

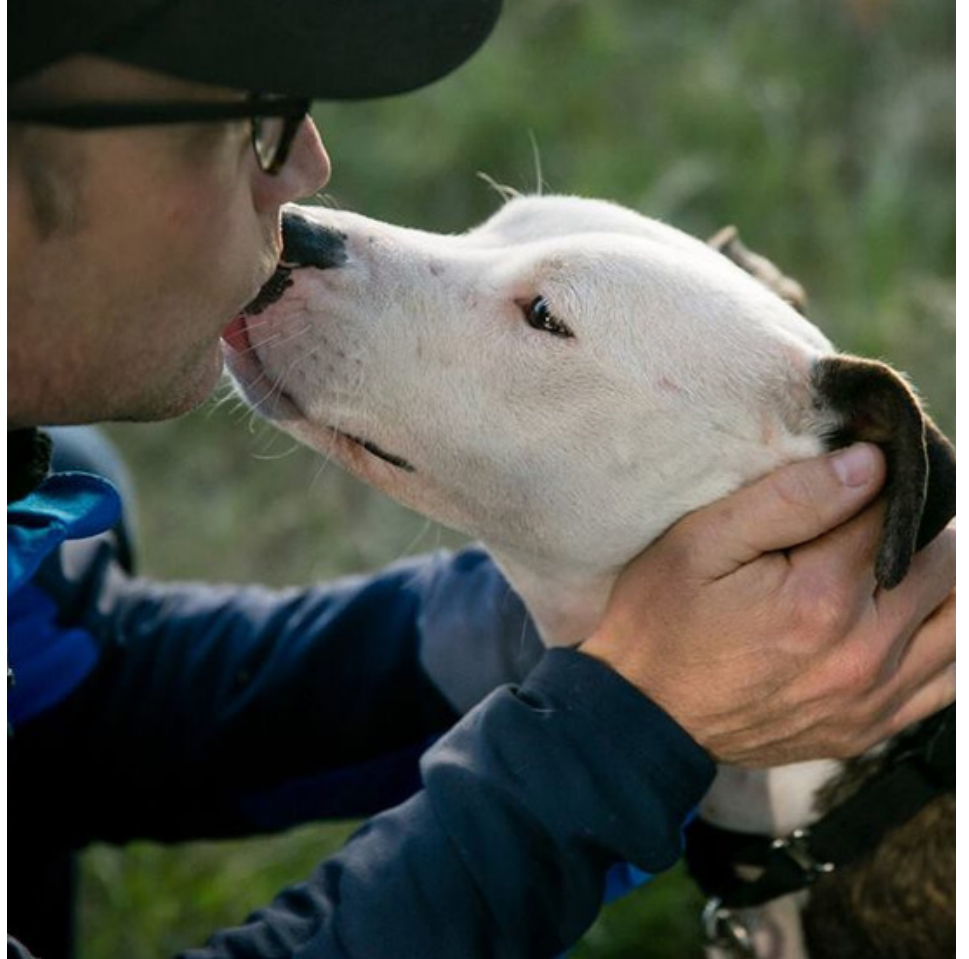
A ROADMAP TO REMOVING BREED LABELS

Kristen Auerbach, Deputy Chief Animal Services Officer at Austin Animal Services shares her shelter's process.

We learned that no matter what the kennel card says, potential adopters, volunteers and staff will make guesses. And they're usually going to disagree with each other about those guesses.

Initially, we only removed breed labels from the kennel cards of dogs we'd identified as "pit bull" dogs. After removing those labels, we noticed an increase in people asking about the breed of a particular dog. This turned out to be a good thing. The question provides the perfect opening for a staff person or volunteer to talk about the inaccuracy of breed labeling and the importance of getting to know each dog as an individual with its own unique personality traits.

Now, we're working with our shelter software system provider to remove the breed labels from our 'adoptable' pets list so dogs will be described only with their names, ages and personality profiles.



Our journey to do away with breed labels began even earlier. Last year, we stopped referring to dogs by breed guess on our social media platforms.

We talked about the individual dog's personality, quirks, sociability with other dogs and people, but we stopped talking about breed. We did this because we know the term "pit bull" does not describe any breed of dog. It's a subjective label that means different things to different people. It has no basis in science or genetics.

