

What does the Matchmaker Placement program do?

The Matchmaker Placement Program is designed to bridge the gap between potential adopters and fosters and dogs with significant placement challenges. In regularly and consistently identifying successful placements for even the most challenging to place dogs, the program demonstrates best practices for dog rescue and shelter client service. The principles and practices that allow us to adopt out dogs with significant placement challenges so successfully could be put in place at nearly any dog shelter or rescue.

A program designed to bridge the gap between potential adopters and dogs with placement challenges.

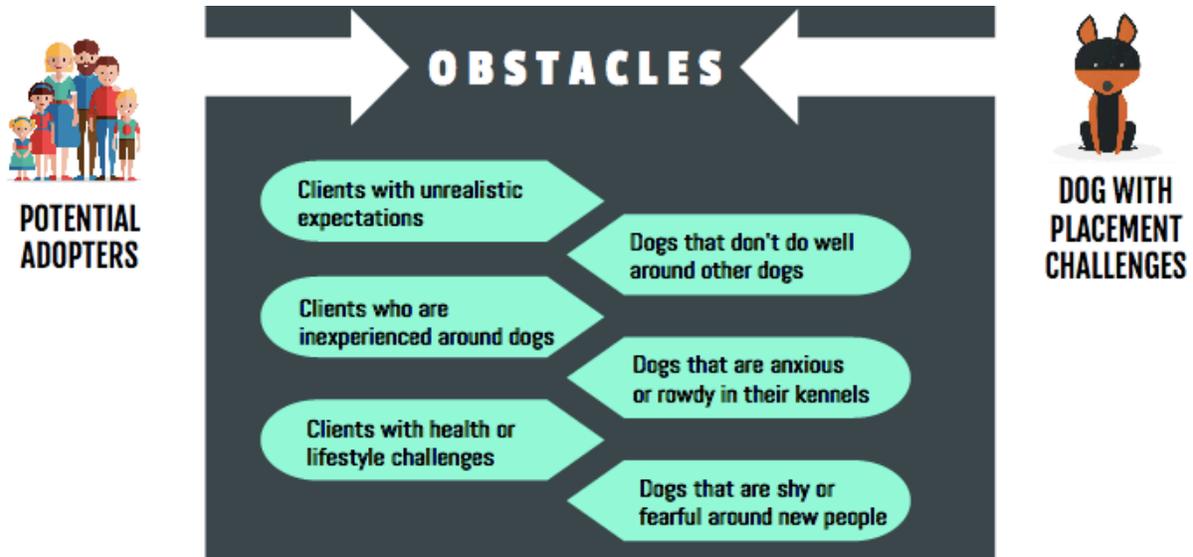


How does it actually work? How is it different from the regular way of adopting an animal?

- **Treating each dog as an individual, unique animal.** And tracking the information about dogs which will be helpful for adopters. We do not rely on outward physical appearance to determine the behavioral patterns or personality of a dog. Instead we analyze notes from a dog's previous home and notes from their interactions while at APA (playgroup notes, notes from dog walkers and counselors, notes from sleepovers and training sessions, and notes from our own interactions with the dogs and their previous introductions to clients.)
- In order to present each dog in our care to the public in as an individual, **we track and organize behavioral and health information on all dogs** in the adoption program.
- We provide **active** customer service. We meet with clients as they arrive at the shelter and counsel them on what traits may be a good fit for their home. We then provide placement recommendations. When we have found suitable candidates, we introduce the client to the dogs and discuss in detail all of the notes we have on the dog, advising them on how the individual dog may or may not fit into their lifestyle.
- **We create shortcuts for clients** to expedite the process of finding the right dog. For each dog in our adoption program we create a series of compatibility scores based on everything we know about that individual dog (Compatibility with dogs, cats, children and being left home

alone.) Clients can access these scores through the APA website and in-facility on the dogs' kennel cards.

- **We ensure safe and productive introductions between dogs and members of the public** by having specific introduction protocols and by using experienced dog handlers to introduce the dogs.
- We gather and analyze client feedback through entrance surveys when a client arrives at APA, exit surveys that are emailed after they leave APA, and post-adoption survey that are completed in shelter at the end of an adoption.



Overcoming obstacles to adoption = saving lives

Ability to intake AND successfully adopt out more challenging dogs.



Organizations that can bring more challenging dogs into their programs can play an even more important role in the No-Kill equation.

How does this lead to better matches?

- 75% percent of clients who adopt a dog from Austin Pets Alive report that the number one factor in choosing to adopt their dog was that they had a chance to meet the dog in the yard, and that the dog was well behaved when they met them. This is by far the top factor identified by our adopters as their primary reason for adoption. More than trial adoptions, low adoption fees, free behavior training, length of stay, the dog being already trained, videos or marketing featuring the dogs, and a number of other factors. The second most popular response (56%) is that “staff was very helpful in explaining everything I needed to know to feel comfortable adopting.” These responses are consistent over a one year period, and they demonstrate that **guided, well-informed interaction with a new dog outside of their kennel is by far the most powerful tool shelters have** in influencing adoption and in finding the right matches.

