

Mutt Mentors



A VOLUNTEER-BASED
APPROACH TO SUPPORTING
LONG STAY SHELTER DOGS

Presented by Olivia Whitton



About Me



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About Our Shelter



ANIMAL REFUGE LEAGUE OF GREATER PORTLAND

- We serve Portland, Maine's largest city, as well as 14 other towns in our region
- Fear Free Certified shelter
- 2,800 Annual Intakes
- 96.7% Live Release Rate
- 32,000 Annual Volunteer Hours



Session Agenda

- What Is Mutt Mentors?
- A Problem Identified
- What We Heard From Volunteers
- Mutt Mentor Program Objectives
- How the Program Works
- Identifying the Right Volunteers
- Managing Expectations & Troubleshooting
- Impact & Case Study
- Implementation / How-To
- Q&A



What is Mutt Mentors?

One volunteer + one dog

3+ hours per week, and any extra time goes to
that same dog

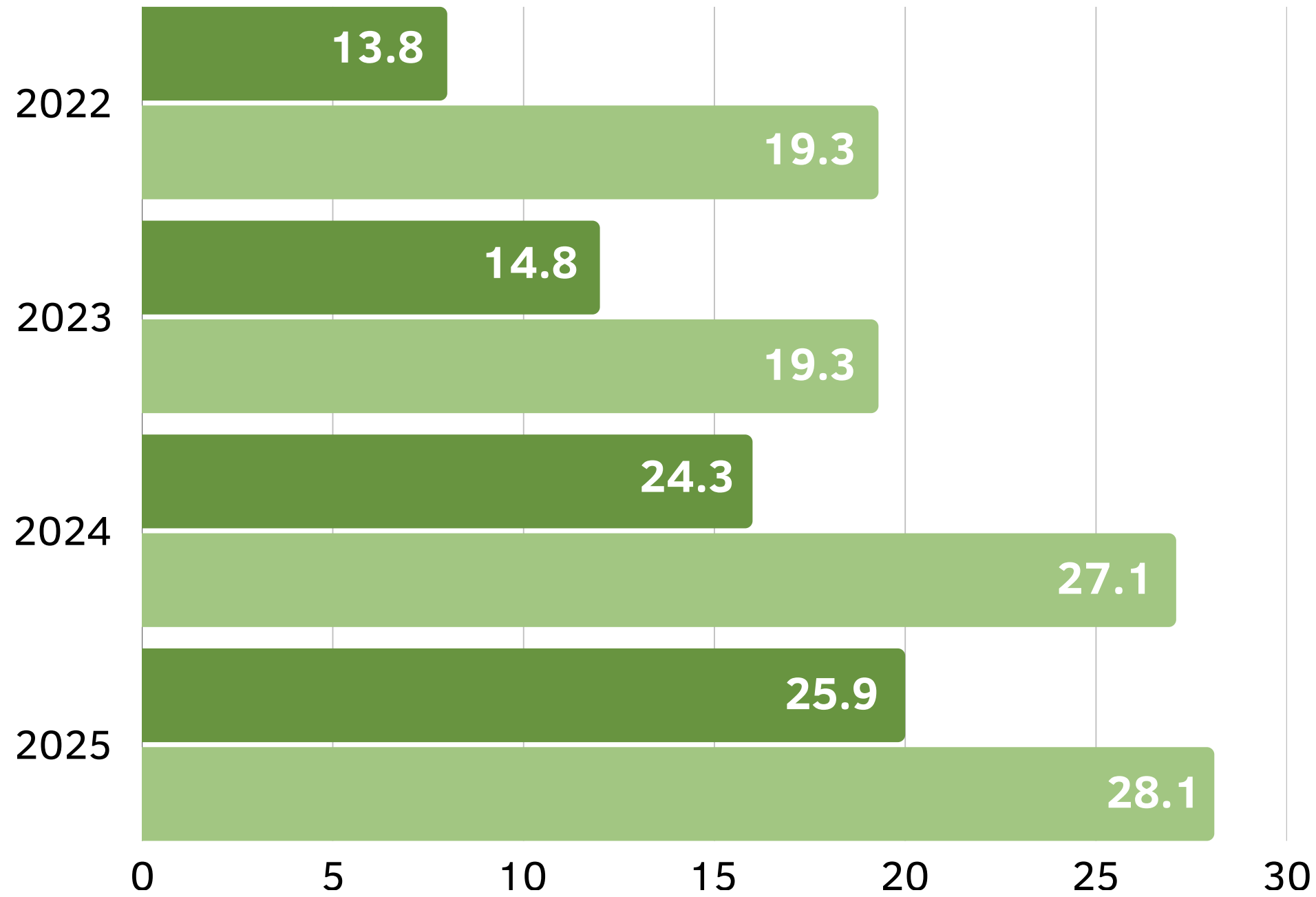
ARLGP's highest level dog handlers

Staff-selected dogs

Dogs are working on specific things as dictated
by the staff

A Problem Identified

● All Dogs ● Large Dogs



Length of Stay in Days



What We Heard From Volunteers



This is the most meaningful way I can contribute.

Michelle

You guys are so busy, let us be the resource.

Kailey

You have given us the tools, we want to do more.

Jen

