

Independent Study 490A: To Determine the Effectiveness of the “Black Dog” Program



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Summary and Implications

Many animal shelters across the country have noticed that black dogs are not adopted as quickly as lighter colored dogs. This trend goes even further as a dog that is all black is not adopted as quickly as a black dog with one white toe or other small white flashing. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the “black dog program” on the speed of adoption of all black dogs at the Animal Rescue League of Iowa. This study was performed at the Animal Rescue League (ARL) of Iowa, located in Ankeny, IA. A total of 43 canine records (30 pre BDC and 13 post BDC) were used in this study. A total of 30 black dogs were in the “pre” BDC and 13 black dogs were in the “post” BDC. The average time (days) for black dogs in the “pre” black dog club to be adopted was 15 days (range 0 to 64 d). The average time for “post” was 11 days (range 2 to 22d; Table 1). There was a difference ($P = 0.009$) for the length of time that black dogs remained in adoption, with dogs being adopted faster after the implementation of the program (11.51 ± 1.9 vs. 19.69 ± 2.68 days) respectively. Therefore in conclusion, this program has essentially added extra value to the all black dogs thus making them more appealing to potential adopters. As a result, dogs that are all black spend less time in adoption which may increase their quality of life. Quicker adoption rates for these dogs also improves the quality of life of other dogs because they are able to go into adoption more quickly when space is limited.

Introduction

Many animal shelters across the country have noticed that black dogs are not adopted as quickly as lighter colored dogs. This trend goes even further as a dog that is all black is not adopted as quickly as a black dog with one white toe or other small white flashing.

Many theories exist to explain this trend. Some believe that potential adopters have a more difficult time feeling an instant connection with a black dog because the dog’s facial features are somewhat camouflaged by their dark fur. Others think that adopters’ may have a more difficult time in seeing into the back of the kennel and “finding” the dog. Maybe the photographs that potential adopters see on the website are not able to depict their features as well as a light tan or brown dog. Another theory suggested is that black dogs are under represented in popular media. The black dogs that are represented in popular media are usually either stalking predators or omens of evil. No matter what the theory behind this phenomenon, the fact remains that black dogs are the most commonly overlooked “type” of dog in shelters. The Animal Rescue League of Iowa has implemented the Black Dog Club (BDC) program as a means to get black dogs adopted more quickly. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the “black dog program” on the speed of adoption of all black dogs at the Animal Rescue League of Iowa.

Materials and Methods

Location and personnel: This study was performed at the Animal Rescue League (ARL) of Iowa, located in Ankeny, IA.

Facilities: All canines were brought into the ARL of Iowa, kept in individual kennels and were fed two times a day (0700 and 1700 h) a nutritionally balanced canine diet and had *ad libitum* access to water. If canines showed interest, approved toys were provided. All canines were evaluated by the veterinarian upon arrival, and were checked for conformational irregularities and/or disease (i.e. heart worm and distemper) and if required were treated. The time for a canine to be brought in and behaviorally evaluated ranged from 3 to 14 d depending on health issues, the severity of the behavior issue and stray dog holding requirements. Once the canine had been given a clean bill of health and passed the behavioral evaluation he/she was then placed into adoption kennels.

Black dog program: The Black Dog Club (BDC) program was implemented January 1st, 2009. This program was

started to help get dogs that are at least 50 % black get adopted more quickly. Adopters of these dogs are automatically enrolled in the club. They receive a Black Dog Club T-shirt, a biannual newsletter and are invited to bring their dog to an annual Black Dog Club reunion Web page for additional information; <https://secure3.websiteencryption.com/ARL/aspx/generalcontent.aspx?pid=3>).

Data collection: A total of 46 canine adoption records were collected by one undergraduate from November 1st 2008 through February 28th 2009.

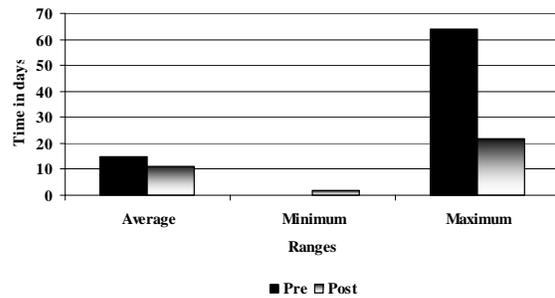
Disclaimers for data: Three records were removed from the data set due to clerical error involving incorrect birth dates (n = 2), and one dog who was never adopted after being put up for adoption (n = 1). Therefore a total of 43 canines were used in this study. Results will be descriptively presented and a t-test was conducted to determine if there were differences in time (days) that dogs spent in adoption pre vs. post the introduction of the BDC. A P value of P < 0.05 was considered significant.

Results and Discussion

A total of 30 black dogs were in the “pre” BDC and 13 black dogs were in the “post” BDC. A variety of dog breeds were involved in the study with the most popular all black dog breed being classified both pre and post BDC was a Labrador mix (16 vs. 8 dogs) respectively (Table 1).

The average time (days) for black dogs in the “pre” black dog club to be adopted was 15 days (range 0 to 64 d). The average time for “post” was 11 days (range 2 to 22d; Figure 1).

Figure 1. Data that was collected.



There was a difference (P = 0.009) for the length of time that black dogs remained in adoption, with dogs being adopted faster after the implementation of the program (11.51 ± 1.9 vs. 19.69 ± 2.68 days) respectively.

Therefore in conclusion, this program has essentially added extra value to the all black dogs thus making them more appealing to potential adopters. As a result, dogs that are all black spend less time in adoption which may increase their quality of life. Quicker adoption rates for these dogs also improves the quality of life of other dogs because they are able to go into adoption more quickly when space is limited.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the canines, Robin Abeltins, and Suzanne Tomlinson, and all the staff of the Animal Rescue League of Iowa.

Table 1. Numbers per breed type of canines that were in the pre and post black dog groups.

Breed Type Pre BDC	No.	Breed Type Post BDC	No.
Chihuahua Mix	1	American Bulldog/ Weimaraner	1
German Shepherd Mix	1	Labrador	1
English Cocker Spaniel	1	Labrador Mix	8
Husky/Chow	1	Labrador/ Shepherd	1
Labrador	1	Scottish Terrier Mix	1
Labrador/ Boxer	1	Shepherd/ Rottweiler	1
Labrador Mix	16		
Labrador/ Poodle	1		
Newfoundland	1		
Poodle	1		
Retriever Mix	2		
Rottweiler / Labrador	1		
Schnauzer Mix	1		
Scottie/ Schnauzer	1		