

**Exploring Contemporary Thoughts on the Use of Environmental Enrichment
Programs in 'No-Kill' Animal Shelters**

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Abstract

This research project seeks to explore the current thoughts surrounding the use of environmental enrichment programs within no-kill shelters in Northern Illinois. This project centers on discussions with workers pertaining to the practicalities of implementing environmental enrichment programs. Methodologies used throughout this project included informational conversations as well as participant observation. Discussion of labeling such as ‘no-kill’, ‘kill’, ‘open admission’, and ‘limited admission’ within the animal sheltering field is presented to highlight the thoughts surrounding the uses of environmental enrichment programs.

Summary

Shelter dogs experience a considerable amount of stress throughout their stay at the shelter. Much research has been done to identify the various factors impacting shelter dog stress levels. Minimizing and eliminating these factors has become a priority in the physical design of the shelter. However, remodeling or building shelters to make them less stressful to the animals in their care is often beyond the financial resources of most shelters.

Environmental enrichment programs designed around food, treats, toys, sensory novelty, training, and social interaction sometimes are implemented to reduce stress in shelter dogs. These programs are used for a variety of purposes including reducing aggressive behavior and increasing desirable behaviors in shelter dogs. This research project sought to explore how workers in several ‘no-kill’ shelters in the Northern Illinois area thought about and spoke of environmental enrichment programs. Furthermore, this research sought to find if these workers believed environmental enrichment programs were practical and effective or not.

In order to explore this topic, informational conversations were held with workers in twenty-eight ‘no-kill’ shelters. Participant observation was also used to help get a sense of what occurs in the shelters daily. Workers expressed their thoughts surrounding the needs of dogs and environmental enrichment programs in general. Workers also discussed obstacles faced in adoption and whether these could or could not be impacted by environmental enrichment programs. Finally terms commonly used in the animal-sheltering field such as ‘adoptable’ and ‘no-kill’ were discussed and deciphered.

Introduction

The life of many dogs in the United States is one filled with uncertainty and insecurity. There are an estimated fifty million companion dogs living in the United States (Marston & Bennett, 2003, 227). Of these fifty million dogs, fifteen million of them will be turned out as strays or relinquished to animal shelters by their owners every year (Tuber et al., 1999, 379). This means that about thirty percent of the dog population will go through the animal sheltering system every year. The dogs that enter the

sheltering system then face varying treatment and care at their respective shelters. With the number of shelters in the thousands, there is great diversity of thought in the field as each individual shelter has its own governing philosophies, and the work they perform differs greatly. The largest division of philosophy and resulting policies within the animal sheltering field is often said to be that between open admission shelters and limited admission shelters.

The definition of ‘no-kill’ employed by a shelter creates very unique circumstances for the dogs in their care. For this reason it is important to distinguish the types of ‘no-kill’ shelters encountered throughout this research. For the purpose of this research three different kinds of ‘no-kill’ shelters were identified: 1. a strict ‘no-kill’ shelter, which takes in all dogs independent of medical or behavioral condition; 2. a non-strict ‘no-kill’ that allows for euthanasia under special circumstances related to behavioral or medical issues; and 3. a strict adoptable-only ‘no-kill’ in which only highly adoptable dogs are admitted into the program and no euthanasia is necessary. A strict ‘no-kill’ shelter is structured around the philosophy that all dogs deserve to live regardless of behavioral temperament or medical condition (Informational Conversation June 3, 2008). The policies at this type of shelter reflect this strict philosophy of not euthanizing the dogs at their shelter (Informational Conversation June 3, 2008). No temperament testing is generally in place, as animals are admitted regardless of their behavior or their breed (Informational Conversation June 3, 2008). Medically needy dogs entering the shelter receive the care they demand. Behaviorally aggressive dogs are rehabilitated and adopted. This is what a no-kill shelter that adheres to the literal definition of ‘no-kill’ sounds like, but it may not look like this in reality (Informational Conversation June 3, 2008). These are the words used to describe the shelter’s philosophy or ideology.

A non-strict ‘no-kill’ shelter operates under the most widely accepted definition of a no-kill shelter, one where “all adoptable and treatable animals are kept alive and where only unadoptable or non-rehabilitated animals are euthanized” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_kill_movement). In these types of no-kill shelters temperament testing is utilized to assess an individual dog’s behavioral skills in order to help determine if the individual is likely to be adopted (Informational Conversation May

9, 2008). All well-mannered canines are accepted into the adoption program even if they are medically in need (Informational Conversation May 15, 2008). These no-kill shelters are generally unconcerned about long-term kenneling, as the animals they take in are generally highly adoptable (Informational Conversation May 23, 2008). They avoid euthanizing any animal by simply not admitting any aggressive ones (Informational Conversation June 10, 2008).

Within certain groups of shelter workers, open admission also may be referred to as “euthanasia” or “kill” shelters; limited admissions shelters also may be referred to as “limited kill” or “no-kill” shelters.

The amount of time that a dog can spend in a kennel environment can differ dramatically, depending on whether she is admitted into a limited admission, or no-kill shelter versus an open-admission, or euthanasia shelter, and differs even among those of both classifications. Depending upon the individual no-kill shelter, dogs entering these shelters may spend anything from days to the rest of their life within the shelter. Dogs entering open admissions shelters also face differing lengths of stay depending upon the characteristics of the dog, the dog’s condition, individual shelter policy, and, the overall volume of animals coming into the shelter.

The fact that the average shelter environment causes high levels of stress in dogs-- regardless of the guiding philosophy and/or practices of the organization running the facility-- is well documented. Large numbers of dogs under one roof that are in visual, auditory, and olfactory communication with one another experience stress (Coppinger & Zoppinger 292). Long-term confinement of dogs in a stressful environment can also cause the development of abnormal behaviors. A dog that does not arrive at the shelter with a behavioral problem may well acquire one at the shelter (Tuber et al. 379). Due to the extended length of time that a dog can potentially spend in a no-kill shelter there may be a greater need to reduce stress and increase positive stimuli in these particular shelter settings than in open admissions shelters (Simonet et al., 2005, 3).

