



All Dogs Deserve a Second Chance at Happiness

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Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center, 480 Cinnabar Rd, Christiansburg



Capstone Experience Briefing

Location: Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center:

Located at 480 Cinnabar Rd, Christiansburg, VA this large scale shelter works tirelessly to ensure that all animals currently housed in the facility are cared for and loved until they are able to be united with a forever family.

Timeframe of the experience: February – May 2023

This time was spent working alongside the canines that were current residents at the Montgomery Country Adoption center, in addition to assisting the staff in any tasks they required help with.

My Role : Volunteer Dog walker

- ❖ Green/Orange dog walker
- ❖ Time was spent walking/playing with housed canines to allow them to stretch their legs
- ❖ Assisted in sizing new intakes for harnesses and collars
- ❖ Assisting new volunteers with any questions they might have
- ❖ Creating informational videos to be displayed to new volunteers

Why I picked this location and style of work:

- ❖ My whole life has been spent with dogs either as pets or at work
- ❖ I wanted to donate my time to help the dogs housed at the shelter
- ❖ I've always enjoyed teaching about topics I am familiar with
- ❖ Canine training is one of my main career goals

My Goals with the capstone

1. Obtain a greater understanding of the inner workings of an animal shelter
2. Attempt to train canines with positive reinforcement to help negate negative behaviors
3. Create informational videos that can be displayed to future volunteers on basic training tips and canine handling
4. Push my comfort level in regards to working with behaviorally challenged canines
5. Experience other career paths in my field of interest
6. Enrich myself by working with a staff of likeminded individuals in the pursuit of increasing the quality of life of the canines housed in the facility

The experience



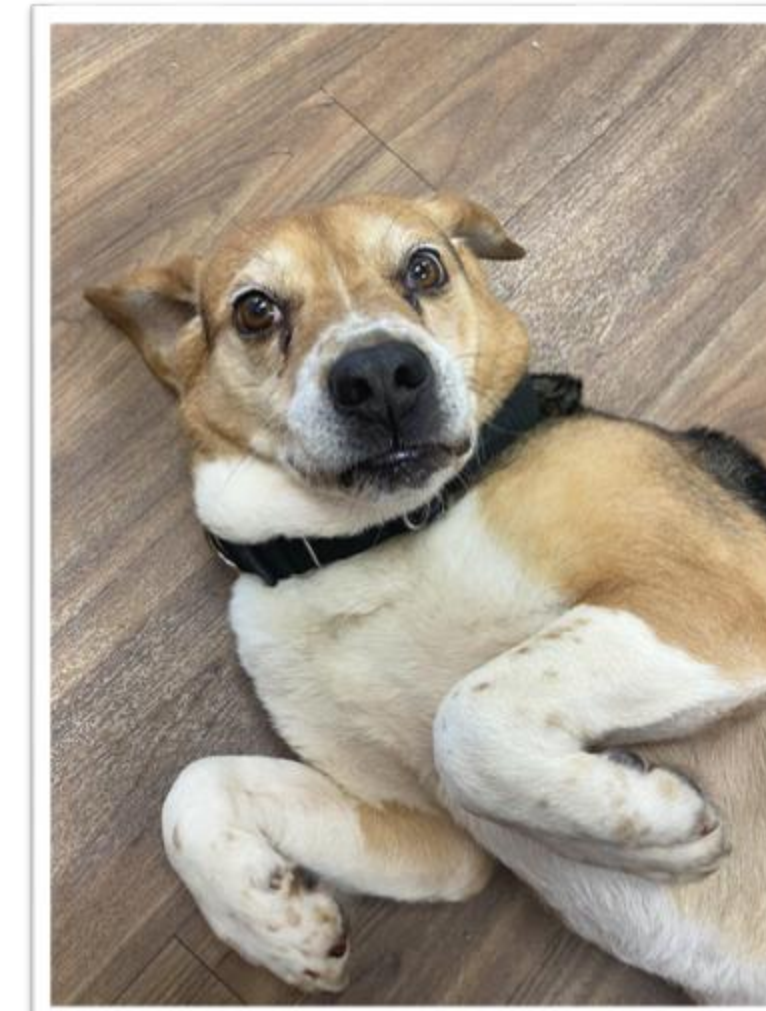
My best girl Sophia who is cage reactive but is all smiles outside and on the leash

❖ The beginning of my volunteering was limited to working with "Green Dogs" these are the dogs that could be walked by anyone off the street. Shortly after starting I was moved to working with "Orange Dogs" these are the dogs that displayed at least one problematic behavior which limited who could walk them.

