Enrichment for Shelter Dogs
Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC
Owner and Director
Animal Alliances, LLC

What do I mean by Enrichment?

Providing an interesting, complex, challenging, stimulating, and variable environment that encourages the animals to explore, think, learn, engage, and be well – mentally and physically.
Shelters should place a priority on programs that reduce stress and promote the physical and psychological well-being of their animals.

Keeping the animals behaviorally, as well as medically, healthy is the humane thing to do.

Why is Enrichment Important in the Shelter Environment?

Shelter animals:
- live in a stressful environment
- are mentally and physically under-stimulated
- are confined to a small area (cage or run) where they have little to no control

This can lead to boredom, anxiety and the development of behavior problems including abnormal behavior.
Enrichment Programs

Provide for the psychological well-being of the animals in our care by:

- reducing stress
- providing physical and mental stimulation
- allowing the animals more control over their environment
- preventing the development and display of abnormal behavior
**Environmental Enrichment**

Modifying the environment so that it:

- is more comfortable
- provides more space (larger enclosure, etc.)
- provides more choices (different levels, etc)
- is more stimulating (views, stimulating the senses, etc.)
- is less stimulating (quieter, not able to see other animals, etc.)

**Behavioral Enrichment**

Stimulating the brain by:

- giving the animal opportunities to perform species-typical behaviors.

- giving the animal opportunities to think and learn.
Research in the neurosciences has indicated that the brains of higher animals are constructed to function optimally when receiving a specific amount of stimulation.

When too much or too little stimulation is presented to the brain, disorganization, instability, disease, and suffering may result.

McMillan, 2002

Studies consistently indicate that mental stimulation is emotionally rewarding to animals, and there is a strong motivation to seek novel stimuli.

Studies also show that many animals prefer to work for their food rather than have it freely available.

‘Inadequate mental stimulation gives rise to the unpleasant emotional state of boredom, which serves to motivate the individual to seek stimulation.’

McMillan, 2002
Enrichment
Is required by law for captive primates!

1991 Amendment to the 1985 Animal Welfare Act
Requires all facilities housing them:

“... to promote the psychological well-being of nonhuman primates.”
Primate Enrichment in the Zoo

Soda bottles

Feeder boxes

PVC feeders
PVC pipe feeder

Spinning log feeder

Milk crate feeder

Nut board

Coconut feeder

Ice Treats

Fruit roll-ups
The rest of the zoo animals also receive enrichment.
Don’t they deserve it too??

Environmental Enrichment

wouldn’t that be nice here?
A Comfortable Environment

• Soft bedding
• Platforms

A comfy adoption floor
Less stimulating environment

You may think that enrichment is all about INCREASING stimulation

And that is a big part of it

But in the shelter environment – DECREASING stimulation is just as important.

Visual barriers
Quiet Kennels

Reducing noise levels reduces stress

Noise Levels in Shelter

Can exceed 100 dB (118.9 dB)

- > 70 dB = considered loud
- 96 dB = subway train
- 110 dB = jackhammer
- 120 dB = propeller aircraft

Any sound in the 90-120 dB range is considered to be in the critical zone and can be felt as well as heard.
Click for Quiet

Time outside of the kennel in an office or real life
The Senses

We should consider all the senses when we develop enrichment strategies for shelter animals.
Auditory Stimulation

Research has found that classical music calms shelter dogs (Wells et. al. 2002)

New Age Music

Soothing Music

Heartbeat music therapy
Canine Lullabies CD

Psychoacoustically Designed Music
Through A Dog’s Ear CD

Household sounds
Wind chimes

A Dog’s #1 Sense
Olfactory Stimulation

Introducing scents into the environment that are stimulating and/or calming

Olfactory stimulation in the zoo
Dry spices sprinkled on bedding

Scent of the Day

Vanilla, almond, coconut, banana extracts
Food scented arousal spray

The “other sense of smell”

Vomeronasal Organ

Analyzes pheromones
Pheromone Therapy

Visual Stimulation
Back to the zoo

Bubbles for the shelter dogs
**Behavioral Enrichment**

- Providing opportunities for the animals to perform species typical behaviors

- Providing opportunities for the animals to think and learn

**Opportunities to perform species-typical behavior**
Chewing is an important behavior for dogs – especially when anxious or bored.

Provide safe chew toys.

Digging is a normal dog behavior.