Various environmental enrichment programs have been put into use to help maintain desirable behavior in shelter dogs (Informational Conversation May 13, 2008). Most of these programs are centered on the daily provision of social interaction with humans and other dogs. Programs may also focus on providing special food, sensory,

novel objects, or training (<http://www.colchester-zoo.co.uk/index.cfm?fa=about.enrichment>). Environmental enrichment programs also have been found to decrease stress and cure boredom in animals (Bekoff, 2007, 145). The use of these programs has at times been a preventative measure to ensure dogs do not develop abnormal behaviors or become aggressive throughout their shelter stay. These programs have also been used as a corrective measure to increase the individual dog's adoptability.

The theory behind environmental enrichment programs is that one can increase the adoptability or quality of life of shelter animals by meeting more of their natural needs in an unnatural environment. The implementation of environmental enrichment programs may lack the richness of theory as workers or institutional policies view the shelter dogs as a homogenous group rather than individuals with differing needs and behaviors. The question concerning environmental enrichment programs in no-kill shelters is more complex than simply asking if they are in use or not. The research previously done shows that environmental enrichment programs appear to be a good idea in theory. This research will both contribute and diverge from the existing body of work by illustrating the realities of environmental enrichment programs through the eyes of front-line workers. These front-line workers have great influence of how enrichment programs are actually implemented daily. Their regular, direct contact with the animals makes their opinions about the practicality and effectiveness of such programs a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge concerning this topic. From the front-line animal shelter worker perspective this research seeks to answer questions concerning the effectiveness and practicality of enrichment programs. This research will further seek to illustrate the reasoning of individual shelter workers pertaining to the implementation or non-implementation of environmental enrichment programs.

This research provides a realistic portrayal of the 'no-kill' animal-sheltering field within Northern Illinois, prompting many challenging questions. How significant are the words and labels used by animal shelters? Does the animal sheltering community acknowledge the environmental stress placed on the animals on a regular basis? How do animal shelter workers think about the animals in their care? How are the needs of animals defined in animal shelters? Are environmental enrichment programs

implemented daily when in use? Are programs centered on general concepts of dog behavior or individual dogs? How do individual philosophies of shelters influence their resources and vice versa? Do obligations towards shelter animals increase when shelters keep them in a stressful environment for long periods of time? Is there a standard of care that all shelters can agree upon? These are just some of the challenging questions that need to be thought about seriously within and outside of the animal sheltering field.

Bernard E. Rollin wrote in *Science and Ethics* that, “We perceive not only with our senses but with our beliefs, prejudices, theoretical commitments, expectations, values, perceptions, and acculturations” (Rollin, 2006, 50). It is in this context that it is important to share the influence on my thinking of my personal experiences working within both open-admission and limited-admission shelters. These experiences have changed and developed me into the person I am today. My work history has influenced me to advocate for the use of environmental enrichment programs in the animal sheltering field. These programs were implemented differently within the open-admission and limited-admission shelters that I experienced as an employee. I came to appreciate these programs but for differing reasons within the different environments. In the open admissions shelter I worked extensively with dogs that would only later be put down due to a lack of time and space. I felt as though I had put all my resources into these animals for little pay off and despite high adoption rates I always remembered my failures. After this experience, I sought refuge working in a no-kill shelter. Here I experienced a whole different world, a world where well-behaved dogs were sure to develop behavioral problems during their extensive stay at the shelter. Aggressive dogs were a relatively large percentage of the population, and it was these dogs who received all of my attention. It is on behalf of these long-term canine residents that I seek to explore this topic today. I wanted to find out if my experiences were representative of others within the no-kill sheltering community. As a former shelter worker I understand very clearly the lack of various resources within the sheltering field. I realized that time working at the shelter seemed to go by way too fast. The practicality of environmental enrichment programs therefore needs to be evaluated in the context of realities and resource availability at the shelters. My concern centers around the quality of life of dogs kenneled long-term in a shelter environment with little to no hope of being adopted. My personal

experiences suggest that I am not alone in these concerns, and this paper hopes to describe the thoughts of workers in no-kill shelters as they pertain to the realistic use or non-use of environmental enrichment programs.

Significance of Research

“The dog and the person have created a partnership in which their minds and bodies work together. They watch, listen to, and generally ‘read’ each other. They enjoy each other’s company. The training is not about getting the dog to obey- or, at least, it is only partly so. It has more to do with creating a relationship.” – Leslie Irvine

Throughout history dogs have had a natural need to be around humans. Humans and dogs have a history of relationships lasting over 100,000 years (Simonet 1). While the cause of such a relationship is undetermined, it is clear that dogs may have a genetic bias encouraging the pursuit of social contact with humans (Gasci et al. 428). The dog pack and the human family have been intermixed for much of history. This being the case, dogs that are socialized within the human family structure seem to form more significant social bonds with their owners than to their conspecifics (Gasci et al. 424).

In the United States over fifty million dogs provide companionship to their human friends (Marston & Bennett 227). Six out of ten American families have animal companions, every year spending tens of billions of dollars on their animals’ care and comfort (Winograd 17). While dogs may be genetically predisposed to seek and enjoy human social contact, the relationship is not always reciprocal. Every year in the United States fifteen million dogs are turned out as strays or relinquished to animal shelters (Tuber et al. 379). Many dog owners seem to care deeply about the dogs in their homes, however, it is less clear if these dog owners care as much about the companion animals outside their own homes.

Unwanted companion animals face considerable amounts of stress as they enter the animal sheltering system and throughout their stay at animal shelters around the nation. The kennel environments present in the majority of animal shelters today are known to cause stress. It has been documented that large numbers of dogs under one roof that are in visual, auditory, and olfactory communication with one another experience stress (Coppinger & Zuccotti 292). Research shows that:

Dogs are subject to a variety of psychological stressors, including novelty, isolation from any former attachment figures, exposure to unpredictable and often intense noise, disruption of familiar routines (such as walks for elimination), and a general loss of control over environmental contingencies. These are precisely the types of events known to activate stress-related physiological systems (Tuber et al. 379).

