

Placing Medium and Large Breed Shelter Dogs with Behavioral Challenges in Foster Homes

Results and Outcomes



Kristen Auerbach, MA
Deputy Director, Austin Animal Center
Formerly Assistant Director,
Fairfax County Animal Shelter
Fairfax, Virginia



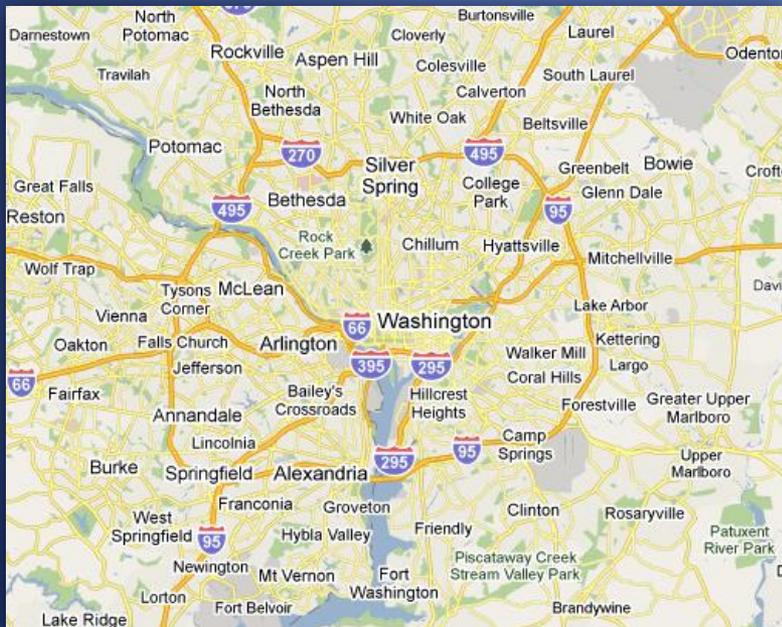


Part I

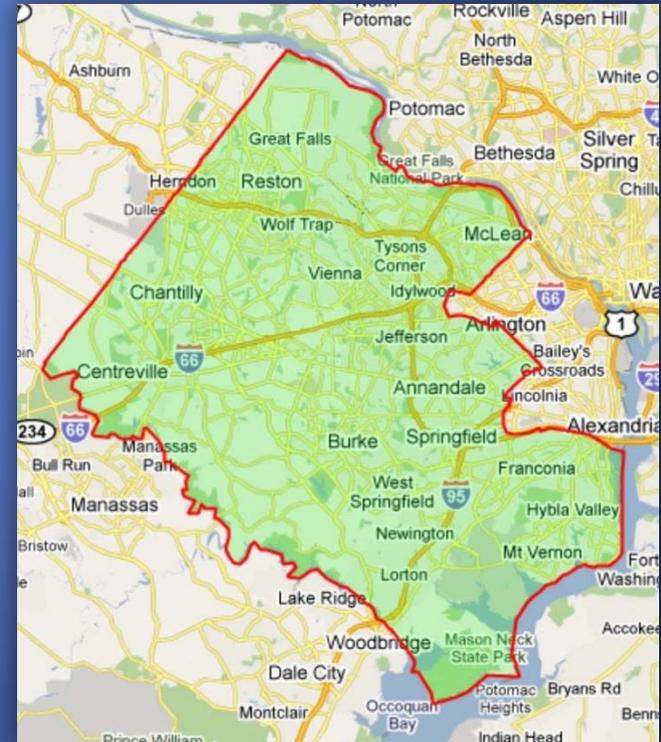
BACKGROUND

- Fairfax County Animal Shelter is an open-access, municipal animal shelter that falls under the Fairfax County Police Department in Fairfax, Virginia
- Shelter serves 1.2 million people over 400 square miles
- Average annual intake between 4,000 and 5,000 animals
- Live outcomes anticipated to be 90% in 2015

Washington, DC



Fairfax, Virginia



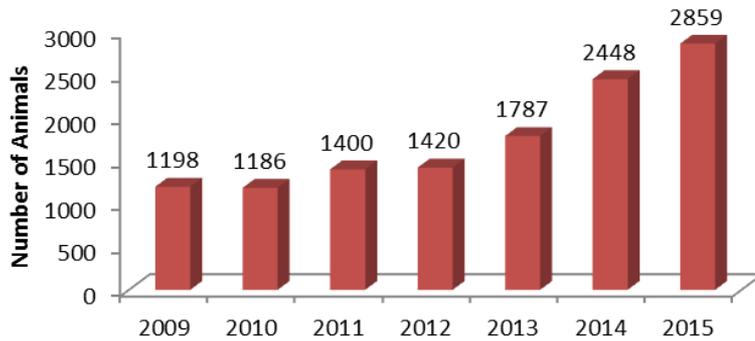
Prior to 2012:

- Euthanizing for space and time limits for adoption for some animals
- 'Pit bull' adoption restrictions up to 80% of pit bull dogs euthanized
- Euthanizing for common behavioral challenges
- Euthanized dogs for 'failing' SAFER evaluation
- Euthanized 25% of animals entering shelter.

