiding situations, shaking off after interaction, not taking food.
- Relaxed behaviors such as: wagging tail and body, taking treats, attentiveness, open smiling mouth, play bow.

Chart 1 below shows the number of times volunteers mentioned on their survey either a red flag behavior, a sign of stress, or if the dog displayed relaxed behaviors. This chart shows an overall comparison of behaviors volunteers observed. Chart 2 shows the number of times the researcher actually observed either a red flag behavior, a sign of stress, or if the dog displayed relaxed behaviors. The researchers' recordings are significantly higher than those observed by volunteers for two reasons. First, the researcher is a trained professional and can identify specific behaviors, and secondly, the class observation time is much longer than the time the volunteers had observing the dog before the class started and after the class was finished.

**Chart 1: Behaviors observed by volunteers**



**Chart 2: Behaviors observed by the researcher****Volunteer benefits from attending class:**

Volunteers were asked if they benefited from attending the class. Out of the 12 surveys collected 11 volunteers felt they benefited from attending. The one volunteer who stated that they did not benefit was a volunteer who left class early due to the dog's shutdown behavior. Volunteers who did benefit stated that they did so because they learned new training techniques and skills (2 out of 11 volunteers had statements similar to this); or because they gained more experience working with and handling a dog in a different environment (9 out of 11 had statements similar to this).

- “Absolutely! Learned how to work at dog’s pace in encountering new experiences.”
- “Yes, in terms of where I’m positioning the lure to be more effective, where to put my hands, what to watch for in terms of shaping a behavior.”

- “Definitely, any experience with dogs conducted by trained dog handlers is helpful to me.”

#### **Dog benefits from attending class:**

Volunteers were asked if they felt the dog benefited from attending the class, 100% of the volunteers said yes. These benefits are in addition to the increase in relaxed behaviors observed by the volunteers after class. Of the 12 dogs who attended the class, 10 were adopted, one was euthanized for behavior reasons, and another was euthanized for medical reasons. Although a high percentage of dogs who attended class were adopted, the adoptions did not appear to result from attending the classes. The average adoption occurred 2 weeks after the class. The shelter also held two large adoption events during the time the researcher was conducting observations, therefore this does not indicate that the classes had any effect on adoption rates.

**Table 7: Benefits for the dog as seen by the volunteer trainer**

<b>Volunteer</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Explanation of how dog benefited</b>
Participant A	All Star Agility Long Beach	“She gained confidence with each obstacle and was wonderful to work with.”
Participant B	All Star Agility Long Beach	“Even though the dog did not participate he still was having fun.”
Participant C	All Star Agility Long Beach	“The dog got exercise and mental stimulation.”
Participant D	All Star Agility Long Beach	“The stimulation of at least seeing the different obstacles and walking on and over them did engage her mind somewhat and hopefully tiered her out a little.”
Participant E	All Star Agility South Bay	“She’s shy so new experiences seemed to help.”
Participant F	All Star Agility South Bay	“He developed a higher level of confidence with every challenge. Became calmer as the challenges continued.”
Participant G	All Star Agility South Bay	“Tried something scary, learned to work for treats and worked on coordination.”

Participant H	Hollywood Hounds Long Beach	“I don’t know how much she gets out of her kennel, I’ve never seen volunteers working with her. Also when we walked around after class to allow her to sniff at things, pee and poop, she was seen by more people.”
Participant I	Hollywood Hounds Long Beach	It was great to see her try and focus. Also it is difficult for her to settle so the ‘relaxing’ portion was really valuable for her.”
Participant J	Hollywood Hounds Long Beach	“She was attentive while getting extra attention, she became more relaxed as it went on.”
Participant K	Shelter Scents Long Beach	“She was having fun and working her brain and senses.”
Participant L	Shelter Scents Long Beach	“Was assessed by several trainers, was interested in activity.”

### Conclusion

Each year volunteers spend countless hours working with shelter animals in animal welfare organizations across the country. Volunteers most likely assume that the work they are doing assists the animals in gaining advantages, while possibly at the same time receiving benefits themselves. The SPCA Los Angeles, like most animal welfare organizations, has many volunteers who walk, train, groom and assist in maintaining shelter animals’ overall care and well-being. One way volunteers assist with this is by attending Shelter Dog Training Classes. This study investigated the outcomes for both the dogs and the volunteers in these training classes.

### Class Successes:

Based on the data collected there are three main successes observed. One, the positive change in behavior shelter dogs displayed. Two, the skills and techniques volunteers learn by attending the class. Three, the willingness of volunteers to attend the class again.

. Volunteers observed a significant change in behavior from the start of the class to the time they put the dog back in his/her kennel. More information needs to be collected to determine further benefits shelter dogs receive, and how long the changes in behavior last. Monitoring shelter dogs in their kennels after the class would allow more information to be collected to determine this. As was done by Coppola, Grandin & Enns (2006), cortisol samples could be collected from shelter dogs before and after class, to assist in finding if the class reduces stress. Based on the behaviors described by volunteers, it can be assumed that visually the dog appears less stressed; however, monitoring cortisol levels could make this assumption more solid.

Volunteers stated that they did benefit from attending the shelter dog training class. Many volunteers gained more experience as handlers; they learned new skills and techniques. Volunteers stated that working with professionals aided in them developing their new skills. Classes also allowed volunteers to work with shelter animals in a different setting, which could perhaps be enrichment not only for the dog, but also for the volunteer. Further information regarding the overall experience of attending the class itself needs to be collected. On the post survey volunteers were asked "How do you feel the class went?" Many of the volunteers were very vague in answering this question, leaving this question and its results uncertain. However, follow-up questions did assist in determining what the volunteers liked and did not like about the class. A question regarding whether the volunteer likes working with shelter dogs on their own versus in a class setting could be a follow up question if this study were to be conducted again.