It is further evident that “The welfare of domestic dogs, like other animals, can be seriously compromised by inappropriate confinement” (Wells 308). Dogs, being the social animals that they are, suffer when restrained from acting upon their natural social inclinations. It has been proposed that social and spatial restrictions cause the most stress in kennel environments (Coppola et al. 541). Naturally social dogs that are isolated often develop abnormal behavior:

Social and spatial restriction changed the behavioral responsiveness of the dogs in that they showed stronger indications of excitement (higher levels of tail wagging, nosing, circling, urinating, and defecating, more changes from one state of locomotion or posture to another, and higher posture), aggression (higher levels of raised hairs, growling, pay laying, and standing over), and uncertainty (increased paw lifting, ambivalent postures, intentions to change from one state of locomotion to another, and trembling) (Beerda et al. 238).

Noise levels have been also been found to contribute to stress levels in shelter dogs (Coppola et al. 7).

Despite vast knowledge pertaining to stress in shelter dogs, animal shelters are rarely successful in combating these stress factors. Limited resources within the animal-sheltering community create limitations in the forms of space, staff, and funding (Marston & Bennett 234). A study conducted in 2006 states:

Even in new kennel construction, noise abatement designs are often ignored because of cost restrictions, making noise a hazard to the animals, employees, and potential adopters. Because of its unpredictable and uncontrollable nature, the shelter is a stressful environment for a dog (Coppola et al. 7).

The initial building of a new shelter can be designed to reduce the amount of stress placed upon the animals. However, the very real financial constraints that exist within the animal-sheltering field usually prevent this from happening. Very few organizations are fortunate enough to design shelters based on natural animal behavior. Some organizations may be so constrained at times that conditions within their animal shelters can be reminiscent of early primate deprivation studies (Tuber et al. 379). These shelters are most likely “running on a skeleton crew, with barely enough staff to clean the kennels

and manage the feeding” (Riley 36). Independent of varying shelter conditions it is easy to “feel, as everyone does, that a shelter is not an ideal place for an animal” (Riley 34).

Long-term housing of dogs in a shelter environment can cause the development of abnormal behavior. The shelter environment is not conducive to maintaining the overall health and well being of the dogs. Due to the stress of the shelter environment, dogs may enter the shelter well behaved and leave with significant behavioral issues. The shelter environment may very well cause dogs to deteriorate:

The very features inherent in the shelter experience might be expected themselves to disrupt the behavior of a dog. In other words, if a dog does not arrive at the shelter with a behavior problem; it may well acquire one (Tuber et al. 379).

The behaviors of individual dogs are greatly influenced by their environments. The behavior of long-term kennel dogs relay their deprivation:

Dogs raised in cell-like conditions can develop abnormal behaviors of extreme fear, kennel shyness, and atypical aggression, or become involved in acute stereotypies. Stereotypies such as route tracing, self-injurious behaviors, or coprophagy and hypertrophied behaviors such as barking are indicators of psychologically deprived animals (Coppinger & Zuccotti 283).

Finding solutions to alleviate the negative effects of shelter environments is daunting given the limited resources available to many shelters. Environmental enrichment programs have been used in animal shelters to help minimize the negative effects on the behavior of shelter dogs. While environmental enrichment programs vary greatly in their approach many involve the use of food items, sensory items, novel objects, social interaction or some form of training. It has been found that the stress of the shelter environment can be reduced using environmental enrichment programs and “incorporating training into daily/weekly routines, allowing for social interaction and providing adequate exercise” (Coppola et al. 541). Furthermore, the International Exotic Feline Sanctuary recently recognized a relatively new form of enrichment entitled emotional enrichment (Bekoff 158). Emotional enrichment is implemented:

In the form of plain human contact, which doesn’t have to be direct or physical. This simple gesture of acknowledgement, attention, and caring is enough to reassure the animal and foster change (Bekoff 158-159).

This concept of emotional enrichment may hold much promise as it encourages social interaction as well as the formation of relationships with humans. This is especially important, as many of the animals in the animal sheltering systems have experienced abuse or neglect at the hands of a human in the past. Emotional enrichment may indeed foster change as trust is gained and sets a healthy foundation for further development of both the caretaker and the animal.

Toys are the most commonly used form of environmental enrichment in both shelters and laboratories. However, it has been shown that:

Dogs housed in rescue shelters do not appear to benefit from toys to the same extent as laboratory-housed animals. In three separate studies, sheltered dogs were found to largely overlook the introduction of a variety of toys to their kennels (Wells 312).

Just as emotional enrichment is a newly discovered form of enrichment, researchers are beginning to think that “Human contact may be even more important than contact with another dog” (Coppola et al. 541). It has been documented that social stimulation tends to exert the greatest positive influence on dog behavior (Wells 161). In the dog behavior research community:

There are suggestions that human contact may be more important for the well being of dogs than conspecific contact. Studies have consistently shown that both the behaviour and physiology of dogs can be affected by the presence of humans (Wells 310).

Environmental enrichment programs are themselves in development as they are being used for a variety of purposes and in a variety of ways within animal shelters. While it is unclear how useful these programs are, some research shows success in environmental enrichment programs focusing on social interaction (Wells 161).

Just as humans are truly individuals so are our companion animals. No two dogs are exactly alike:

Even in a single breed and sex group, with similar rearing history, there are individual coping strategies and differences in the behavioural expression of stress similar to those shown in other species (Rooney et al. 854).

Centuries of selective breeding of the domestic dog have created great anatomical, morphological, and behavioral diversity (Ronney et al. 847). Dog behavior is influenced by a variety of factors not limited to: breed, sex, neuter status, age, past experiences,

individual temperament and personality (Rooney et al. 848). When one speaks of dog behavior one can only truly speak of individual dog behaviors. Environmental enrichment programs that are to be implemented successfully within a shelter setting recognize the individual personalities of the dogs influencing their differing needs and desires.