Sample Outcomes List – Open access shelter in Maryland 2015

	<u>Reason</u>	<u>Impound Date</u>	<u>Leave Date</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Justification</u>
ACIMP-2015-03432	Stray - Other	07/16/2015	08/05/2015	Euthanized	Aggressive to humans or other animals
ACIMP-2015-03452	Stray - Other	07/18/2015	07/29/2015	Euthanized	Aggressive to humans or other animals
ACIMP-2015-03625	Owned/Given Up - Other	07/27/2015	08/05/2015	Adopted	
ACIMP-2015-03721	Stray - Other	07/31/2015	08/05/2015	Euthanized	Overall poor health, several existing conditions
ACIMP-2015-03732	Owner/Given Up - Abandoned	07/31/2015	08/05/2015	Euthanized	Feral/undersocialized/fearful
ACIMP-2015-03746	Stray - Other	08/01/2015	08/19/2015	Euthanized	Feral/undersocialized/fearful
ACIMP-2015-03846	Stray - Other	08/05/2015	08/10/2015	Euthanized	Feral/undersocialized/fearful
ACIMP-2015-03895	Owned/Given Up - Other	08/08/2015	08/08/2015	Euthanized	Aggressive to humans or other animals
ACIMP-2015-03898	Stray - Other	08/08/2015	08/19/2015	Euthanized	Feral/undersocialized/fearful
ACIMP-2015-03997	Stray - Other	08/12/2015	08/22/2015	Adopted	

Adoption - All Animals 2009 - 2015



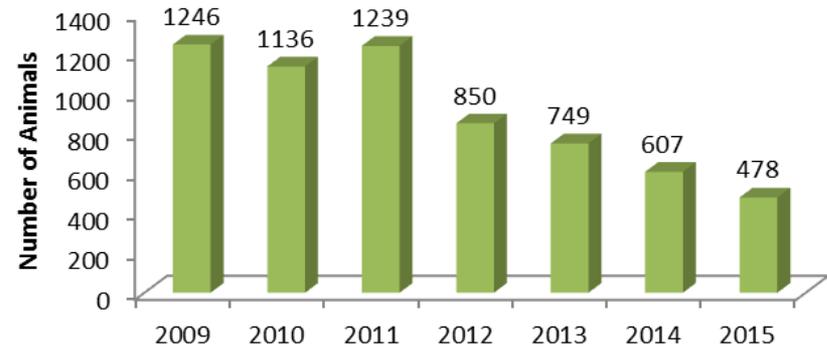
Note: 2015 projection based on data from first half of 2015

Beginning in 2013:

- Worked towards ending euthanasia based on perceived breed
- No euthanasia for 'failing' standardized behavior evaluation
- Shelter began implementing enrichment, playgroups, adult dog foster program



