

CGC-Ready and TOP Dog Story

In 2013, Austin Pets Alive! began a Canine Good Citizen Ready program. We focused more on blocky headed pitbull-type dogs, not because they need the advocacy, but because they historically have a longer length of stay in our shelter due to breed restrictions, and breed misconceptions, as well as other factors. Within the first 2 years of the CGC-Ready program we were able to cut the length of stay for those blocky headed dogs by 80%, to an average of 40 days. Dogs who participated in the CGC-Ready program, what we call "CGC-affected dogs", were also 7 times less likely to be returned in comparison to non-CGC blocky headed dogs.

Four years into the program, APA! is saving more dogs than ever, contributing to a city-wide save rate of 98%. While the CGC program continues to be very effective, it is now almost too effective. The CGC-affected dogs' average length of stay has decreased and most dogs in the program are adopted before they get a chance to complete training. This is not a bad thing, it is actually pretty awesome because they can come back post-adoption and complete training with their owners. However, this did bring to the forefront that the population of dogs that APA! is now working with has changed over the past 4 years. The dogs that could benefit from specialized training in order to decrease their length of stay are no longer just those dogs that we focused on in the infancy of the CGC-Ready program. That is why we created Austin Pets Alive!'s TOP Dog.

The "Total Obedience Program," AKA: APA!'s TOP Dog is an opportunity for the dogs that are not candidates for the CGC program in shelter to get worked in an obedience program of the same style as the Canine Good Citizen-Ready program. Any dog that is in the TOP Dog program will be working towards passing their own specific test that is similar to the fundamental skills of the CGC test. The goal of creating this program is to target the dogs who may be ineligible for the CGC, but would still benefit from having a strong set of basic obedience. All volunteers working dogs for the TOP Dog Program work hand-in-hand with CGC volunteers, attend CGC classes and learn the majority, if not all, of the same skills. We want our TOP dog trainers to be able to have a clear objective and end goal for the dogs in the program. In addition, the added bonus is that we will now have created the opportunity for these dogs to be marketed and seen in the same light as the CGC dogs. When a TOP Dog passes their specific test, they will be labeled as TOP Dog Ready, meaning that they can successfully perform all of the skills on their test.

Each TOP Dog's training test is structured around what skills that particular dog should work on to help them transition into their new home and possibly help manage home specific behaviors. An adopter of a TOP Dog is encouraged to bring their new family member in for a post adoption training session to learn about all the skills that their dog has been working on. APA has always offered free post adoption training assistance to any dog adopted from APA, but this will be more personalized training with someone that has worked closely with the dog that they adopted. Our hope is to have as many dogs as possibly in the shelter working on basic training skills and possibly more in hopes to decrease length of stay and return rates, and come out on TOP.