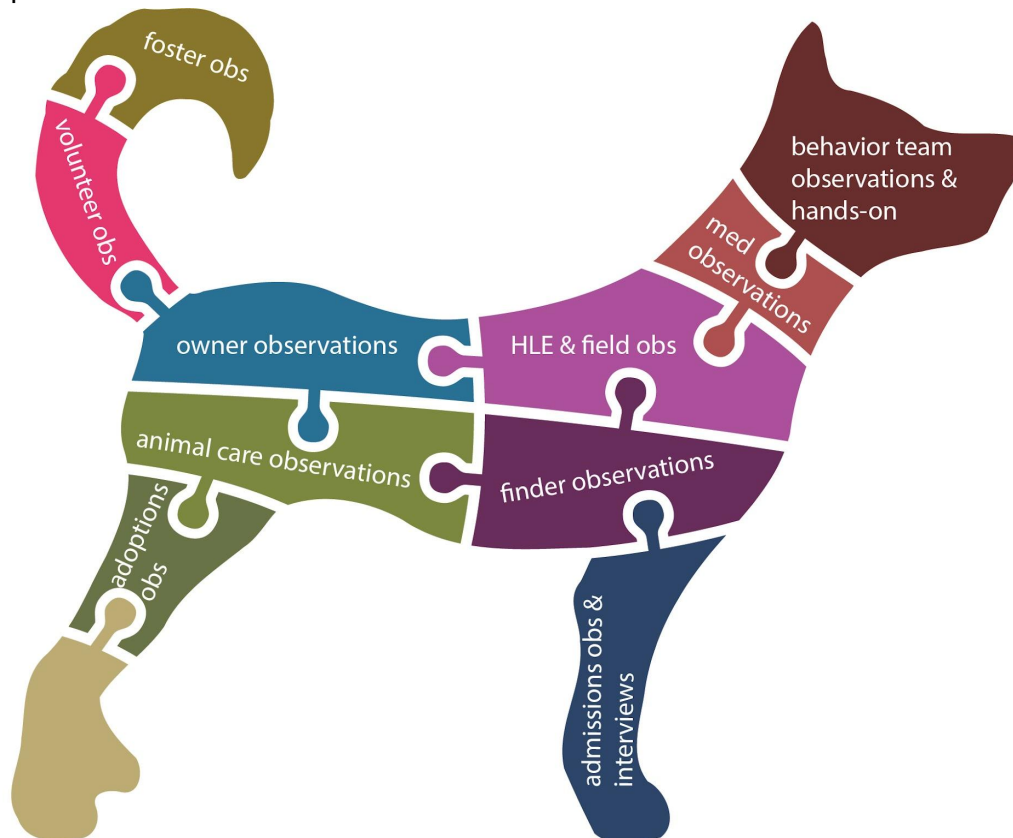# Integrating Behavior into the Everyday: Gaining Buy-in and Training Your Staff

Overview

Animal behavior and training are fundamental areas of knowledge that should be integrated into all aspects of sheltering. Accurate education in body language of dogs and cats can increase the ability for all of us to make more accurate observations, practice low-stress handling techniques, and increase fluency in the most effective and humane methods for changing animals' behavior. Through increasing and integrating accurate behavioral knowledge into each area of sheltering, from intake to adoption, we can improve the safety of the community, staff and volunteers, shorten animal stays, decrease costs, improve population health, lead to more accurate decision-making about appropriate pathways, and improve overall animal welfare.

Behavior Across Teams

Collecting objective behavioral information throughout the animal's journey is important for a holistic understanding of each animal's needs. When this is practiced in the home, foster, field, and during daily care activities, each set of observations adds an important piece to the overall behavioral puzzle.

Examples in Practice

Since implementing a behavior program with common behavior language, the Animal Welfare League of Arlington noted better cross-team partnerships across the organization. Some of the additional impacts include consistency in the ACOs' case reports, greater alignment in decision making, and increased engagement across all teams in supporting behavioral welfare. This shelter used the Fear Free Shelter Program to achieve that goal and integrated that no-cost program into their on-boarding process for staff and volunteers.

The San Diego Humane Society evaluates the behavior of the animals in its care through a continuous information gathering process from all animal touch points where each single source of information is considered as one single piece of an animal's individual behavioral profile that informs a comprehensive evaluation process. All staff and volunteers are trained by the in-house behavior staff on collecting and documenting objective behavioral information about each animal which helps to determine appropriate animal pathways (e.g., adoption, foster, rescue, and humane euthanasia) and shapes adoption recommendations. Additionally, this information informs safety considerations for staff, volunteers, and the community.

How to Begin

Even if your shelter does not have access to experienced behavior professionals who are a resource, you can adopt the practice of integrating behavior into the "every day". There are several free resources available, some are listed below. When we are better educated in animal communication and behavior, as well as simple training techniques using positive reinforcement, we can increase welfare and reduce stress and anxiety in our sheltered animals.

Observation Skills and Objective Notes

Getting everybody on board with objective observations will help to collect accurate information about the animal across its stay. Here's a helpful webinar from the ASPCA that includes some handouts to support that effort.

Fear Free Shelters

The Fear Free Shelter program provides instructional content on recognizing the emotional needs and minimizing fear, anxiety, stress, and frustration of sheltered dogs and cats.

Quick Daily Training -- Minimal Effort for Maximum Impact

Protopopova & Wynne (2015) found that regardless of what the dogs are doing, throwing in a few treats or pieces of standard kibble every time you walk past the kennel reduces stress, reduces noise levels, and promotes calm in-kennel behavior.

Use free resources to train your staff and volunteers on training shelter dogs

Share a basic training program that is in alignment to the least intrusive, minimally aversive ethical standard that is commonly referred to as LIMA. Training staff and volunteers on using positive reinforcement to train desirable behaviors in shelter dogs to increase their chance of success. KikoPup and the ASPCA have great resources on training the basics.

Additional Resources and Reference Materials

1. Abrantes, R. (1997). Dog Language - An Encyclopedia Of Canine Behavior. Wakan Tanka Publishers. 2. Aloff, B. (2005). Canine Body Language: A Photographic Guide. Dogwise Publishing.

3. Asheville Humane Society. Understanding Dogs' Body Language.

4. Gorman Dunbar, K. Open Paw.

5. Handleman, B. (2008). Canine Behavior - A Photo Illustrated Handbook. Woof and WordPress. 6. International Association of Behavior Consultants (IAABC). IAABC Statement on LIMA. IAABC.org. https://m.iaabc.org/ about/lima

7. Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training. KPA Shelter Training and Enrichment Program.

8. Kalnajs, S. (2006). The Language Of Dogs - Understanding Canine Body Language and Other Communication Signals Dvd Set. Blue Dog Training and Behavior.

9. Krulik, T. I Speak Dog -- All About Dogs.

10. Maddie's Fund. Feline Communication: How to Speak Cat and Understand Cat Behavior.

11. Protopopova, A., & Wynne, C. (2015). Improving in-kennel presentation of shelter dogs through response-dependent and response-independent treat delivery. Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 48(3), 590-601.

12. University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. Shelter Medicine. Discussing Behavior in Animal Shelters. 13. Weiss, E., Mohan-Gibbons, H., Zawistowski, S. (eds) (2015). ASPCA Animal Behavior for Shelter Veterinarians and Staff. Wiley Blackwell.