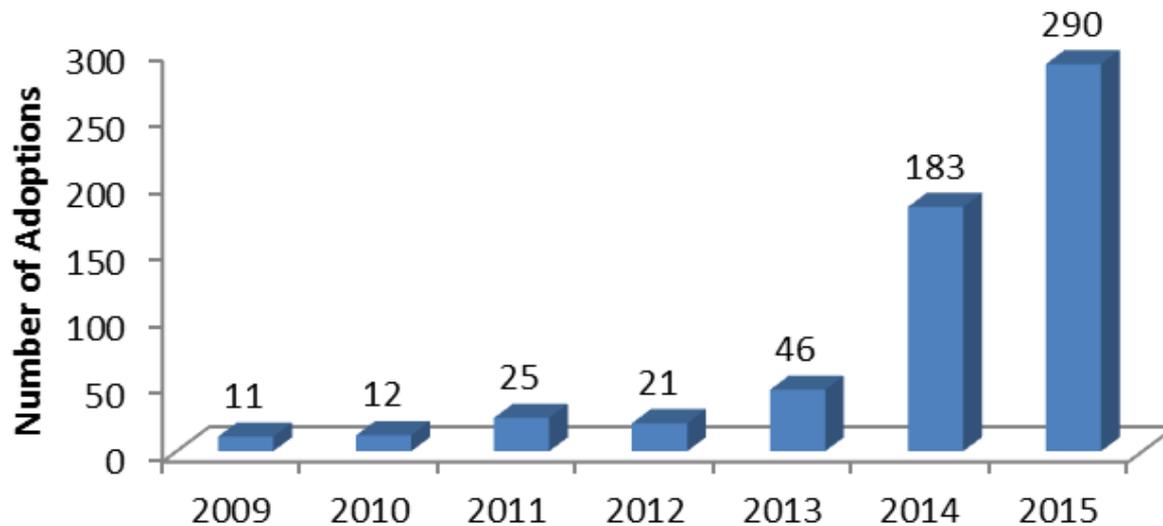
Euthanasia - All Animals 2009-2015



Note: 2015 projection based on data from first half of 2015

Restrictions on 'pit bull' adoptions overturned January 2014

Pit Bull-type Dog Adoptions 2009-2015



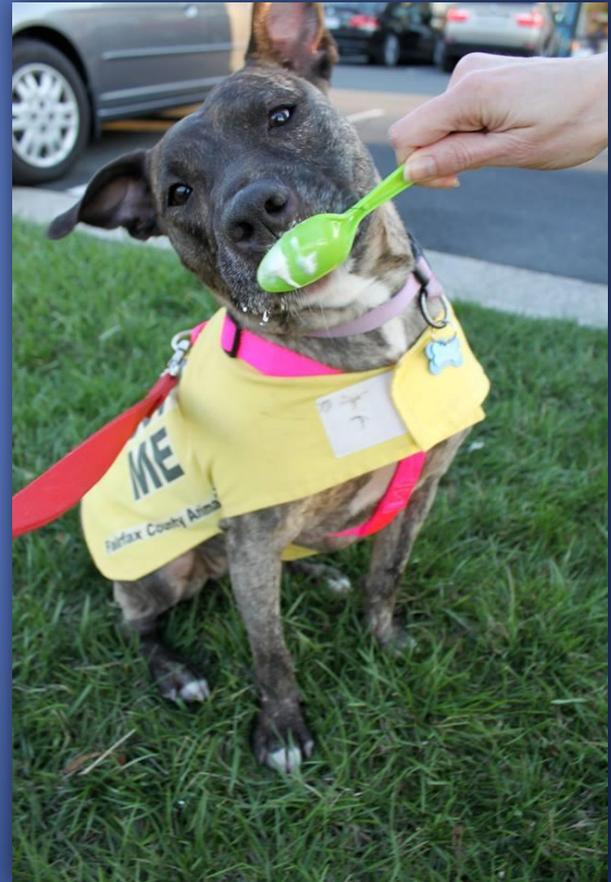
Note: 2015 Projection based on data from first half of 2015

Lifesaving programs for shelter dogs

Play Groups



Adult Dog Fostering



Dog with behavioral challenges



Declining behavior over time

No behavior staff or rescue placement options

Concerns from staff, volunteers, ACOs

Part II

THE STUDY



Patty's story...



The Dogs



May 2013 to March 2015

52 medium/large shelter dogs of various breeds and types

- No viable placement options because of behavioral challenges in shelter
- Not severely aggressive towards people or animals

16 Foster Families

- Characteristics
- Number of dogs they fostered
- What the foster families agreed to



Study objectives

1. Could we place medium and large dogs with behavioral challenges in foster homes and see their behavior improve?
2. Could these dogs eventually be adopted into permanent homes?
3. Could we do all of this safely?