FAS Scale

Stop

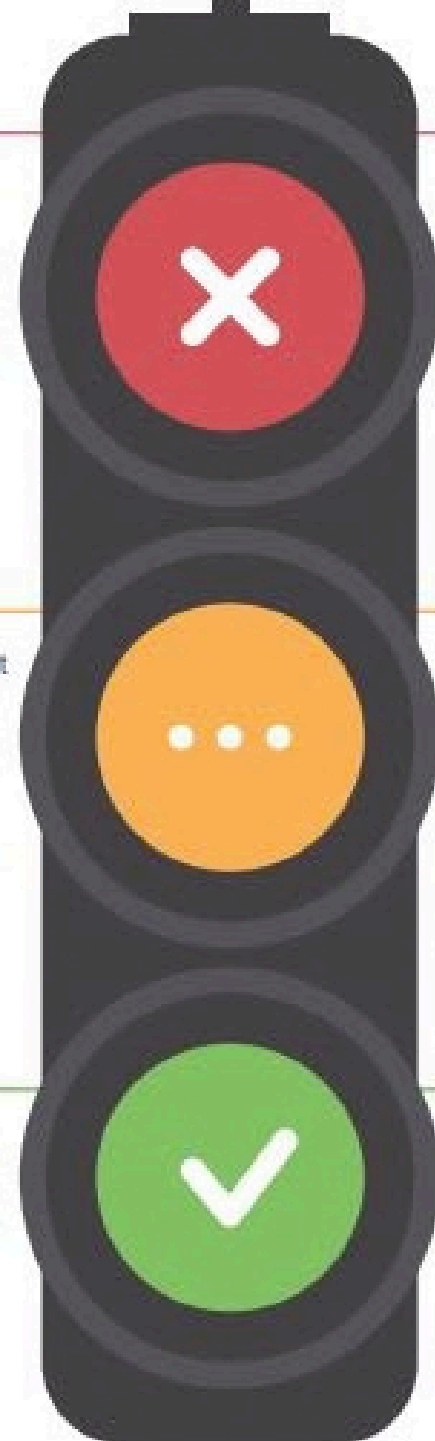
- Little to no interest in treats, toys, and/or attention
- Fight, freeze, or flight response
- Sedation+ pharmaceutical/nutraceutical PVP

Caution

- Moderate interest/disinterest in treats, toys, and/or attention
- Fidgeting, difficulty settling
- Pharmaceutical/nutraceutical PVP

Go

- Readily accepts treats, toys, and/or attention
- Relaxed or mild signs of FAS
- Nutraceutical PVP



High FAS

Level 5 Severe signs of FAS with aggression, such as growling, lunging, barking, hissing, snarling, and/or snapping. Intolerant of procedures.

Level 4 Severe signs of FAS without aggression, such as immobility, fidgeting, escape behavior, dilated pupils, excessive panting (dog), increased respiratory rate, trembling, tense closed mouth, ears back, and/or tail tucked or thrashing (cat). May or may not be accepting any types of reinforcers. Not interested in interacting with team members and may be showing active avoidance (moving away).

Moderate FAS

Level 3 Displays more than 2 moderate signs of FAS occurring more than 4 times in a minute. May refuse reinforcements for brief moments. Might take treats roughly at times. May also be hesitant to interact with team members but not actively avoiding team members.