❖ Working with orange dogs was the vocal point of my project, I wanted to see if basic training would help move them down in their grading, thus allowing them more access to walking and potential adoptions.

❖ I discovered quickly that many of the dogs in the shelter already knew most basic commands such as sit, lay down, come, and gentle. So training was limited to reinforcing already known commands.

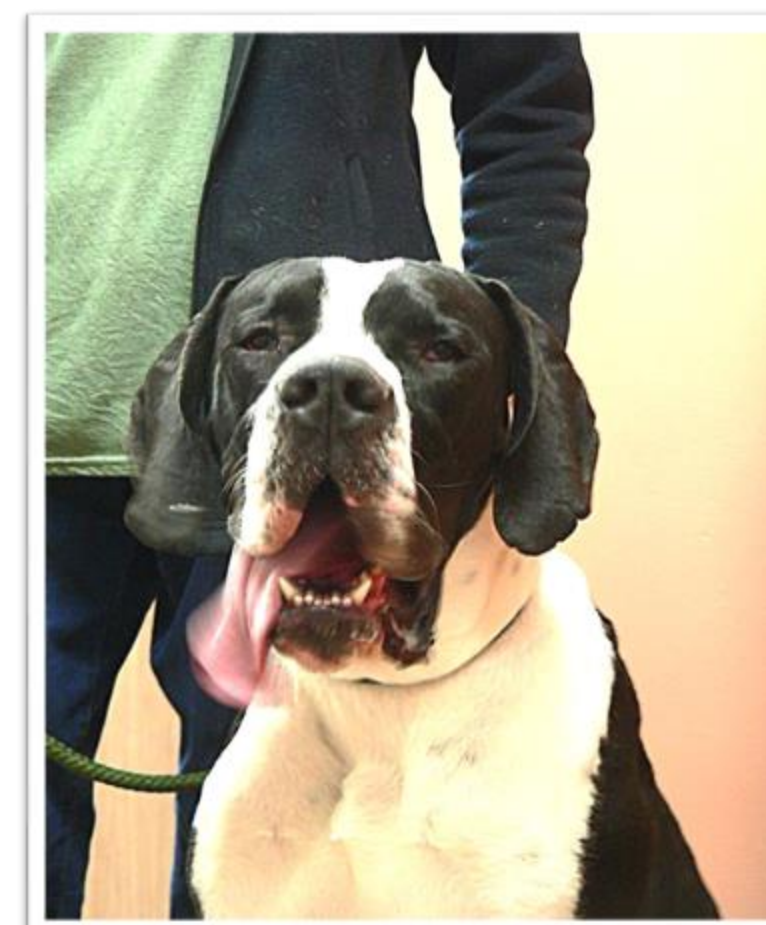
❖ It also became apparent that teaching more complex commands such as heal, stay and off was not beneficial or realistic. Such commands require regular reinforcement which is unlikely to occur within a shelter environment.



Our resident old man Rosco who despite spending his whole life outside has amazing manners.

Shift in focus

❖ As stated above my original plan was to produce videos on basic training guides. After many hours spent in the shelter I realized the videos should focus on showing helpful tips on how to handle some of the more headstrong dogs rather than actually training the dogs themselves.



The Great Dane Moose who I personally helped find a very special new home

These video topics included:

- ❖ How to properly use a slip lead to get an excited dog out of the kennel and into the yard for harnessing
- ❖ How to harness the dogs with the least amount of resistance
- ❖ Ways to stop the dogs from using their leash as a tug toy.
- ❖ Ways to reduce the amount of pulling on the leash
- ❖ Getting the dogs attention back on you when something exciting happens
- ❖ How to best walk the dogs through the gauntlet