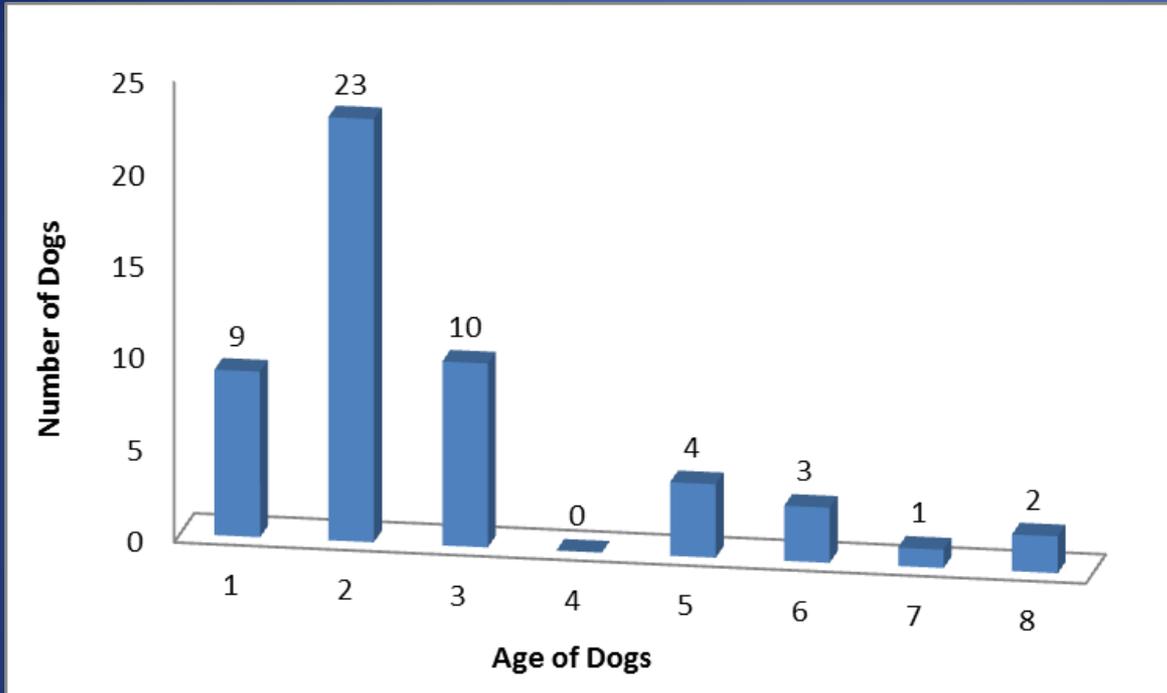


What we studied

- Ages
- Primary and secondary behavioral issues
- Duration of stay in foster
- Outcome - adopted or euthanized
- Reasons for euthanasia
- Rate of and reasons for return
- Any behavioral challenges experienced by
 - Foster families
 - Adopters
- Status of dogs six months to 18 months after adoption