Methodology

“Our ways of testing for intelligence in animals reveal a cognitive limitation on the part of humans” – Erica Fudge

It is clear that as human beings we are not perfect. We find ourselves limited in our physical, emotional, and our mental abilities. Our past experiences, our present situation and our thoughts regarding the future greatly influence the ways in which we interact with the world on a regular basis. The way in which researchers conduct their work is also impacted by their own worldview or perspective. Critical theorists argue that:

The whole process of research- from the selection of research topics to the creation of research instruments and the interpretation of the data gathered- is not a value-free activity (Willis, 2007, 86).

Research is conducted due to some type of motivation held by the person performing the work. Values do not disappear in the research setting, and this research project was conducted in the context of my personal experiences and values.

In my determination to gain more knowledge concerning the quality of life of shelter dogs housed long-term in no-kill shelters, I used various methods, including- informational conversations and participant observation. Participant observation allows for the researcher to truly become part of the culture by doing what those within the culture do. Researchers have the ability to literally place themselves in the shoes of those in the culture being studied. This allows researchers to not only observe what others are doing but also feel what they may feel.

Informal, informational conversations allow for others to speak in a relaxed and natural setting. More is said to a trusted member of their culture than would be to an outside researcher who comes into a community to interview subjects.

For this research I visited twenty-eight animal shelters in the Northern Illinois area. I conducted informational conversations while performing participant observation at these shelters. The only criteria I had for the selection of shelters was that they operated under the label of no-kill. I was most concerned with the use or non-use of environmental enrichment programs in these shelters as dogs have the potential to stay for prolonged periods of time within ‘no-kill’ shelters.

I hypothesized that environmental enrichment programs were not being implemented on a daily basis at the no-kill shelters I visited. I sought to find out how these shelters operated on a daily basis specifically concerning the amount of time spent interacting with the dogs. Furthermore, I was exploring if many of the no-kill shelters regularly housed unadoptable dogs permanently. I sought to answer the following key questions:

What is the daily schedule for the dogs at the shelter?

What is the average length of stay for the shelter dogs?

Did the shelter have long-term dogs? Were unadoptable dogs held permanently?

Does shelter policy require the use of environmental enrichment programs?

Are environmental enrichment programs focused on general dog behavior or on individual dog behavior?

What resources are used to implement environmental enrichment programs?

What are the outcomes or results from the use or non-use of environmental enrichment programs?

What are some of the obstacles, if any, faced in adopting out dogs from the shelter?

Informational conversations allowed many workers to discuss these topics and more with me.

Findings

Thirty-one informational conversations were held in twenty-eight different shelters. Of these shelters, five were strict ‘no-kill’ shelters taking in all animals regardless of temperament, breed, or overall physical condition. These strict ‘no-kill’

shelters would house dogs permanently if they were not adopted. The average length of stay for this type of shelter was one year, with a range from six days to life. Nineteen of the 'no-kill' shelters operated under the non-strict definition of no-kill, taking in medically needy and behaviorally challenging dogs. These shelters used temperament testing to screen adoptability or behavioral issues. Rehabilitation was used for those in need and under certain circumstances, such as for medical reasons or aggression, euthanasia would occur. The average length of stay for this type of shelter was six months, with a range from one week to three years. Four of the 'no-kill' shelters used temperament testing as an admission test, rejecting admission to those considered unadoptable. These shelters took in only the most highly adoptable dogs, steering away from those with any behavioral or medical issues. The average length of stay for this type of shelter was two weeks, with a range from three days to a month.

Of the twenty-eight shelters, only three shelters had environmental enrichment programs in place. Of these three shelters, one was a strict no-kill shelter. In this shelter, the program in place revolved around individual dogs and the staff had the resources to provide dogs with walks, personal attention, playtime-- both individual and group-- as well as toys stuffed with treats on a daily basis. The two other shelters with environmental enrichment programs were no-kill shelters operating under the non-strict definition in which euthanasia may occur due to medical or behavioral issues that cannot be resolved. One of these two shelters had a program based on general dog behavior in which all dogs received the same enrichment. This program was implemented by both staff and volunteers to make sure that all dogs received regular walks, playgroups with other dogs, treats, toys, and positive reinforcement training. The last shelter with an environmental enrichment program in place focused on individual dogs and was dependent upon volunteers to successfully implement the program. All dogs were walked individually with breaks for personal attention during the long walks, socialization with humans and other dogs as well as training that was provided by trained volunteers daily. The main resources used in these three environmental enrichment programs were staff, volunteers, and donated toys and treats.

The reported outcomes of the environmental enrichment programs in place were varied. The programs in place at the non-strict 'no-kill' shelters where euthanasia took

place in a small minority of cases, reportedly helped decreased the length of stay for the dogs. Workers in both of these shelters reported that the length of stay for their dogs did not regularly exceed one month. The strict 'no-kill' shelter reported that their more adoptable dogs did not stay more than two to three months due to their environmental enrichment programs. Meanwhile, the effect on their less adoptable dogs was not as clearly known. Workers at the shelter stated that the program enabled them to develop relationships with long-term dogs but adoption was still complicated for these dogs.

Twenty-five 'no-kill' shelters had no environmental enrichment program in place. It should be noted, however, that in nine of these shelters dogs were walked daily. Due to the amount of cleaning needed daily, time was limited and these walks were not guaranteed by staff or volunteers. Furthermore, of the twenty-five shelters where environmental enrichment programs were not in use, workers at seventeen of the shelters reported ongoing discussions within the organizations regarding the implementation of environmental enrichment programs. Of these seventeen shelters, eleven had an experimental program in place that was not consistent or occurring on a regular basis, reportedly due to resource constraints. Workers at eight out of the twenty-five shelters reported that no discussions were taking place around implementing such programs. They reported being too constrained by current situations to even think about environmental enrichment. Workers stated that they were understaffed and barely meeting the minimum requirements of the dogs in their care.

The practicality of environmental enrichment programs was discussed in all thirty-one informational conversations. Seventeen out of the thirty-one (55%) workers believed that these programs were practical and could be implemented daily within their shelter, even if they weren't currently in place. These workers stated that more staff and trained volunteers would be the largest obstacle facing the implementation of such a program. Twelve out of the thirty-one (38%) felt as though the programs were not practical. These workers reported that too many obstacles existed including a lack of treats, toys, staff, volunteers, and time. Such a program could not be managed on a regular basis within their shelter due to a lack of organization and time.

