

Read and Relax (R&R) Kennel Enrichment Program

An enrichment program for shelter dogs



Developed at the Animal Refuge League of Greater Portland in Westbrook, Maine, the Read and Relax Volunteer Program helps decrease the arousal and stress levels of your dogs on the adoption floor as adopters pass through, and helps increase the dogs' success in their new home.

This enrichment program is suitable for dogs in Meet Your Match™ shelters as well as dogs in shelters that haven't implemented ASPCA®'s Meet Your Match™ Adoption Program.

Daily walks are an important part of a shelter dog's life. However, it is important to limit the number of walks as it can create dogs with Olympic walker stamina! Human contact is the most enriching part of a shelter dog's day – that's why in-kennel human contact is so important.

Dog walkers can be asked to help with this program. However, it is quite helpful to recruit volunteers solely for R&R duty. The R&R program is appealing to "dog people" who may not be physically able to walk shelter dogs.

A press release to your local newspaper or a page on your website describing the program and the need for volunteers is likely to generate interest.

What the Dogs Learn

The R&R program will teach shelter dogs to:

- Remain calm as adopters pass through the adoption floor.
- Enjoy the presence of a human without having to be the center of attention.
- Develop exercise needs that are more manageable for adopters.
- Be accustomed to "down" time, a key element for success in the home.
- Appreciate great literature. (Just kidding.)

Materials You Need

- Folding chairs
- Appropriate books for the public and children (Volunteers can bring their own reading materials to catch up on if they choose to do so.)
- Kennel signs briefly describing to the public the interaction taking place in the kennel between volunteer and dog.
- A session log to track the number of sessions per day, who completed the sessions, and for how long.
- A behavior observation log kept out of sight from the public for the volunteers to write notes regarding the dogs' behavior. This log will serve as communication among the volunteers and staff.

Volunteer Requirements

When reading to the dogs, volunteers should be capable of accomplishing the following tasks if circumstances require:

- Enter the dog's kennel only when the dog has four paws on the floor and is waiting quietly.

- Ignore inappropriate behavior, such as barking, jumping, whining, etc.
- Make good judgments about when to exit the kennel if the dog continues inappropriate behavior even when he is ignored.
- Practice self-restraint in wanting to play with the dogs in the kennel or turn the focus of the R&R session into a highly interactive time with the dogs.
- Be skillful at politely addressing the public's questions about the program or re-directing other questions to the front desk or a staff member.

R&R Protocol

- Once or twice a day, volunteers will enter the dogs' kennel, sit down on a chair and read aloud to the dogs for 30 minutes.
- Upon entering the kennel, the volunteer will post a sign on the door briefly describing to the public the interaction they are viewing in the kennel.
- Volunteers will acknowledge the dog's presence in the kennel by quickly patting his head when the dog approaches with good manners, and then carry on with their reading.
- At the completion of each R&R session, the volunteer will fill out the session log and behavior observation log.

Questions?

For more information about the Meet Your Match™ Adoption Program or enrichment programs for shelter animals, contact ASPCA® National Outreach at outreach@aspca.org.