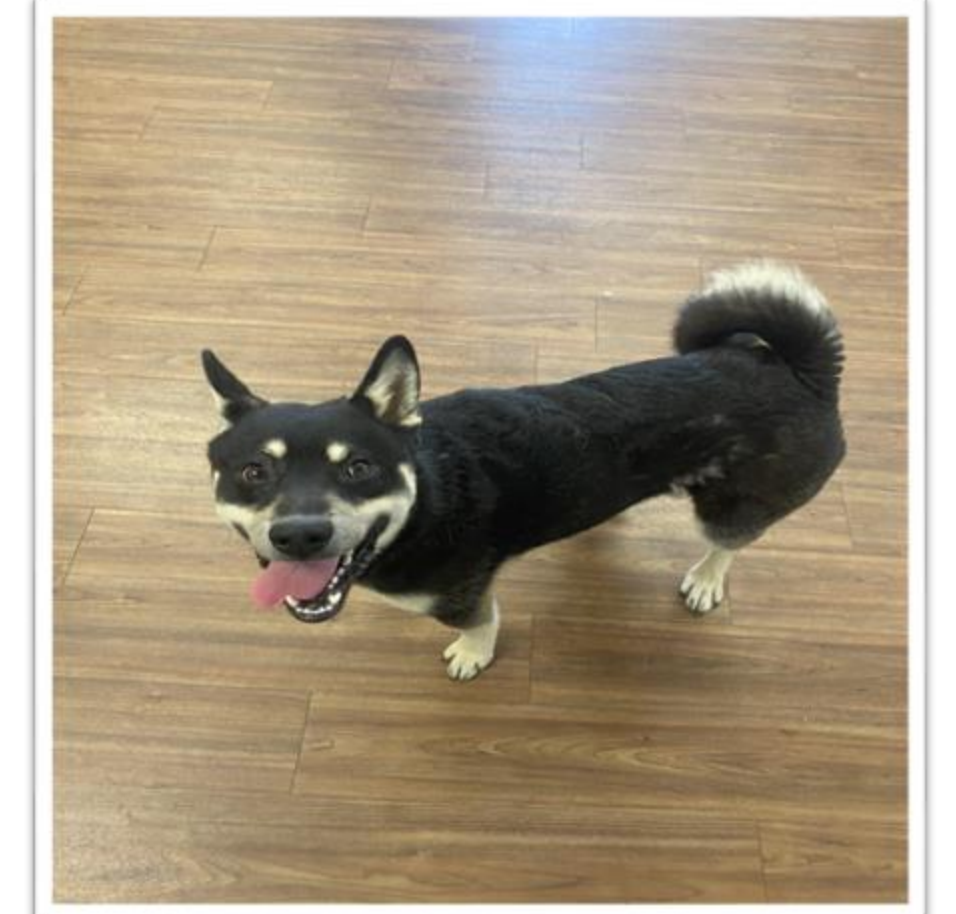
Otis the Pitbull who has a rough exterior but wants to work for his handler more than anything.

Questions gained through my experience

During my time volunteering at Montgomery County there were some questions I pondered on how to increase the quality of life for the canines in the shelter. I think some of these ideas would make for some great research questions that could be conducted either by myself or anyone else who might have a passion for this line of work. Some of the questions I came up with were:

1. Would the use of vision blockers such as a solid door on the outside of kennels help reduce stress in the housed canines in addition to helping improve their showing quality.
2. How would organizing canine kennel placement in the shelter based on their proneness to barking reduce stress in less vocal canines.

3. If possible would having a "Dog of the day" program in which a different dog is brought to the front desk for the day help increase adoption rates of dogs that may not show well inside the kennel.



Husky mix Chap who had enough energy to power a whole city

Conclusion

This project opened my eyes to an entirely new world of animal science. Through participation of this project I learned so much about the inner workings of a an animal shelter and about personal passions I didn't realize I had. The satisfaction gained from doing even the smallest task like walking the dogs left me with a smile and a desire to do more. This satisfaction was doubled when I would help a dog learn a new trick (such as gentle) that might help them in finding their new family. It was amazing to me how quickly the dogs I worked with became part of my family and how much joy came from watching them walk out the door with a new family hopefully never to be seen again. My time during this project has shown me that I am very interested in future career paths that involve training and shelter management.

Ask me about

- ❖ What experiences in my college career helped me during this project
- ❖ Why this project meant so much to me
- ❖ The breeds I encountered during my time at the shelter
- ❖ Ways that you can become involved in helping
- ❖ How I helped one special dog find a new forever home

Acknowledgments

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