Size of the shelter appeared to influence many of the workers' thoughts. Specifically, the worker to dog ratio greatly impacted how workers viewed environmental

enrichment programs. Nineteen of the twenty-eight shelters visited were small operations holding less than thirty dogs. Sixteen out of twenty-one workers (76%) at these facilities remained positive that environmental enrichment programs could easily be implemented into their shelters. Nine shelters operated on a larger scale with a minimum of sixty dogs. Two of these nine shelters had a staff to dog ratio that was within reason. (The staff to dog ratio being within reason is defined in this paper as having time left in an average workday after meeting the minimal needs of the dogs; mainly feeding, watering, and cleaning.) Seven of these nine shelters had worker to dog ratios that did not allow for significant interaction between staff and the dogs in their care. Seven out of ten workers (70%) working at these larger facilities stated that many obstacles existed preventing environmental enrichment programs from being implemented on a daily basis.

Shelter workers reported many obstacles pertaining to the adoption of their dogs. Twenty-four of thirty-one workers (77%) reported a lack of consistent foot traffic through their shelters. These workers stated that more needed to be done to attract the public into the shelter therefore increasing the number of potential adopters walking through their doors. Twenty-one out of the thirty-one workers (68%) noted that breed discrimination was an issue since many of their dogs were mixes with predominantly pit bull characteristics. Workers reported a consistent need to explain individual dog behavior in order to avoid stereotypes and generalizations based on breed. Seventeen of the thirty-one (54%) stated that the public's perceptions of the shelter and their dogs was a large obstacle in attracting potential adopters. Workers reported that adopters commonly believed that shelters only held dogs with medical or behavioral problems. Workers further reported that the public commonly believed that shelter dogs were nearly all dirty, ill-behaved mutts. Eleven of thirty-one workers (35%) reported frustration in handling adopters who were unwilling to work with dogs that were not house-trained or had unique behavioral quirks such as fears of certain objects perhaps due to past abuse. Finally seven 'no-kill' shelter workers (22%) reported having to explain to potential adopters why dogs had stayed so long in their shelters. These workers reported feeling stuck having to defend dogs that have been at the shelter for a long period of time as potential adopters took this as a bad sign thinking that the dog must have earned time spent at the shelter.

Policy Framing

“An ideology is a set of fundamental beliefs, commitments, value judgments, and principles that determine the way someone embracing those beliefs looks at the world, understands the world, and is directed to behave towards others in the world.”- Bernard E. Rollin

The history of the animal welfare movement in the United States finds its way back to the year 1866 in New York City with Henry Bergh, the original founder of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). Armed with the Declaration of the Rights of Animals signed by over one hundred people, Bergh secured a charter from the State of New York and founded the country’s first humane society (Winograd 8). Advocacy and the prevention of cruelty were at the heart of the work being done by Henry Bergh. Some twenty years later with the formation of the American Humane Association (AHA) a uniform approach to sheltering would be formed. The AHA was the first national companion animal organization and with its formation “three approaches- education, adoption and killing- were endorsed on a national scale in 1879...and have become the mainstay of sheltering ever since” (Winograd 14). Animal control took the place of advocacy and cruelty investigations sometime around 1910 (Winograd 13). It may well have been that “The guaranteed source of income provided by contracts helped sway many SPCAs and humane societies to abandon their traditional platforms of advocacy and cruelty prosecutions in favor of administering dog control for cities and counties” (Winograd 13). Within this time era, the concept of “city-run” animal control programs dominated the animal sheltering field and euthanasia of various sorts became the norm for all unwanted animals found within city limits.

The history of the no-kill movement in particular cannot be easily attributed to one person or organization, rather we can decipher that the movement has gained considerable power and support throughout the 1900s. It is clear that:

The history of the no-kill goes back more than half a century when independent caregivers began rescuing and sheltering homeless animals with the intention of keeping them alive. This was in reaction to the standard operating procedure of most humane societies and tax-supported animal

control services that killed stray and abandoned animals
(http://www.maddiesfund.org/nokill/nokill_articles_foro.html).

During the early 1990s:

Millions of animals continue to be killed annually because of uncontrolled breeding, while numbers increase proportionately of caregivers who believe that destroying these animals is not the solution to dog and cat overpopulation
(http://www.maddiesfund.org/nokill/nokill_articles_foro.html).

In 1995, a retreat entitled “No-Kills in the ‘90s” was held and it was said that at this retreat the no-kill movement had begun (<http://www.maddiesfund.org>). With good intentions the no-kill movement officially was gaining support from the general public.

The difference between open admission euthanasia shelters and limited admissions no-kill shelters is often heralded as the largest gap in philosophy within the animal sheltering field due to the outspoken debate between the camps. The debate within the animal sheltering field concerning concepts of ‘no-kill’ and ‘kill’ shelters has resulted in heated interactions. Both sides have at one time or another portrayed the other side as cruel:

Accustomed to criticism from the public, the sheltering community now faces an internal divide, in which one camp perceives the other as cruel. Instead of preventing cruelty, as their mission suggests, open-admissionists can be seen (and portrayed to the public and media) as causing it (Arluke, 2007, 32).

Open-admissionists have argued:

No-killers are cruel because they ‘warehouse’ animals past the point where they should be ‘humanely euthanized,’ keeping them in shelters for long periods, sometimes with inadequate care, socialization and housing (Arluke 32).

The general beliefs of those working in ‘euthanasia’ shelters and those in ‘no-kill’ shelters may very well be different. Terms like ‘adoptable’ can be considered loaded language in ‘no-kill’ organizations where workers believe that “Adoptability is only judged by the adopter” (Arluke 36). Unlike some workers at ‘euthanasia’ shelters:

No-kill workers convince themselves that a perfect adopter exists for virtually every one of their charges, and this view justifies keeping animals for a long time as adoption staff search for the right person for each animal (Arluke 38).