Level 2 Displays 1 to 2 moderate signs of FAS, such as ears slightly back or to the side, tail down, furrowed brow, moving slowly, overly attention seeking, and/or panting with a tighter mouth (dog), occurring 4 or fewer times a minute. Readily accepts reinforcement (treats, toys, and attention). Still soliciting social interactions with team members.

Low FAS

Level 1 Displays 1 or 2 mild signs of FAS, such as lip licking, avoiding eye contact, turning head away without moving away, lifting paw, partially dilated pupils, and/or panting but commissures of lips are relaxed, occurring fewer than 4 times a minute. Interested in reinforcers (treats, play, attention) and chooses to interact with the team members.

Level 0 No signs of FAS. Pet displays relaxed body language and solicits social interactions with team members.

Program Objectives

- Not focusing on length of stay
- Primary objective is to reduce FAS while in the shelter
- Maintain positive behaviors and/or teach life skills for more successful adoptions
- Happy side effect: increase positive outcomes
- Leverage already invested volunteers to minimize burden on staff



Current Stats

151

Mutts Mentored

20

Total Mentors

91%

Live Outcomes

15

Active Mutt/
Mentor Pairs

6

Original Pilot
Program Pairs

How the Program Works

Mutt Mentor Dogs		Contacted?	Email	Notes
Cindy	Precious	Yes	email123@email.com	Break in march
Kailey	Horace	Yes	email123@email.com	
Jen M	Checkers	Yes	email123@email.com	Traveling til 3/25
Shelby	Bowdin	Yes	email123@email.com	
Jane	Pudding	Yes	email123@email.com	
Jordan	Chauncy	Yes	email123@email.com	
David	Zuma	Yes	email123@email.com	
Steph	Shayla	Yes	email123@email.com	
Michelle	Luke	Yes	email123@email.com	Mostly weekend availability
Ellen	Bentley	Yes	email123@email.com	Shy/fearfuls, non-physical dogs
Faith	Rocko	Yes	email123@email.com	Traveling 4/3 - 4/10
Katie	Bubblegum	Yes	email123@email.com	
Jen C	Coco	Yes	email123@email.com	
Tory	Joey	Yes	email123@email.com	No one too strong
Kristen	Brownie	Yes	email123@email.com	Dogs under 40 lbs
Dogs nominated for mentors	Reason for Mentoring	Date submitted	Name of Nominator	Notes
Shamrock	Confidence building	3/10/2026	CV	Stalling, door Dashing
Buddy	Needs more enrichment	3/14/2026	OW	Starting Clonidine 3/14
Josie	Basic manners, impulse control	3/15/2026	AZ	Knows sit, down

Staff keeps this list up to date.

How the Program Works



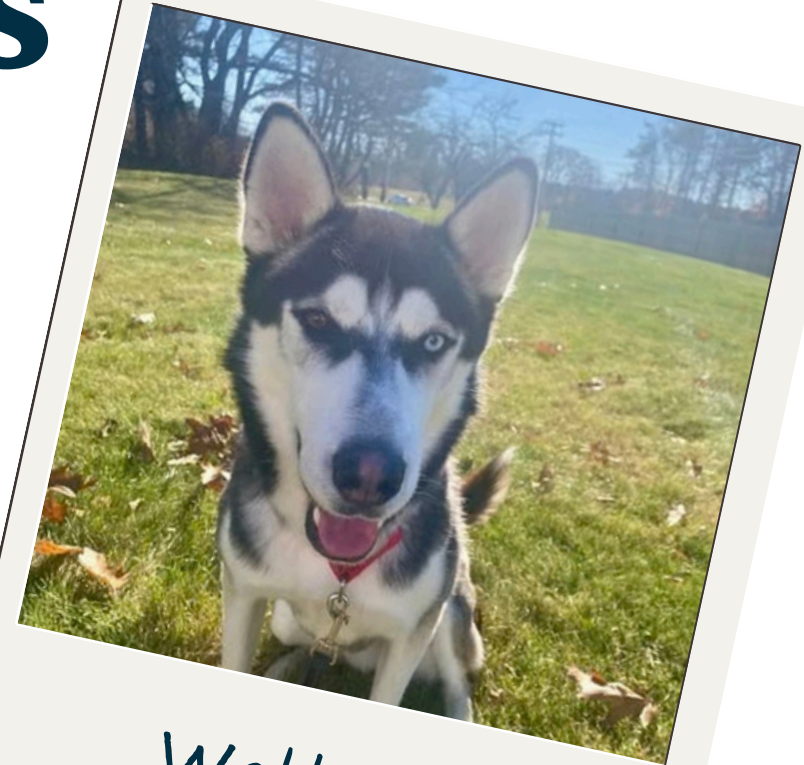
Snugs



Field trip to Lowe's



Coffee run



Walkies



Mentor's house



Hotel overnight!!!