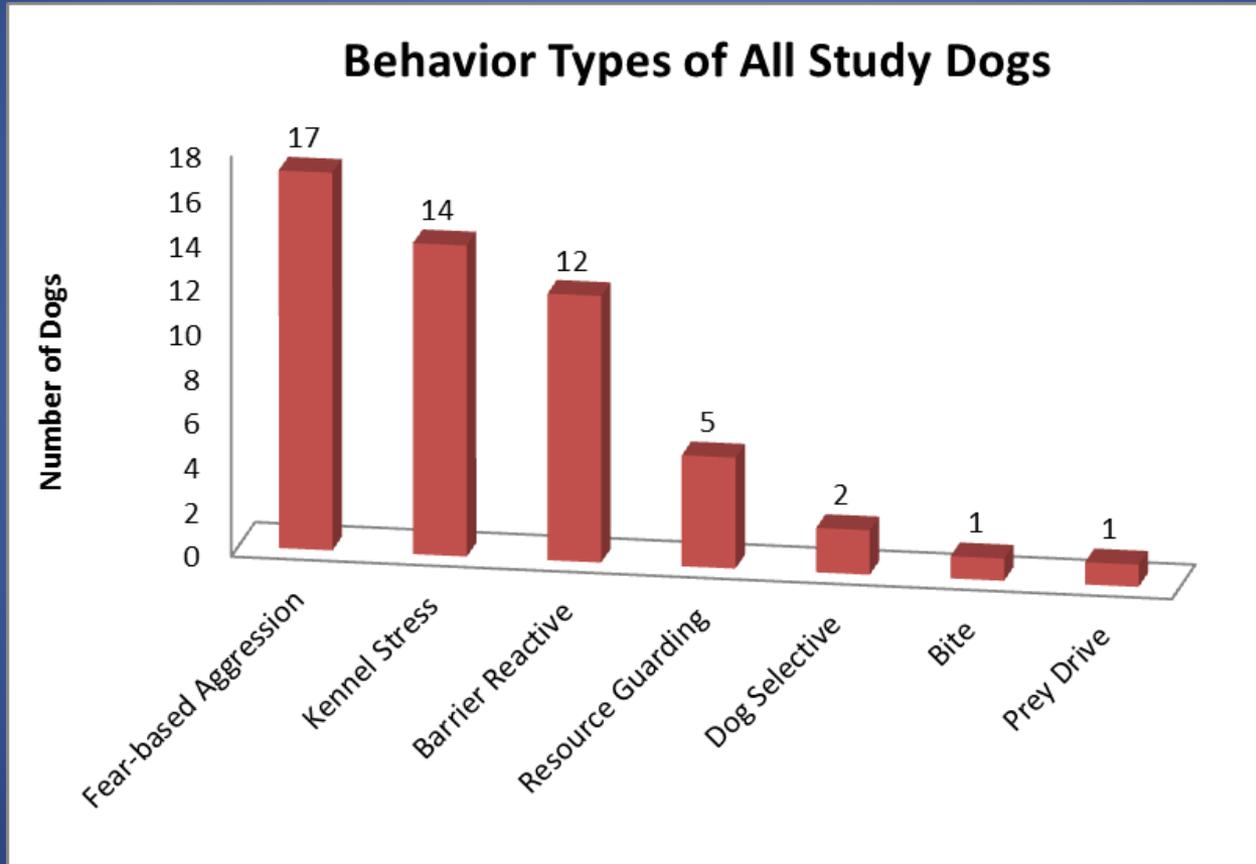


Age



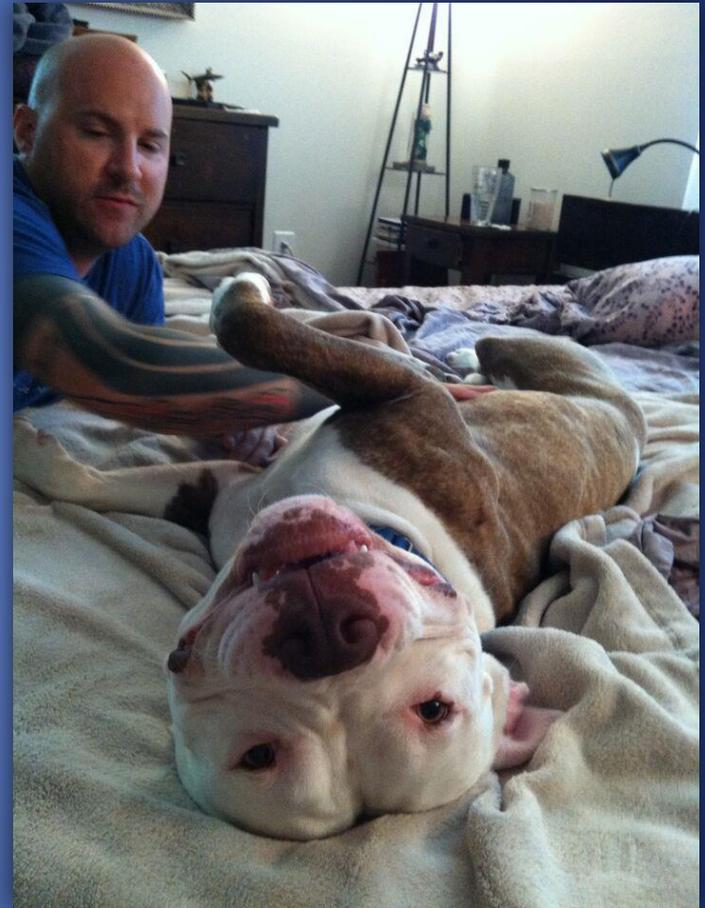
Over 80% of dogs were 3 years and under

Primary Behavioral Issues

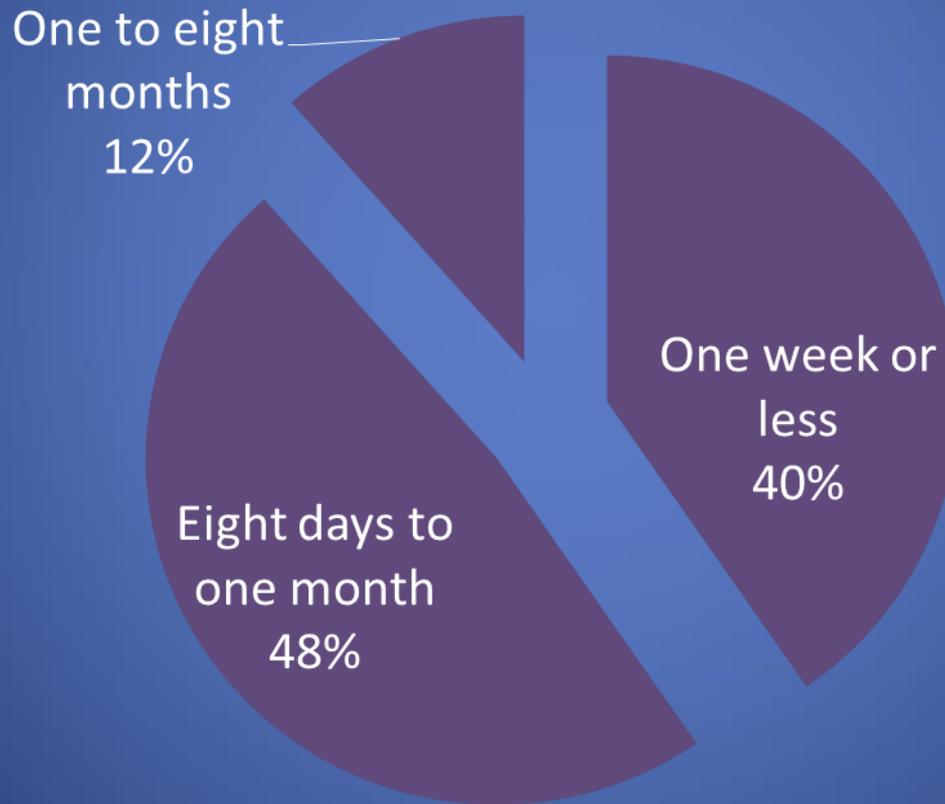


Secondary Behavioral Issues

- 10 - extremely energetic
- 4 - possibly dog aggressive
- 2 - dog selective
- 2 - afraid of men
- 2 - under-socialized
- 2 - displayed separation anxiety
- 1 - reactivity



How long did the dogs stay in foster?