The 'no-kill' debate has been largely centered on beliefs. The various physical results of the label 'no-kill' remain largely unknown to those outside of the animal sheltering field. With regards to an organization's policies and actions there is much overlap between 'euthanasia' and 'no-kill' shelters. The false dichotomy of 'kill' versus 'no-kill' has and continues to mislead the public as well as shelter workers.

The no-kill sheltering world is filled with confusing and complex ideas. There are feelings among workers that there is little to no networking within the no-kill field (Informational Conversation June 20, 2008). Shelters may not even know of other no-kill shelters that exist near them (Informational Conversation June 20, 2008). Philosophies differ among individual shelters and this leads to a further breakdown of the phrase 'no-kill'. 'No-kill' does not have one solid, concrete definition. It is further obvious that all no-kill shelters are not created equal (Informational Conversation May 3, 2008). This being the case it is often hard to implement blanket environmental enrichment programs in no-kill shelters. The differing circumstances of each individual shelter both in philosophy and in reality may determine what type of program is viable within the shelter. One environmental program may be practical and easily managed at one shelter and become a quick failure in another.

A strict adoptable-only 'no-kill' shelter only admits healthy, well-behaved animals into their adoption programs (Informational Conversation May 13, 2008). Extensive temperament testing is used to determine the adoptability of individual dogs (Informational Conversation June 1, 2008). Breed discrimination may also be used to deny breeds that have a hard time being adopted due to stereotypes surrounding them (Informational Conversation May 13, 2008). Medically needy animals as well as aggressive or behaviorally challenging ones are usually denied admission to the shelter (Informational Conversation May 13, 2008).

The majority of no-kill shelters are privately-supported shelters and the philosophy of those in charge show in the everyday actions of the shelter. Definitions of the terms 'adoptable' and 'unadoptable' are consistently debated and contested within and outside of the no-kill sheltering field (Informational Conversation May 27, 2008).

This lack of consistency around what constitutes being ‘adoptable’ is compounded by discrimination based on breed, as the reputation of some breeds cause their chances of adoption to decrease significantly (Informational Conversation May 13, 2008). The effectiveness of rehabilitation is also under debate, with many within the animal sheltering community believing that rehabilitation is inefficient and a waste of limited resources. It is clear that arguments surrounding definitions of these highly charged terms take place in nearly every animal shelter whether open admissions or limited admissions.

The ways in which workers of these varying ‘no-kill shelters view the dogs in their care also greatly influences the way they implement and view environmental enrichment programs. So how are dogs viewed within ‘no-kill’ shelters? Dogs are generally viewed as having an inalienable right to life. Saving the lives of animals becomes the number one priority within many no-kill shelters (Informational Conversation May 9, 2008). This can also be viewed in some shelters as an attempt to avoid euthanasia of companion animals (Informational Conversation May 9, 2008). Workers independent of the type of ‘no-kill’ shelter they worked at tended to view dogs in four distinct ways: 1. *simple automatons*- automatons being defined as a person or animal that acts in a monotonous, routine manner, without active intelligence (www.dictionary.reference.com); 2. *complex automatons* adhering to a strict pack hierarchy; 3. *unintelligent loving creatures with personalities*; or 4. *intelligent individuals having physical, mental, and emotional needs*. Environmental enrichment programs tended to be weighted most heavily in those who believed dogs were complex automatons and those who believed dogs to be intelligent, caring beings.

The opinion surrounding environmental enrichment programs build strongly on the foundation of how one defines a dog. The needs of dogs differ depending upon how one sees the dog. The majority of workers that view dogs as simple automatons tended to view environmental enrichment programs as a privilege rather than a necessity for the dogs in their care. These workers still advocate for use of such programs but it is not the highest priority. Saving lives and meeting the dog’s immediate needs such as food, water, and shelter are the highest priorities. Many of the workers that viewed dogs as complex automatons adhering to a strict pack hierarchy believed that environmental enrichment was a necessity as these programs allowed dogs to act more naturally within the shelter

environment. The majority of workers who saw dogs as loving and personable yet overall unintelligent saw environmental enrichment programs as unnecessary but perhaps entertaining to the dogs. A majority of workers who viewed dogs as intelligent individuals having physical, mental, and emotional needs viewed environmental enrichment programs as a necessity within the animal sheltering field.

The opinions of workers surrounding environmental enrichment programs go far beyond whether or not these programs are useful, but also critic these programs showing how they could become more useful. The workers that viewed the dogs in their care as complex automatons thought environmental enrichment programs worked best when based on general dog behavior. Programs based on general dog behavior would implement daily enrichment uniformly among all the dogs. Workers that viewed dogs as intelligent individuals with differing mental, physical, and emotional needs stated that these programs would work best on an individual level. Programs based on individual dog behavior would tailor enrichment to the individual personality and needs of the dog.

The purposes behind the use of environmental enrichment programs in shelters are often unclear and lack uniformity. In strict ‘no-kill’ shelters, these programs may be used to improve the overall quality of life for the dogs that will most likely remain at the shelter their whole lives (Informational Conversation May 8, 2008). Within these strict ‘no-kill’ shelters, newly arriving dogs participate in environmental enrichment programs to help increase their adoptability and decrease the chance of staying at the shelter for a long period of time (Informational Conversation June 3, 2008). In both non-strict ‘no-kill’ shelters and strict adoptable-only ‘no-kill’ shelters, the purpose of environmental enrichment programs is to help ensure smooth transition for the dogs into their new homes, as well as the permanency of adoptions (Informational Conversations May 13, 2008 and July 14, 2008).