Lighthouse trip!




PUP CUP!

1. Name *

Enter your answer

2. Select the date of your outing. *

Please input date (M/d/yyyy) 

3. Dog Mentoring *

Enter your answer

4. How well did your outing go with your mentee?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Very Bad Perfectly! No issues.

5. Please enter any details of your outing that are to make note of:-Where did you go?-What did you work on?-How did your mentee do with distractions? *

Enter your answer

6. Would you like the behavior team to troubleshoot anything with you? *

Yes

No

Maybe

3/13/26
 MM: Jen
 Score: 9/10

Coco and I had another good couple of hours today! We drove to Scarborough; she is getting better in the car. She still will cry now and then, but she will stop relatively quickly; it also helps sometimes if I roll up her window and roll it down again, which distracts her attention away from whatever is causing her anxiety.

She got to have a nice long walk down a road along a pond, and she got to sniff all of the good sniffs. She does very well on the leash. She does seem to be pretty focused on all the smells she comes into contact with, which definitely makes me wonder about her prey drive.

We had some nice time just sitting inside together, also. I made her a few treat pouches out of taped-up toilet paper rolls. She likes to tear them up, but she does not eat the paper (she also doesn't eat toys that she pulls apart). That is a good thing to see!



Average score
8/10!

We have a glass half full group of Mentors!

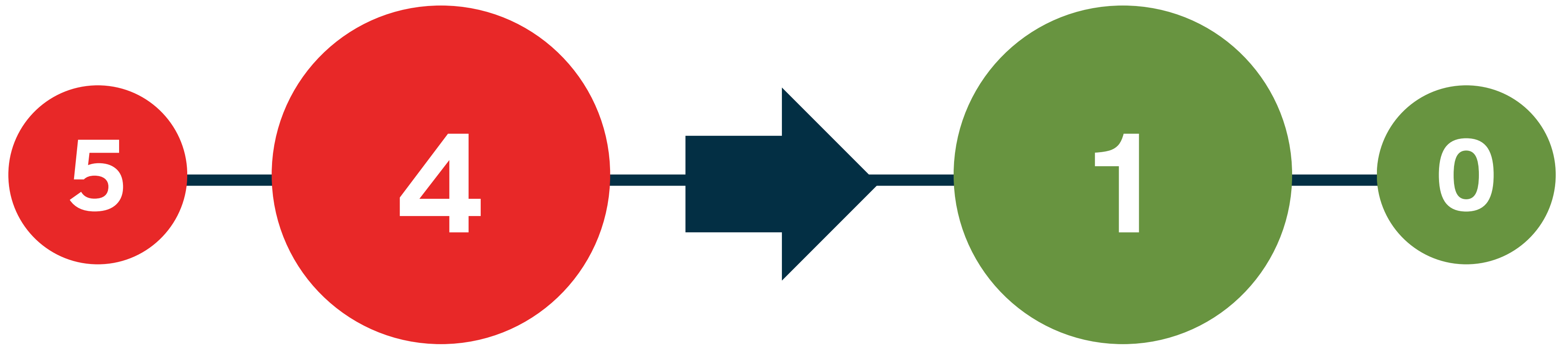


Volunteers, Expectations, and Troubleshooting



- Our highest level handlers
 - Time Commitment = 3+ hours/week
 - Staff Input
 - Now, many self-identify!
-
- Managing Expectations
 - Troubleshooting
 - Euthanasia
 - Key = TRANSPARENCY!
-