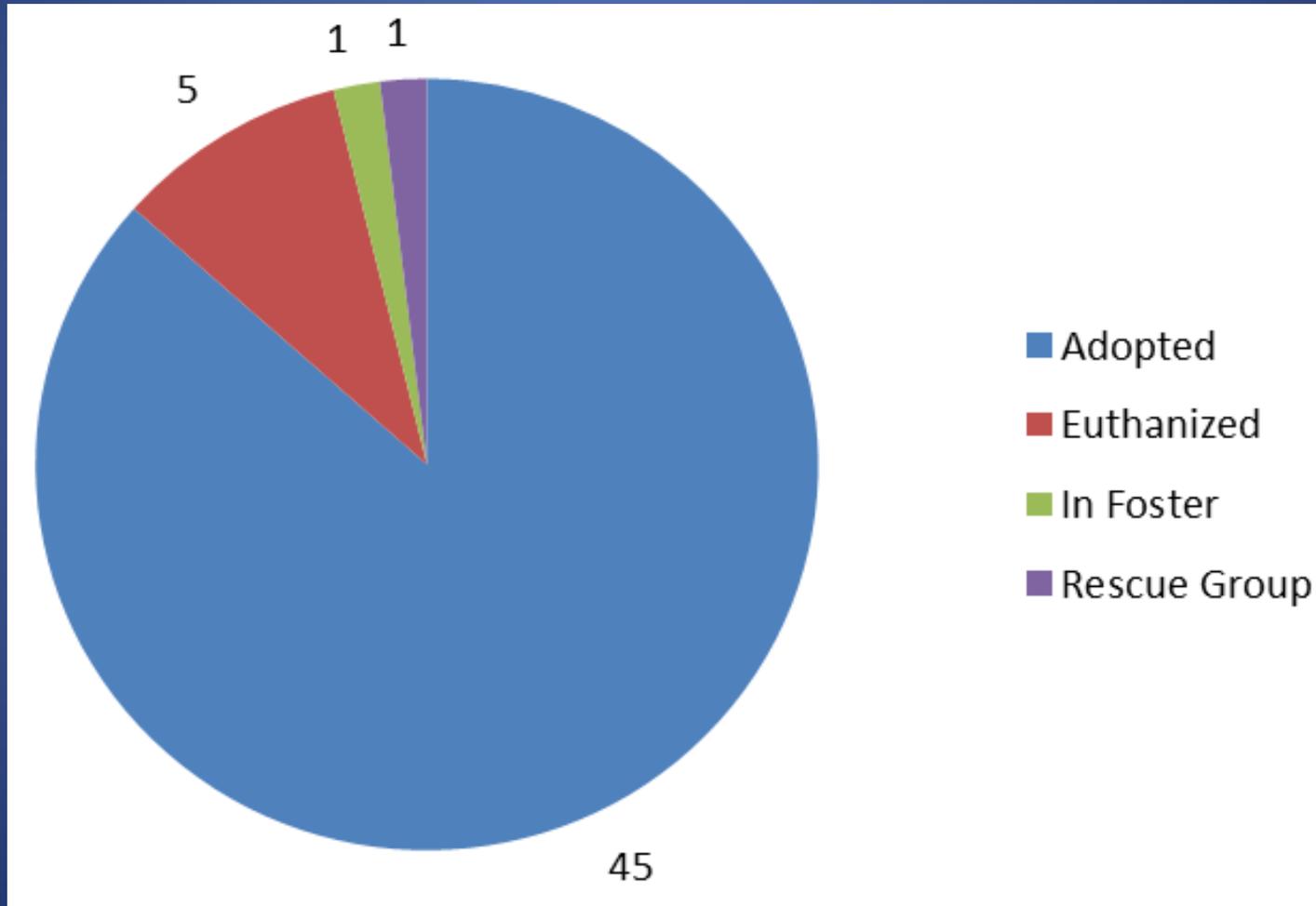


88% of the dogs were in foster 30 days or less.

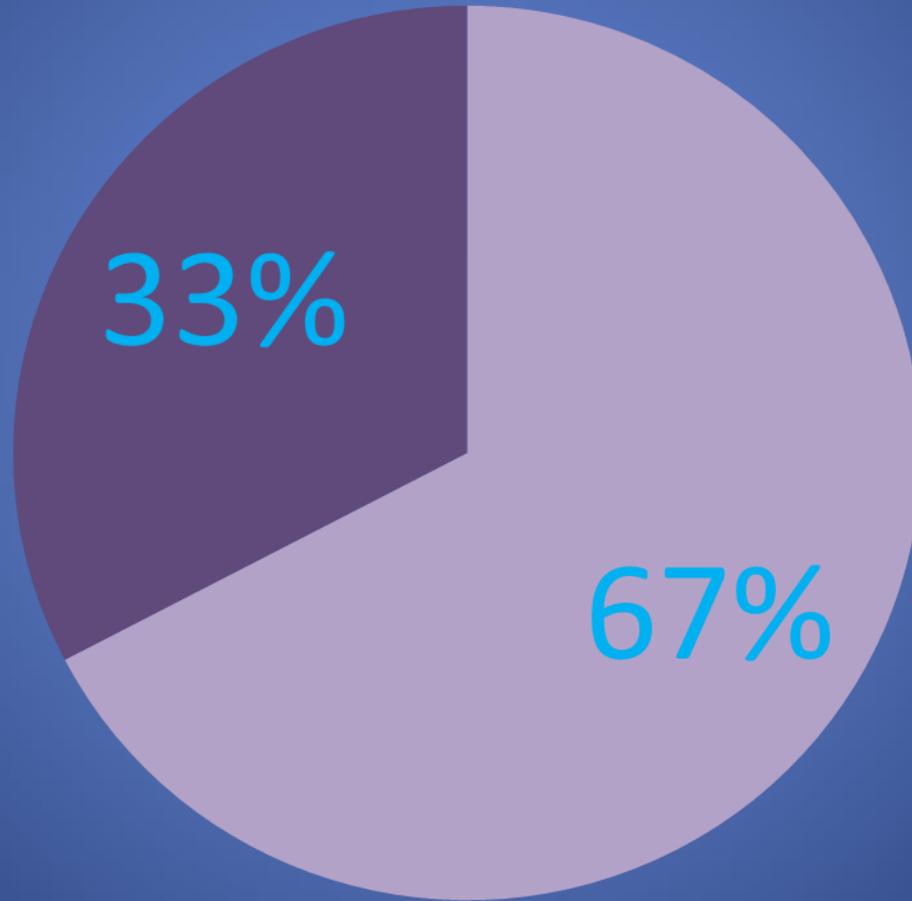
Place of Adoption:

- 33 adopted directly from the foster home
- 16 returned to shelter and subsequently adopted