The fact that 100% of the volunteers who attended classes are willing to attend the class again shows that the class in general was a success. If volunteers did not want to return, further

investigation as to why would be needed. While filling out a post survey, one of the volunteers mentioned that volunteers appear to enjoy props. They like to work with things that they typically do not have the opportunity to do so. Although the volunteer mentioned this, she did not write it down on her survey. Perhaps interviews in addition to surveys would allow volunteers to express themselves more, and give more reasons as to why they would attend the class again, and how the Behavior and Training Department could recruit more volunteers to attend.

### **Class Challenges:**

During the course of this study the researcher observed a few challenges that could cause the classes to be less successful. One, the way the classes are advertised does not allow all of the volunteers to be aware of them, and it does not allow the volunteers to truly understand what the classes are. Two, because the information regarding the classes are not reaching the volunteers, fewer volunteers are enrolling, which then leaves the Behavior and Training Department unsure of the number of attendees.

Currently classes are advertised through the volunteer newsletter. Although this newsletter is sent out to all volunteers, a large percentage of the volunteers do not open the email, and at other times the email goes to junk mail in many people's email settings. This is a problem, because this is the main source of class advertisement. Another challenge here is that classes do not have detailed descriptions describing volunteer and dog benefits. Descriptions are vague and do not give volunteers a lot of information as to what the class is about. For volunteers who have attended, this is not as big of an issue, but for new volunteers, this could be a real problem. The problem of advertising, results in low class attendance. Throughout this study the researcher had to approach the majority of volunteers to attend the classes. This could be a

strategy for the Behavior and Training Department, to gain higher class attendance, however at the same time this process can be time consuming.

### **Recommendations**

Below is a list of recommendations that the SPCALA should consider as a way to make the shelter dog training classes more successful. They are listed in order of easiest to most difficult to incorporate.

1. Place a white board in front of the class area advertising the class to customers and other volunteers. On the white board there should be a short description of the class, the time the class starts and ends, and some of the things that will be taught. This will allow interested adopters to be more informed of what the dogs are learning and allow volunteers who are not yet enrolled to talk with the trainer about attending the class.
2. Reword the description of the shelter dog training classes. Currently the description for classes reads “Did you know that dogs who’ve received some obedience training are less likely to be surrendered to a shelter? To help train, and enrich the lives of our dogs, we run special group classes just for shelter dogs.” This is very general and does not give much information about each individual class. Below are possible rewording recommendations that can be advertised in the volunteer newsletter.
  - a. Adoption Academy- This class focuses on teaching shelter dogs’ basic obedience skills such as: sitting for their food bowl, sitting for an approaching person, and down stay. These skills can assist our shelter dogs with adoption and could prevent the dog from being returned. Shelter dogs are not the only ones who learn new skills by attending this class; volunteers learn how to teach these cues to

different shelter dogs; they work closely with a trained professional; and they learn to adapt to new challenges, making our volunteers more valuable.

- b. Hollywood Hounds- This class focuses on teaching shelter dogs' tricks, while building on basic obedience. When a shelter dog can perform an adorable trick, it not only challenges them mentally while they are learning it, but it makes our customers more willing to adopt. Shelter dogs are not the only ones who learn new skills by attending this class, volunteers learn the skills to potentially teach these cute tricks their own dogs at home, giving our shelter dogs new challenges and our own furry friends new challenges, too.
- c. All Star Agility- This class focuses on getting our shelter dogs moving and experiencing new things. Walking over objects, running through tunnels, and jumping over jumps is not only physically challenging for our dogs, but mentally challenging as well. This is a great benefit for our dogs and our volunteers. Let's get moving!
- d. Shelter Scents- This class allows our shelter dogs to use their best sense, their sense of smell. Dogs have an amazing nose and the sport of Fun Nose Work allows our shelter dogs to use their sense of smell to hunt for treats. This is a great form of enrichment for our shelter dogs, but dogs are not the only ones who benefit from this class. Volunteers work closely with members of the training department, where they learn more about canine anatomy and how a dog's sense of smell works.

3. Take photographs of individual classes. These photographs can then be used for class advertisement. Photographs are simple yet appealing ways to catch volunteer's attention while assisting our visual learners with understanding the class itself.
4. Hold classes at times where there appears to be the largest number of volunteers at the shelter. This gets the volunteers who might have missed enrolling in the class an opportunity to attend.
5. List the instructor of the class at the time of advertisement. Based on data collected volunteers enjoy working with a trained professional; listing the trainer will allow volunteers to put a name to a face once they attend the class.
6. Record short clips of the training classes to assist not only with advertising the classes, but the shelter dogs attending the classes as well. These video clips can be posted on social media, showing the shelter dogs in action and advertising why people should come and adopt.
7. For long term shelter dogs that are in need of extra attention, volunteers can be assigned to a dog with the goal of attending all four shelter dog training classes. After the duo has completed all four classes both the dog and the volunteer can receive a certificate. Certificates are low cost ways to positively reinforce our volunteers, and acknowledge the work that they do. The certificate for the shelter dog can be hung on their kennel, to advertise the skills they have learned during their stay at the shelter, assisting in attracting adopter's attention.
8. Create a log in section on the website for volunteers. Ideally if volunteers can log into the website the organization can create information just for them to see. Here a calendar of events can be placed, volunteers can get more details about classes and events, they can

find contact information for specific staff members, they can have a forum where volunteers are allowed to share information and get to know one another better, and they can track their volunteer hours.

By incorporating a few of these recommendations the SPCALA can potentially see an increase in class attendees, leading to more shelter dogs being worked with, hopefully leading to more benefits for the volunteers and the shelter dogs.

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