



## Understanding and Caring for Rescued Hoarded Dogs

By Franklin D. McMillan  
August 2016

## **About Best Friends Animal Society**

Best Friends Animal Society is a leading animal welfare organization working to end the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters by 2025. Founded in 1984, Best Friends is a pioneer in the no-kill movement and has helped reduce the number of animals killed in shelters from an estimated 17 million per year to under 350,000. Best Friends runs lifesaving programs across the country, as well as the nation's largest no-kill animal sanctuary. In collaboration with a network of thousands of animal welfare and shelter partners, and community members nationwide, Best Friends is working to Save Them All.

Best Friends Animal Society  
5001 Angel Canyon Road  
Kanab, UT 84741

Phone: 435-644-2001  
Email: [info@bestfriends.org](mailto:info@bestfriends.org)  
Website: [bestfriends.org](http://bestfriends.org)

## **About Franklin D. McMillan, DVM**

Dr. Frank McMillan, the former director of well-being studies for Best Friends, is a board-certified specialist in veterinary internal medicine. He was in private practice in Los Angeles for 23 years and was a clinical professor of medicine at the Western University of Health Sciences College of Veterinary Medicine. Dr. McMillan lectures worldwide and has published dozens of scientific journal articles on the subjects of emotional health and suffering, stress, and quality of life in animals. He is the author of the textbook *Mental Health and Well-Being in Animals*, and a book for the general public titled *Unlocking the Animal Mind*.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Part 1: Psychological and behavioral characteristics of rescued hoarded dogs</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Results of the study.....	5
<i>Health problems</i> .....	5
<i>Behavioral and psychological concerns</i> .....	5
<i>Increased fears</i> .....	6
<i>Increased attachment and attention-seeking behavior</i> .....	6
<i>Increase in undesired behaviors when left alone at home, such as house-soiling</i> .....	7
<i>Increase in compulsive and repetitive behaviors</i> .....	7
<i>Decreased aggression</i> .....	7
<i>Decreased trainability</i> .....	7
Results of the follow-up study.....	7
<i>Sociability</i> .....	8
<i>Trust of humans</i> .....	9
<i>Sex preference</i> .....	10
<i>Eye contact</i> .....	12
<i>Coping with change</i> .....	12
<i>Mental functioning</i> .....	13
<i>Sleep disturbances</i> .....	15
<i>Unusual things</i> .....	17
<b>Part 2: Rehabilitation and treatment methods for rescued hoarded dogs</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Most effective methods of rehabilitation .....	18
Having other dogs in the home .....	24
Least effective methods of rehabilitation .....	27
Causes of setbacks.....	31
How to know what to do .....	34
<b>Part 3: Outlook for recovery and long-term well-being</b> .....	<b>36</b>
Insurmountable obstacles .....	36
The well-adjusted dog.....	38
Percentage improvement over time .....	38
Happiness and related experiences .....	40
Adopters' satisfaction .....	41
Most rewarding experience.....	45
Disappointing or troubling experiences.....	47
Would you adopt this dog again? .....	51
Would you do anything differently? .....	53
Inspirational stories .....	54
Final comments.....	58
<b>Online resources</b> .....	<b>63</b>

# Introduction

Animal hoarding occurs when individuals accumulate animals in numbers that exceed their ability to provide for the animals' basic needs, resulting in a situation that causes harm to the animals. In some hoarding cases the animals are kept outside, but the most common environment is a house or other structure (e.g., barn, mobile home, old buses, cars) containing dozens to hundreds of animals running free and/or confined to cages or other enclosures.

The quality of the environment in cases of animal hoarding exists on a spectrum. Most typically, however, the conditions are extremely unsanitary. A large amount of feces and urine is usually present on the floors and the odor emanating from the waste material — predominantly ammonia — may be powerful enough to cause injury to the animals' eyes, nasal passages and lungs. The animals may be forced to compete for food, which may be insufficient in quantity, of poor quality, contaminated or spoiled.

The duration of the time the animal lives in the hoarding situation ranges from months to the animal's full life span. Conditions in many hoarding environments are so bad that many of the animals don't survive. When police enter hoarding situations, there are deceased animals present in a majority of cases.

Many of the animals are born into the hoarding environment, which often means they are not adequately socialized to humans during their critical youth stages. Other animals in hoarding environments were formerly someone's pet, ending up in the hoarding situation in a variety of ways.

It has been estimated that as many as 5,000 new cases of hoarding are reported each year in the U.S., which would mean that as many as 250,000 animals are in a hoarding situation each year.<sup>1</sup>

Hoarding is done with all types of animal species, including cats (most common), dogs, birds, horses, farm animals such as goats and pigs, small mammals such as rats, reptiles, and small and large exotic animals. We chose to study hoarded dogs because they are among the most numerous victims and the ones most adopted into homes.

Over the years, thousands of the animals held in hoarding situations have been fortunate enough to escape their confined existence and make their way into adoptive homes. Those who are involved in adopting these animals into homes have long been aware that many of the animals show evidence of psychological harm in their behaviors and emotional responses to normal life.

In a series of scientific studies undertaken by Best Friends in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine and the Atlantic Veterinary College, we have made great headway in advancing our knowledge about formerly hoarded dogs. I have compiled all of this information below.