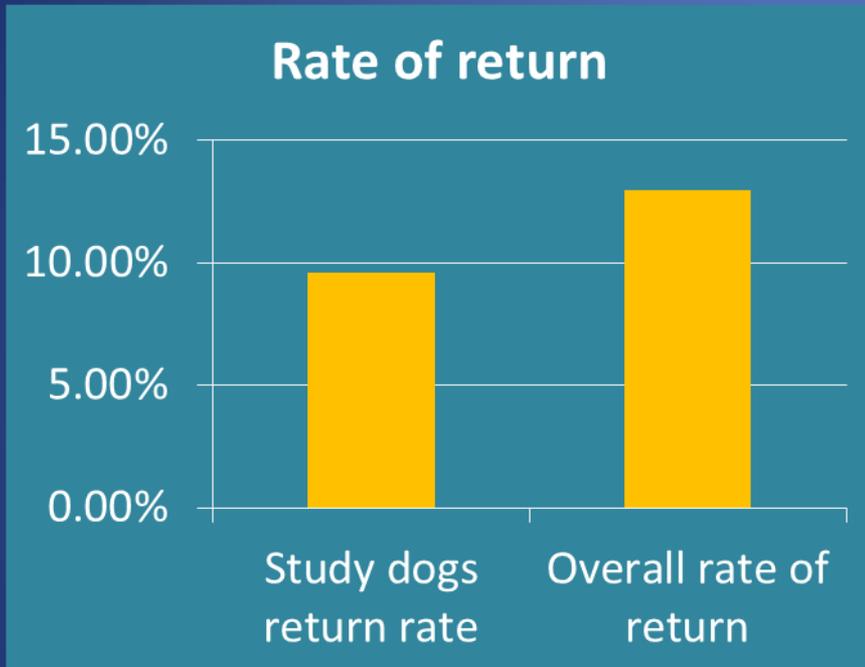
Live Outcomes 90.4%



- Adopted directly from the foster home
- Returned to the shelter and adopted from kennel



Returned Adoptions



Six dogs (11%) adopted/returned prior to foster

Three dogs (6%) sent to foster, adopted, returned and re-adopted

Two dogs (4%) sent to foster, adopted, returned and euthanized

Return rate of dogs in study: 9.6%

Overall return rate of adopted dogs: 13%



Part III.

DISCUSSION

Here's what the fosters said about their experiences...

1. They felt well-informed about issues prior to taking dogs home
2. They felt they either did not witness the behavior described to them or they stated the described behavior diminished or disappeared within a week
3. They said sometimes new behavioral issues emerged over time
4. They felt trainer support and someone to consult was key



Adopter Follow-up



We called our adopters six to 18 months following adoption and asked them four questions...

1. Is this dog still in your home?

96% of respondents said YES!*



*respondents represent the final, adoptive homes. Some dogs adopted, returned and re-adopted.

2. Did you experience any challenges?

“Barks a lot, digs and pulls too much.”

“Needs training and will run away if off leash but so loving”

“Afraid of cars. Wants to chase them but scared.”

“Sometimes he’s a bit naughty. Chewing on things”

“None. She fits right into the family and bonded with our other dog.”

“Mindy is a handful and she’s great with our family but experiences anxiety and is fearful around some men.”

“Bella has severe anxiety. She hasn’t left the house since the day she came home.”

“No behavioral issues, but she has skin allergies.”

3. Would you re-adopt this dog?

“Yes. Dogs are dogs.”

“No. not knowing what we know now. But we love Mindy and have no intention of giving her up.”

“Yes, in a heartbeat.”

“No. We love her very much but we wouldn’t adopt a young dog again because of the need for exercise and training.”

“Oh yeah. Absolutely. He’s perfect.”

“I love him now but in the beginning I would have opted for another dog if I had known about his skin allergies.”

4. Could we have offered you more support?

- Basic training
- Training support immediately following adoption
- Someone to call to help them 'troubleshoot' behavior issues





- Six out of the 51 dogs were adopted by their foster family
- What word did fosters use more than any other to describe their foster dogs?
- In most cases, fosters met with potential adopters

Dogs Helping Dogs



- Dogs socialized with other dogs
- Playgroups played a key role in identifying dogs with shelter-based behavioral issues
- All dogs were evaluated with other dogs off leash



Study Objectives results

1. Could we place medium and large dogs with behavioral challenges in foster homes and see their behavior improve?
2. Could these dogs eventually be adopted into permanent homes?
3. Could we do all of this safely?



THANK YOU!

Find me on Twitter
[@KEADasher](#)

And on Facebook,
LinkedIn, and
Instagram.

[Kristen.auerbach@
Austintexas.gov](mailto:Kristen.auerbach@Austintexas.gov)