The ultimate goal of individual no-kill shelters appears to be a major factor in determining how and if environmental enrichment programs are used. Strict ‘no-kill’ shelters recognize that all their dogs are not adoptable, leading to some confusion within the shelter if the ultimate goal of enrichment is perceived as making the animals suitable for adoption (Informational Conversation May 8, 2008). Depending on the dog, the goal of the shelter may ultimately be adoption or it may be to improve the quality of life for

dogs living there permanently (Informational Conversation May 8, 2008). Given the limited resources of nearly all animal shelters, these strict no-kill shelters suffer more as adoption fees remain uncollected due to the percentage of long-term dogs in the shelter (Informational Conversation June 3, 2008). The resources within these shelters are spread very thin in an attempt to save the lives of as many dogs as possible (Informational Conversation July 15, 2008). Due to the very real lack of money, time, and staff focus is often placed on meeting the immediate needs of all the dogs within their care. Short-term adoptable dogs are given a priority in order to financially support the care of the long-term dogs within the shelter (Informational Conversation May 8, 2008). Environmental enrichment programs were less likely to be considered in this type of setting. Meanwhile, in strict adoptable-only 'no-kill' shelters, dogs generally are rotated more frequently as adoption is the ultimate goal for all the animals in their care. Environmental enrichment programs reportedly are valued more in these types of shelters as there is a financial incentive as well as the achievement of permanent adoption for the animal (Informational Conversation May 13, 2008).

Policy Implications

“Ideals which nobody can translate into action are wasted.” –Mary Midgley

The traditional role of animal shelters has been to provide basic care to animals in need. In the past animal shelters provided temporary care for unwanted animals, over the years the expectations of higher standards of care have increased steadily. Now with the rise of the no-kill sheltering movement many shelters are also becoming long-term housing for discarded animals.

The thoughts and feelings of society in general regarding the treatment of companion animals has helped to change the way in which animal shelters have operated in the past. Across the nation adoption agencies, humane societies, and other shelters are no longer content to simply serve the traditional function of warehousing unwanted pets (Tuber et al. 385). Due to these sentiments the use of environmental enrichment programs within the animal sheltering field is increasing. Still the variety of thought surrounding

these programs and standards of care create a complex and diverse world of animal shelters.

Within the no-kill shelters studied, workers consistently wanted to do more for the dogs in their care regardless of how they personally viewed the nature of dogs. Due to a lack of time within their workday or a lack of resources such as toys or treats, many workers felt unable to provide sufficient environmental enrichment for the dogs. Many spoke of a pressure to maintain a presentable environment for visitors that out-prioritized their interaction with the dogs. Some workers reported that managers placed a low priority on environmental enrichment programs. Food, water, and clean shelter were the major priorities advocated in the majority of the no-kill shelters studied. Workers in many shelters stated that any type of interactions with the dogs was viewed as something that could be done in spare time or even outside of the workday as a volunteer.

The overall size of the no-kill shelter seemed to be the greatest indicator of the shelter's capability to implement environmental enrichment programs on a daily basis. Generally smaller shelters, in which the ratio of dogs to worker was within reason, succeeded in having workers interact positively with their animals on a regular basis. The worker's perceived ability to implement environmental enrichment programs daily was also greatly influenced by the size of the shelter. Workers at smaller shelters felt as though they had time to spend and get to know the dogs in their care. They felt achievement in being able to discuss the dog's behavior and personality to potential adopters. Follow-up with adoptions helped workers to continue feeling a sense of achievement, as they were able to remain a part of the dog's life long after the dog was out of their care. Larger no-kill shelter workers were less capable of interacting with the dogs on a consistent basis. Workers at these shelters felt more helpless at times due to their inability to work with dogs on an individual level. These workers tended to pick favorites within the shelter setting. They would spend time with their favorites and help them to become adopted. Their inability to explain the behavior of dogs that they did not interact with regularly further led to an overall feeling of frustration. Environmental enrichment programs tended to be seen as impractical on a daily basis. Toys and treats were handed out when they became available and usually there were not enough for all the dogs.

The idea of no-kill sounds much easier than it is. In many of the no-kill shelters observed, no-kill translates into squeezing more out of less (Informational Conversation June 8, 2008). For this reason the smaller no-kill shelters observed in this study tended to operate more efficiently. Workers seemed more confident in their abilities and that they could provide more than the bare necessities for the dogs in their care. Larger no-kill shelters observed tended to stretch resources thin. Workers at these shelters seemed more frustrated with feelings of helplessness lingering. There was a consistent demand to clean and maintain a sanitary environment due to the number of dogs present within the shelter. Workers in large shelter reported more often that managers placed great priority on the basics- food, water, and a clean environment. The majority of workers in these shelters felt much less able to handle the number of dogs in their care and reported gaining an ability to ignore the dogs in their care rather than acknowledging them as they had in the past.

The majority of workers in strict 'no-kill' shelters also reported that they did not feel comfortable with all the dogs in the shelter. Some stated that they could not handle all the dogs, as some of the dogs were aggressive. Many of the workers did not feel able to work with these dogs. Workers in strict adoptable-only 'no-kill' shelters felt comfortable handling all of the dogs in their care. Due to this comfort level, workers felt as though it would be easy to implement an environmental enrichment program at the shelter on a daily basis. In larger no-kill shelters the vast majority of workers stated that the biggest obstacle to overcome in implementing such a program was a lack of staff. Workers in large, strict 'no-kill' shelters stated they would need more staff in addition to more training to be able to handle some of the aggressive dogs. These workers also reported that the number of dogs being admitted would need to decrease so that more time could be spent with the dogs already in their care.

Clearly, behavioral research tells us that if animal shelters want to protect the overall well being of dogs placed in their care, it is important that they make environmental enrichment programs a priority. The obligation of no-kill shelters may be even greater as they continue to keep the dog in a stressful environment for prolonged periods of time. Interviews from this and other research suggest that such programs would serve to improve conditions for workers as well as the dogs. It is clear that

“enriching the lives of captive animals makes for happier caretakers; it increases the well-being of the people responsible for the care of the animals” (Bekoff 146). A healthy environment for all can persist if daily interaction exists between the workers and the animals in their care.

The benefits of environmental enrichment do not end with the specific dog or the worker. At an organizational level implementing these programs may mean less turnover among staff, which may then help to maintain consistency for the programs as well as the animals within the shelter. Workers felt most confident when they were able to interact with the dogs in their care on a daily basis. Time with dogs allowed workers to learn individual personalities and behavioral quirks. Knowing these dogs on a deeper level allowed workers to begin training and working with these dogs, increasing their adoptability.

