

## **Implications of Visual Social Access on the Welfare and Behavior of Shelter Dogs**

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Animal shelter environments have many stressful factors that impact the welfare of shelter dogs, such as lack of predictability and control, and social isolation. Social isolation has been found to increase abnormal behavior and lead to poorer adoption outcomes. Providing visual access to shelter dogs is a relatively easy environmental modification that increases social opportunities and allows for more predictability and control over the environment, potentially improving welfare. To investigate the impact of visual access on the behavior of dogs, we used a within-subject design, conducting 5-min focal observations four times weekly before, during, and after visual access was provided by partially removing a barrier between crates at a suburban dog shelter. Our preliminary analysis of 17 subjects using non-parametric Friedman's Tests ( $\alpha = .05$ ) found no significant difference between phases in regard to anxiety behaviors ( $\chi^2 (2) = .50, p = .78$ ), frustration behaviors ( $\chi^2 (2) = .51, p = .77$ ), time spent in the front of the crate ( $\chi^2 (2) = 4.50, p = .11$ ), self-directed behaviors ( $\chi^2 (2) = 1.86, p = .40$ ), resting behaviors ( $\chi^2 (2) = 4.59, p = .10$ ), or vocalizations ( $\chi^2 (2) = 4.59, p = .10$ ). The absence of an increase in vocalizations during visual access may encourage shelters to implement this change. However, the lack of a decrease in anxiety or frustration behaviors may indicate that visual access alone is insufficient for providing welfare benefits and that shelters should prioritize increasing social contact in dogs through playgroups or group housing.

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