In our mission to get our adopters to see the dog not the label, and in the interest

of full disclosure, the most honest thing we could do was simply say:

**"WE DON'T KNOW
WHAT THE BREED OR
BREED MIX IS"**

Things got a little more complicated when we stopped labeling all dogs, because we would all stand in front of a dog, and a staff member would say:

**"THAT IS A PUREBRED
DACHSHUND" - OR
ROTTWEILER, OR
WHATEVER THEY
THOUGHT IT WAS.**

"IT SIMPLY ISN'T NECESSARY NOR IS IT HONEST FOR US TO PRESENT GUESSES OF ANY BREED AS IF THEY ARE FACT"

But, we asserted that the vast majority of dogs in our shelter are of mixed breed heritage and, unless we have indisputable proof a dog came from a breeder and has a documented pedigree, we don't know for sure.

EVEN THEN, HOW DOES A BREED LABEL HELP A DOG GET A HOME?

People are going to make their own visual breed identification, whether it's written on a kennel card or not. It simply isn't necessary nor is it honest for us to present our guesses of any breed as if they are fact.

We're having a lot of success focusing on the dog, not the perceived breed. But each animal welfare organization has its own challenges and in some places, not labeling is impossible because of breed specific legislation or breed-based adoption restrictions.

What then?

It's up to us, as advocates, no matter what our particular situation, to explain to people that breed labels are subjective.

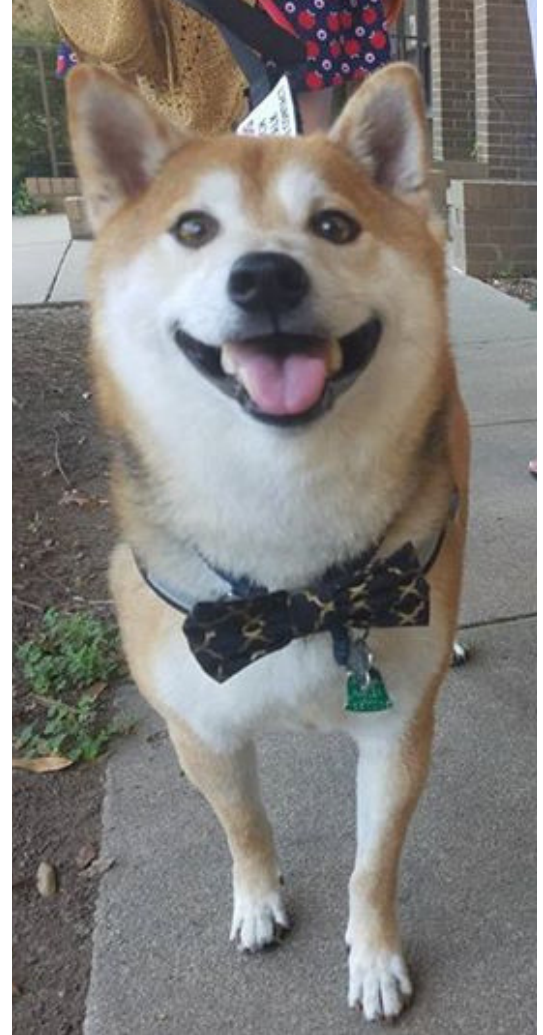
They are not based in science.

WHEN ANIMAL WELFARE PROFESSIONALS GUESS, WE GUESS WRONG AT LEAST 50% AND EVEN 75% OF THE TIME.

We should tell people that the vast majority of dogs in our shelters are mutts or mixed breeds and that the way they look says nothing reliable about their behavior.

If you are at a shelter or rescue where putting an end to breed labeling is a possibility, you may be surprised at the immediate changes in your adoption numbers.





REFER TO THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES
TO SEE HOW OTHER SHELTERS HAVE
TACKLED THIS CHANGE

Orange County Animal Services:

<https://www.animalsheltering.org/magazine/articles/whats-label>



The Humane Society of Indianapolis:

<http://www.indystar.com/story/life/2016/05/04/wit-hout-label-more-pit-bulls-adopted/83249332/>



Dallas Animal Services:

<https://www.facebook.com/dallasanimalservices/photos/pb.101535076582438.-2207520000.1461097264./985463288189608/?type=3&theater>



Capital Area Humane Society:

<https://animalfarmfoundation.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/capital-area-humane-society-saving-lives-with-open-minds/>



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EXPLAIN TO PEOPLE
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THEY ARE NOT
BASED IN SCIENCE."

- Kristen Auerbach