TIPS FOR CANINE ENRICHMENT

As you build a canine enrichment program for your shelter’s dogs, keep the following general tips in mind.

• Think like a dog. A rope toy soaked in meat broth, frozen, and then offered as a chew treat may sound messy and gross to you, but dogs are fine with messy and gross.

• You can offer canine enrichment without creating a lot of extra work for shelter staff. By simply changing toys or other enrichment items (like music or scents) daily or even a few times during the day when volunteers interact with the dogs, it can be easy to incorporate enrichment activities into the daily routine.

• You can create a robust program on a very slim budget. For example, try looking in your recycling bin for products that can easily be converted into food-dispensing devices. Lunch bags, copier paper, and paper-towel rolls are non-toxic and can be filled with kibble for a new, low-cost twist on the Kong.

• Variety and change themselves are enriching experiences, and you can use this to your advantage. By swapping toys, varying the music playing in the kennel area, or simply feeding in a different way (meals in Kongs or paper products) you can add variety to kennel life.

• Monitor your program to see what works and what doesn’t. Add more of what works, and remove the elements that don’t appeal to the dogs.

• Expect to fine-tune your program for individual dogs’ needs and preferences. If the dog doesn’t interact with it, it’s not enrichment. A toy or treat that sits untouched in the kennel is not enriching that dog’s environment.

• Enrichment doesn’t replace training and behavior modification. You can build some basic positive-reinforcement training into activities with humans. Dogs who are behaviorally at-risk still need separate behavior modification sessions with a staff member or trained volunteer.

Because dogs are social animals, social interaction is extremely important to most dogs, especially dogs who are confined separately in kennels. For dogs with no known aggression toward other dogs, play time with other dogs and time with humans are the highest-value enrichment experiences that you can provide.