

**Michigan Humane Society**  
**Canine Behavior Evaluation Program**  
**Progress Report**  
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## INTRODUCTION

In October 2011 I conducted a three-day behavior consultation with the Michigan Humane Society. The purpose of the consultation was to evaluate the canine behavior assessment program that you use to determine adoptability and make placement recommendations for the dogs in your care.

This progress report documents the changes that you have indicated have been implemented in the last seven months as a result of my recommendations.

## BACKGROUND

During my October consultation I witnessed your 'Personality Assessment Tool' (PAT) being performed by several trained staff members at each of the three facilities. As stated in my original report, I found your canine assessment tool to be in line with the industry standard for best practices regarding such assessments and to be a good screening tool to identify dogs with the propensity for aggression that would pose a risk to public safety. The recommended changes to your procedure were made to ensure the safety of the evaluators while conducting the procedure and to increase the amount of information gathered about the basic personality and temperament of the dogs to improve adoption matching.

## IMPLEMENTED CHANGES

### Improved Safety Procedures

I have been informed that you have created and implemented a daylong training program to improve the staff's ability to recognize signs of stress in, and safely handle the dogs in your care. It is my understanding that this program is mandatory for all staff to attend, not just the personnel conducting the behavior assessments. This is good policy and will ensure that the dogs are properly handled and cared for and the staff less likely to be injured while working with the shelter dogs.

You have indicated that you have also implemented many of my recommended changes to the PAT regarding evaluator safety. The first recommendation was to change the order of the battery of tests, as certain aspects of the assessment are predictors of potential issues during other

aspects of the assessment. For example, the sociability test should be conducted first as the dog's level of sociability is directly correlated to his threshold level for aggression so a dog who exhibits no sociability will be handled more cautiously as the procedure progresses. Additionally, the order in which the handling portions of the assessment are conducted ensure that the most dangerous procedures are conducted last after learning more about the dog's tolerance for handling. I also recommended that the dogs be tethered to the wall during the resource guarding components of the PAT and this is now a requirement for all of the evaluators. It was also my recommendation that there be two people present during the assessment and this recommendation is being followed as often as staffing permits.

### Procedural Changes to the PAT

The remaining recommended changes to the PAT procedure were made in order to elucidate more information about the dog's basic personality and temperament to improve matching with adoptive families. It is my understanding that the following recommended changes have taken place:

A new Sociability test has been added to the PAT. This procedure involves four steps that help to determine the dog's level of sociability with humans. Elucidating this aspect of the dog's temperament is critical, as research has found that dogs with low levels of sociability have lower thresholds for aggression. The information gleaned from this test will help guide placement recommendations as an unsocial dog should not be placed with children as they do not have the social buffer to tolerate the things children do around dogs.

Additional handling procedures have been added to the PAT at my recommendation. These procedures include picking up the dog's foot, touching his tail, grabbing his collar and wiping him with a towel. These common handling procedures are things that every pet owner does to their dog from time to time and it is wise to assess the dog's tolerance of them prior to making placement recommendations.

Lastly, changes have been made to the play test to ensure that the dog is allowed the ability to engage in untethered play with the evaluator so that a true assessment can be made of the dog's level of arousal. This is another aspect of the dog's temperament that is important to determine to aid in

making adoption recommendations, especially regarding the age of children the dog would be best suited to live with.

### Budget for Canine Behavior Evaluations

It was my recommendation that a line item for behavior assessment supplies be added to the MHS budget and I have been informed that this line item already exists but that the staff may not have been aware that they could request the supplies they needed. The evaluators have now been instructed to keep the Sr. Director of Operation, who controls this budget, informed about their needs in this regard and a commitment has been made to ensure that assessment supplies are always available.

### Training and Re-certification of Evaluators

It was my recommendation that you improve your training procedures for new staff learning how to conduct the behavior evaluation and to develop a process where by evaluators are re-certified on a yearly basis to ensure that each evaluator is conducting the assessment in a standardized manner. This recommendation is being addressed and revisions to the training manual are about to be finalized. You have asked for my input as you proceed with the development of the training and re-certification protocol.

### Improvements to the Adoption Matching Program

I made recommendations for you to expand your adoption-matching program to improve your ability to match dogs with potential adopters. To accomplish this goal, you have created a program called “Right Dog” which even includes a smart phone application that people can use to find a dog that better matches their lifestyle and expectations for a canine companion. This program is commendable.

### RECOMMENDATIONS NOT YET IMPLEMENTED

### Video Tape Documentation of Evaluations

It was my recommendation that each canine evaluation be video taped so that there is documentation of witnessed behavior. This video

documentation is useful when decisions about the dog based on the observed behavior are questioned. Videotaping also allows for monitoring the evaluators to ensure that consistent standardized evaluations are being conducted.

I understand that videotaping every dog that you evaluate is a complicated endeavor because of the large volume of dogs that come through your shelter system and the large amount of data storage necessary to accomplish this goal. It is my understanding that at this time MHS feels the funds that would be required to make the videotaping a reality would be much better spent elsewhere. I cannot argue with this sound logic.

### Increased Statistical Analysis

I recommended that you improve the tracking of your statistics on dogs returned to the shelter by their adoptive family so that you can better assess the effectiveness of your canine evaluation procedure and adoption-matching program. This recommendation requires that your shelter software allow you to pull out the information needed to accomplish this goal. It is my understanding that your software is restricting your ability to do this. On my return visit, I will work with the Sr. Director of Operations to see if we can in any way accomplish our goal with the current software.

### Implementation of the “Kid Test”

I included at the end of my original report a description of the procedure that I developed to match dogs with adoptive families with children. While it was my hope for you to implement this procedure at your shelters to aid in better match making, it is not a component of the formal Canine Behavior Evaluation Procedure and was not a recommended addition to the PAT. The procedure is actually part of the adoption process and it is my understanding that it will be introduced to the adoption department at some point in the future.

### My Continued Support and Consultation with MHS

I have had several phone and email correspondences with CJ Bentley, Senior Director of Operations, over the last seven months as you worked to

implement my recommended changes to your Canine Behavior Evaluation program.

We are currently planning a return visit in the early fall so that I can see these changes in action and further assist you in the implementation of an improved canine behavior evaluation program.

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