How about a digging pit in the play yard?
Those amazing noses

tracking games
Nose Work

All dogs love to play
Toys in the kennels

Play yards for the dogs
Every dog needs exercise

Agility
Some shelters are lucky enough to have an agility field.
Dogs are social animals

Dogs are a social obligate species – they NEED social companionship to be emotionally healthy

Provide opportunities for social interaction with conspecifics
Play Groups

Pool Party!
Play Group Concerns

Safety
- make good matches
- introduce the dogs properly
- observation & supervision
- keep arousal at a reasonable level (positive interrupt signal)
- be prepared to break up fights – ‘fight kit’ where playgroups happen

Fight Kit
- Air Horn
- Blanket
- Break stick
Co-housing

Co-housing concerns

Safety
- redirected aggression when aroused
- resource guarding
- more difficult to manage
  - make good matches
  - observations
- no valuable resources in cage
- feed dogs separately
Human social contact is VERY important too.

Sitting quietly, petting, brushing, playing

What do people want their dog to do most?

Just be with them
“Do Nothing” time in the shelter is important

Calm interactions outside the cage
Massage

Doggie Massage
Providing opportunities for the animals to think and learn

Food Acquisition Challenges
Primate food gathering enrichment

Anteater Enrichment
Feeding Procedures

Feeding meals in Kongs helps to:
- prolong eating time
- provide mental stimulation
Make it more challenging

Feeder Balls
Cheap Alternatives
Box of fun

Commercially available puzzle feeders
Shelter-made puzzle feeder

Ice Blocks
We use them in the zoo too
Training in the Shelter

- Mental stimulation
- Social stimulation
- Gives the animal some control
- Increases adoptability
- Easier to manage

Clicker Training

Very effective form of training because its principles are based in science.
Clicker Training

Uses the two major forms of learning:

- **Classical conditioning** – association learning
- **Operant Conditioning** – learning through the consequence of behavior.

How it works

The “click” sound that the clicker makes is first paired with the delivery of a reward (classical conditioning)

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click – treat  click – treat  click – treat
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Once conditioned, the clicker becomes a wonderful, effective communication tool to “speak” to the animal.

The click sound “marks” the exact behavior you want to reward (operant conditioning)
Communicating with another species:
- is like trying to speak to a person in a foreign country when you don’t know the language.

Clicker training is like using a translator.

The animal understands the click (once conditioned).

Clicker Training is:

• Communication the animals understands
• Positive and hands-off
• Mentally stimulating – because it makes the animal learn to think
  “how do I get that darn clicker to click?”
• Fun for the human and the animal.
Why use a Clicker?

• Clear signal
• Carries no emotion
• Quickly marks the behavior you like
• Requires no processing in the brain
• Through classical conditioning the animal understands its significance.

Marine Mammal Training
Clicker Training in the Zoo

- Mental stimulation
- Allows the animal control over its environment
- Improves husbandry

Stationing

Responding to cues
Receive Injections

Listen to heart

Urine collection
Shifting

Moving from the outside exhibit

To the inside holding area

Restraint – Moving into a squeeze cage
An “obedient” lion

Target Training
Targeting with the tigers

In-cage target training with the shelter dogs
Training the Shelter Dogs

Start with the important skills that can help them get adopted:

- sit at the cage front
- don’t jump on people
- don’t pull on the leash

First Impressions are important

Teach them to “SIT” at the cage front
Sit at the cage front

‘4 on the floor to open the door’
Jumping as person enters

Jumping in greeting
Pulling
Stop ALL forward movement when the dog pulls (when there is tension in the leash)
“Turn to Stone”
“click” and treat when the dog is NOT pulling

Tools that can help
Head-halter
Front Clasping Harness
Knowing some basic behaviors makes the dog more adoptable.
- people want to adopt a “smart” dog

Sit – Down – Come
A Simple Trick

is VERY impressive to a potential adopter!

Wave
Spin

Staff/Volunteer Classes
Getting an Enrichment Program Started

- Explain the importance to the staff & volunteers.
- Have everyone come up with a list of enrichment strategies they want to try.
- Everyone gets their own clicker and bait bag.
- Empower the staff – put them in charge of one or a few animals – each day it is their responsibility to come up with cool enrichment for their animals.
- Have a contest – “best enrichment of the week”
- Once it becomes part of their day it won’t feel like an extra chore.

Keep Track
Not just for the animals

- Why did you get into this business?

  - to help animals
  
  - not to clean cages or deal with the public

  **ALL day**

  Spending even a few minutes each day enriching the animals adds to your work satisfaction
Do you have time?

• Everyone knows that shelter workers are overworked (and under paid)

MAKE THE TIME

A few minutes a day can make a BIG difference to the animals in your care.

Happy humans
Happy Animals

The End

kelleybollen@animalalliances.com