Program Impact



Average Weekly FAS Score

*(starting the week after being paired
with a Mutt Mentor!)*

Program Impact

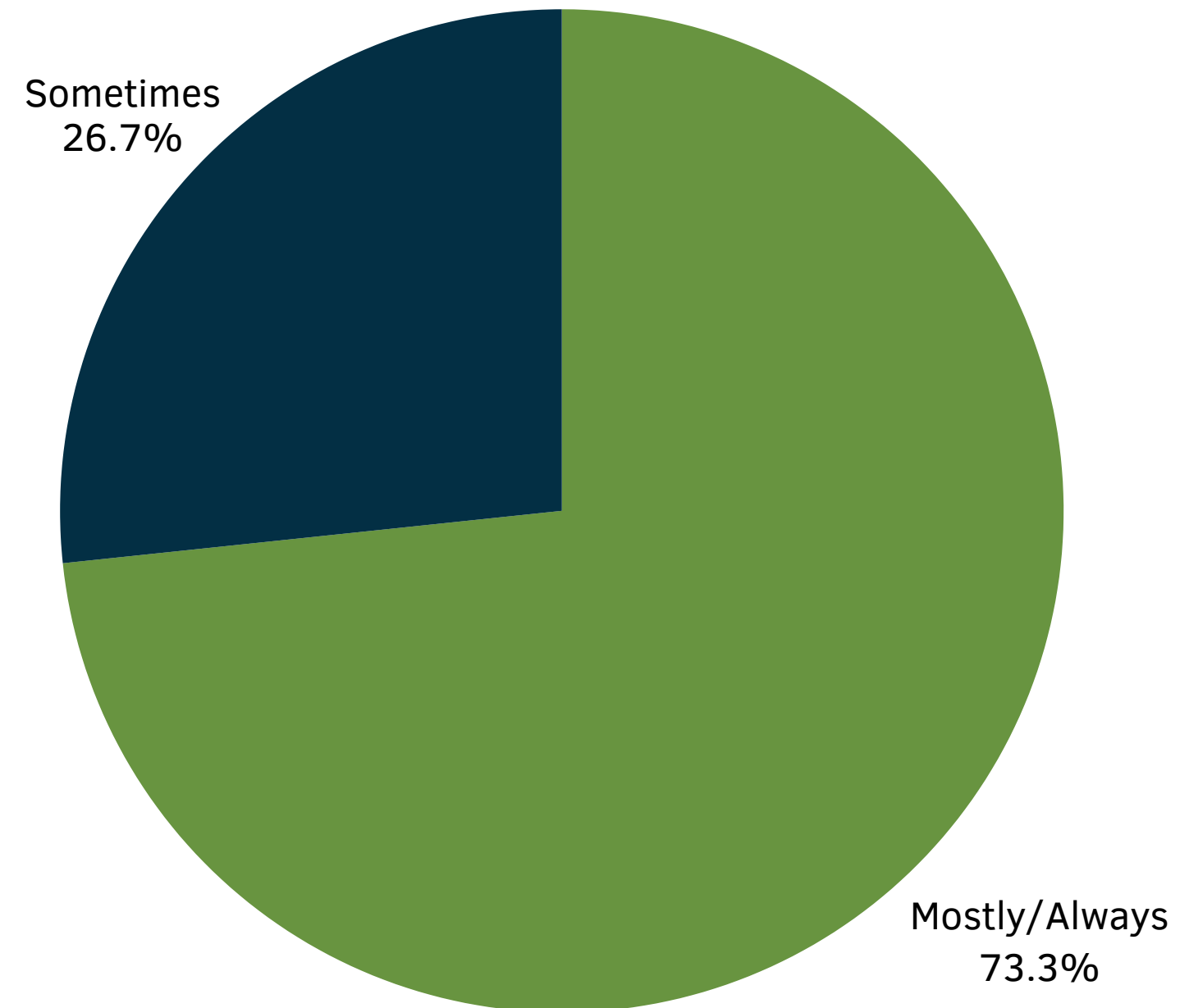
December 2025 Survey Results

4.5



Average when asked for their general satisfaction level with being a Mutt Mentor

Do you feel that your work as a Mutt Mentor makes a difference for the dog?



Case Study: Horace



Initial Concerns: inability to settle in kennel, rapid barking at people, no house manners

Mentor: Kailey **LOS to Date:** 243 days

Avg. FAS Score Pre-MM: 4.5

Avg. FAS Score w/ MM: 1

MM Interventions: energy outlets and enrichment, impulse control training, acclimating to a house

Current Concerns: Navigating 3 legs

Implementation/How To

1. Have dogs who need it
2. Think realistically about your objectives
3. How will you measure success?
4. Identify your point person(s)
5. Identify your pilot participant(s)
6. Figure out how you'll get notes & what you'll do with them
7. Support your participants



Questions?



Reach me with any questions at owhitton@arlgp.org!