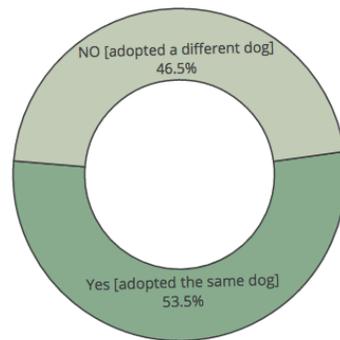


- Treating potential adopters as **clients** - not customers.
- **Proactive client service** - engaging with clients from the moment they come in the door until the moment they leave.
- Having someone who is **responsible for ensuring a pleasant experience** for the client. Following up throughout the process of the adoption.
- Bedside manner - taking pride in our ability and to successfully navigate **difficult conversations** with adopters.
- Having staff that can can conduct **safe and productive introductions** between dogs and clients

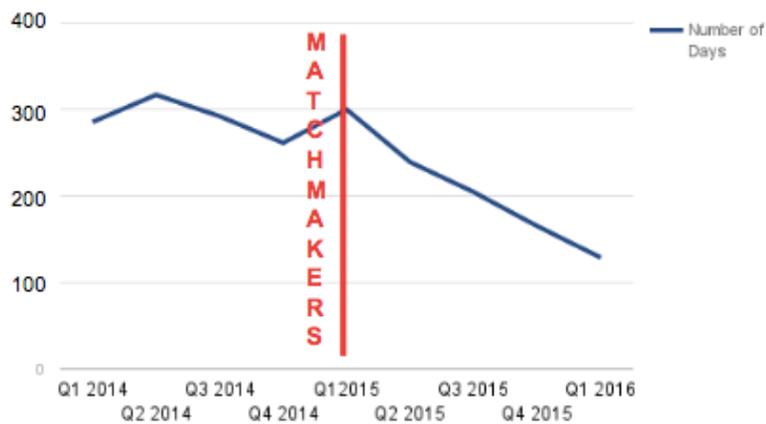
Does this program help dogs who might otherwise be overlooked, get into homes?

- In the first 6 months of the Matchmaker Place Program at APA!, we saw a **50% decrease** in the average length of stay in our dog population.
- We identify and analyze any obstacles to adoption. For instance, **talking to clients about how and why dogs behave the way they do in the unnatural kennel environment**. These will be slightly different at every shelter/ rescue, but there will be some shared obstacles. Several examples of this over the past year: We found that behavioral signs on the front of dogs kennels present a “stop sign” for potential adopters. We created a “dog walking safety checklist” for volunteer and staff dog walkers to convey behavioral information about the dogs. These checklists are behind the dogs kennel cards remove the obstacle of having behavioral information on the front of the kennels. We found that the busy environment within the main courtyard was not an ideal environment to introduce clients to dogs. With the help of volunteers we created an air conditioned “life room” in a renovated airstream where clients can have a more natural and calmer experience with the dogs.

Did you adopt the same dog you originally came in to see?



Length of Stay for Dogs in Adoption Program



Can you tell me about some of your favorite success stories?

Izzy:

- Came to Austin Pets Alive! in January 2016 as a 12 year old senior labrador mix with notes of being uncomfortable interacting with dogs and having destructive separation anxiety in the home.
- The phrase 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks' was not applicable to Izzy. She was enrolled in the Canine Good Citizen program and started working on her skills with the APA! behavioral team .
- Izzy spent months in the shelter waiting for her "forever family", that family finally came almost a year later.

Pippa:

- 3 year old Pit Bull mix who was in and out of the shelter since 2014.
- Consistently struggled in her interactions with other dogs
- Was in the CGC program working on her skills
- Adopted after client came in asking about CGC dogs

-Completed CGC training with her adopted and has moved on to pass service dog training

Tuffy:

-4 year old Pit Mix. Was in and out of the shelter system for most of his life.

-Involved in an incident with little known details or facts that listed him as a dog that wasn't able to live inside of Austin City Limits.

-Was overly stressed inside the high stimuli shelter environment and showed poorly inside his kennel.

-Adopted to a family visiting APA! with two younger boys. Is now a very loved member of the family.

Midas:

-4 year old Lab mix who came to APA! as a stray with no home notes

-Was enrolled in the Canine Good Citizen program

-Went to temp foster for a cold front when APA! reached out to the Austin community asking for help.

-Temp fosters fell in love and was ADOPTED

There are hundreds of other examples.

When did the program get started?

The program in started in earnest in 2014. Since then it has grown rapidly and we continue to tweak our methods on a day to day basis.