Adoption rates at shelters that used environmental enrichment programs on a regular basis were overall much higher. Staff that understood their dogs were better able to communicate the dog’s behavior-- both good and bad-- to potential adopters, leading to more successful and permanent adoptions. Dogs in these shelters were less likely to be returned after having been placed in a home. The increased adoption rates also translated into shorter stays at the shelter for homeless dogs.

Environmental enrichment programs can also improve the relationship between the animal shelter and the community in which they operate. Whether it is the distribution of toys, treats, bedding or training sessions for the dogs all help to bring in more involvement from volunteers. With more volunteers working with the dogs inside and outside of the shelter walls, more people become aware of the organization and its programs. These people can eventually become volunteers, donors, adopters, or even staff. By training volunteers to help train shelter dogs in group sessions, shelters help their dogs, their staff and their community. The socialization of dogs with such a variety of people will allow for the dogs to be comfortable in a variety of settings in the future. Adoptions are more likely to occur when the pool of potential adopters is made larger. Shelters must work with the community in order to provide a high standard of care for all their animals.

Shelters set an example for the public. A shelter that meets the dog's emotional, mental, and physical needs on a regular basis is setting a standard of care that influences the public in the way they interact with their own companion animals. Within this same line of reasoning, a shelter that only meets the minimal needs of its animals is setting a low standard by example. Environmental enrichment programs in use show that the needs of the dogs exceed that of food, water, and shelter. Those focusing on individuals also help to demonstrate to the public that dogs have individual personalities that cannot be stereotyped by categories such as breed.

Shelters need to evaluate themselves fairly in order to do what is best for the animals in their care. Shelters in which the worker to dog ratio was within reason tended to operate very efficiently. It is clear that no-kill shelters have the ability to operate efficiently if the number of workers increases proportionately with the number of animals present. In strict 'no-kill' shelters, workers felt as though they were not capable of handling all the dogs in their care. In these cases shelters need to consider staff abilities before accepting dogs that may be behaviorally challenging. Workers also stated a need for increased training if they were expected to handle challenging dogs. In the no-kill sheltering field it is important to be proactive rather than reactive when it comes to the behavior of challenging animals.

Environmental enrichment programs can be implemented in a variety of ways. All shelters have the ability to implement some form of an environmental enrichment program on a daily basis. It may take much creativity and thought for some shelters that are truly struggling with little resources, but it can be done.

Discussion

“Once you consider an animal as having a subjective self and the capacity to share intentions and emotional states, it becomes harder to think of him or her as existing solely for your amusement, use or pleasure.” –Leslie Irvine

This research explores the realities of environmental enrichment within the 'no-kill' sheltering field, acknowledging the good, the bad, and the unclear. The findings of this research indicate that many shelter workers believe the use of environmental

enrichment programs would in fact be practical and beneficial. Limited resources may prevent these programs from becoming implemented in the majority of the shelters visited. Still, creativity in the use of limited resources may allow for many more environmental enrichment programs to be implemented. With the majority of workers feeling enthusiastic about the use of such programs, possibilities are endless.

It is less clear whether shelter workers can agree upon a standard of care for the dogs in their care. The ways in which workers interviewed viewed shelter dogs differed substantially, and this in turn affected the ways in which they believed shelter dogs should be treated. As a community, those who run animal shelters need to acknowledge that “animals have social and emotional needs, and just as in humans, disrupting or ignoring them leads to negative consequences” (Bekoff 157). Upon making this acknowledgement as a community and acting upon it positively, shelters will succeed in improving the quality of care of dogs inside and outside of shelter walls. Improving the care within their walls will greatly influence the public perceptions of how dogs should be treated, in turn improving the care of dogs outside of shelter walls.

Every day millions of people interact with their dogs, yet many human companions have yet to fully understand their canine friends. Our interactions with our companion animals will “require a commitment to learning how the dog or cat sees the world and functions within it” (Irvine 65). A commitment should be made to begin fully understanding and appreciating our companion animals for the intelligent, curious, playful, loving and physically able animals that they are. There is no better place to begin demonstrating this commitment than within the organizations established to represent animals and articulate their welfare to our communities. As Erica Fudge states in *Animal*:

All animals have a ‘way of life,’ all that we need to do is attempt to understand- albeit with the inevitable limitations of our own perceptions- what that way of life might be (Fudge 133).

Despite our own limitations as imperfect human beings, it is clear we have the ability to understand animals of many species, as we ourselves are animals. These capabilities have been within us throughout time:

Neither with dog nor human do we need words to reveal to us what expressive and interpretative capacities far older and far deeper than words make clear immediately (Midgley 59).

The common ground of animals both human and nonhuman allows us to remain in communication regardless of the languages we speak. As human beings we have a high potential that is yet to be met. Acknowledging that we ourselves are animals may help us to further understand the animals around us, both those that live with us and those that live outside of our homes.

Environmental enrichment programs may acknowledge the unique natural needs of the dogs in shelters. If they are trained and encouraged to do so, it is not difficult for shelter workers to decipher the feelings of the dogs in their care. This task only becomes difficult when time and other constraints do not allow for consistent interaction. Assigning time daily for workers to interact with shelter dogs ensures a greater understanding of individual dogs within their care. This in turns helps to promote a healthy work environment where workers feel confident resulting in less worker turnover. These programs may also help individual dogs to become more adoptable increasing successful adoptions. Furthermore, these programs may help to improve atmospheres where non-adoptable dogs are housed indefinitely increasing both the quality of life of the shelter dog as well as the shelter worker. A large majority of shelters have the ability to implement some form of environmental enrichment program on a daily basis. It may take much creativity and thought for those within shelters that are truly struggling with little resources, but it can be done.

Only through continued research can we help to improve the lives of animals. For it is only through intelligent, informed observation that we can really find out what constitutes a normal, healthy life for a variety of species (Midgley 38). This knowledge must then be taken and acted upon in ways that are fair to both humans and nonhuman animals. Any policy regarding the use of environmental enrichment programs needs to address the individual strengths and weaknesses of an organization. For this reason, no blanket policy is suggested in this paper, as a truly successful policy would give much thought to individual shelter circumstances. Continued observation and research will perhaps allow our relationships with our canine companions to grow.

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