

## Long Term Effects in Shelter Canines

January 17th 2021

By Shannon Wright, BHS Canine Behaviorist

While BHS provides the best care possible for the homeless animals that come into our care sometimes they stay longer than we hope. Certain dogs may have a narrower window of opportunity for being adopted quickly because of their specific needs. For example, a dog who has never been socialized with other animals and is not dog friendly may get little interest regardless of their good qualities. Or a senior dog may get overlooked simply due to age. At times even dogs who have disabilities will experience a longer stay at the shelter because it can be unfamiliar compared to a childhood dog. While those obstacles can at times keep them here a little longer, sometimes those unwanted traits or challenges grow and can manifest themselves in other unwanted ways, creating a spectrum of caution to outsiders.

BHS does it's best to match their long term dogs with foster parents who understand the dog may need a break from the shelter first, before working on any training or behavioral challenges. Dog adoptions counselors help to educate interested parties about how stress levels in the dog will continue to decrease as days go by so we can support and attempt to set the dog and their new owner up for success. A dog will begin to know and expect the routine you've provided and then once comfortable enough-begin to push boundaries to see exactly where they are. The boundary pushing point is the most pivotal point when bringing home a new dog, it should be met with an opportunity to train a *wanted behavior* to replace the *unwanted behavior*. For example, the dog has a known history of jumping up on new people who enter the household. The owner/adopter should provide the dog with an alternative when new people enter the house by handing the visitor a treat and instructing them to ask for a sit/down/shake (a known behavior).

In our experience what often happens is the long term dogs do get an opportunity to go to a home, however, the dog starts to boundary push when the owner has done little to train the dog to be successful. Similarly the acclimation process may have had little structure and the dog becomes confused as to what is expected in this new environment. Sadly many will be returned because it's 'too much' or 'not the right fit'. Without giving the dog the opportunity to learn new *wanted behaviors*. Thus they come back to the shelter and the stress levels increase all over again causing the dog to continue the *unwanted behavior(s)* at an intensive level or develop new unwanted behaviors that 'work' for the dog.