The information I present will be divided into three parts: "Part 1: Psychological and behavioral characteristics of rescued hoarded dogs"; "Part 2: Rehabilitation and treatment methods for rescued hoarded dogs"; and "Part 3: Outlook for recovery and long-term well-being." The manual includes details about adopters' experiences and satisfaction levels with having adopted a rescued hoarded dog.

*<sup>1</sup>Patronek G. 2008. Animal hoarding: A third dimension of animal abuse. In: Ascione FR (Ed.), The International Handbook of Animal Abuse and Cruelty: Theory, Research, and Application. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, pp. 221-246.*



# Part 1: Psychological and behavioral characteristics of rescued hoarded dogs

To fully understand the psychological make-up and mental health of dogs removed from hoarding situations, we solicited adopters of these dogs to participate in a study consisting of an extensive online questionnaire about the behavioral and psychological characteristics of their dogs. The full study was published in the journal *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*.

We compared the scores of these dogs with those of standard pet dogs. There were 408 formerly hoarded dogs included in the study, and these dogs had been living in their adoptive homes for an average of 2.2 years. Based on best estimates, the average age of the dogs was 5.5 years.

## Results of the study

### Health problems

Physical health problems were reported at significantly higher rates by owners of formerly hoarded dogs than by owners of the control dogs. Because our study focused on psychological issues, we did not break down the physical health problems into specific medical conditions affecting the dogs. However, the physical problems are well-known and include mild to severe dental disease, hair coat and skin disorders, eye and ear infections, internal and external parasites, traumatic injuries, and malnutrition and starvation.

### Behavioral and psychological concerns

The specific results of our study showed a broad range of abnormal behavioral and psychological findings in the rescued hoarded dogs. When compared to normal pet dogs, hoarded dogs had significantly higher rates of the following:

- Fear toward a wide variety of things, such as unfamiliar people (strangers), other dogs, and general life events such as noises, movements, and strange objects
- Not wanting to be touched, picked up, or held



- Attachment and attention-seeking behavior
- Undesired behaviors when left alone at home, such as house-soiling
- Compulsive and repetitive behaviors

The hoarded dogs showed significantly lower rates than pet dogs for these factors:

- Aggression toward strangers
- Aggression toward other dogs
- Trainability
- Chasing small animals
- Excitability (only during the first 2.5 years in a new home)
- Energy level
- Rivalry with other dogs over food, toys, beds, and human attention
- Persistent barking (if placed in a home with no other dogs)

It is essential to note that all of the factors evaluated above represent a composite of rescued hoarded dogs as a *group*. In other words, the

increases or decreases in the different factors are an average for the group of hoarded dogs, compared to the average for the normal pet dog group. What this means is that for any increased value — fear of strangers, for example — there are some individual rescued hoarded dogs who show absolutely no fear at all of strangers, while others have astronomical increases, causing the average for that group of dogs to be higher than that reported in the normal pet dogs.

The same is true for all the decreased values. For example, while the group of hoarded dogs shows a lower level of trainability than the group of normal pet dogs, some hoarded dogs are highly trainable. On a similar note, in discussing the findings for hoarded dogs, when I make a statement like “Rescued hoarded dogs show a fear of virtually everything,” I’m referring to the dogs as a group, not indicating that every individual hoarded dog is fearful of everything.

### **Increased fears**

The most dramatic and important difference we found between the rescued hoarded dogs and normal pet dogs was in their levels of fear. The fears involve everything a dog could be fearful of and the intensity ranges from mild fear (such as being startled a little more than a normal dog would be when hearing a loud sound) to being completely “shut down,” frozen with fear, and unable or unwilling to interact with anyone or anything.

**Fear of strangers.** Formerly hoarded dogs were much more likely than typical pet dogs to have a high level of fear of unfamiliar people. The causes of this fear of people could be due to a number of factors. The dogs who were born into the hoarding environment may not have received adequate socialization to humans in their puppyhood. Early positive interactions are critical for the developing brain to form the neural connections that promote positive social relationships throughout life. Another reason for this particular fear could be that the hoarded dogs had been separated from human interaction for such an extended period of time that their confidence in humans had eroded and they now feel that humans can’t be trusted. Irrespective of the precise cause of this fear, the level of the fear may range from a very mild shyness up to terrifying and debilitating fear.

**Fear of other dogs.** It might seem that dogs in a hoarding situation, who are often around many other dogs, would be comfortable around dogs when they are taken out of the hoarding environment. But our study showed that, as a group, rescued hoarded dogs were more fearful of other dogs than typical pet dogs are. This is likely due to the fact that many dog-to-dog interactions in the hoarding environment are unpleasant in nature (because of the stress and limited access to vital resources, such as food), so the dogs develop negative feelings about other dogs. In addition, some hoarding situations involve keeping dogs in small cages separate from other dogs, which means they are unable to socialize normally with fellow dogs, resulting in poor social skills.

**Fear of general life events such as noises, movements, and strange objects.** This fear involves everything in life other than living beings (humans, other dogs, cats, etc.), including such diverse things as a car driving by, a strong wind, wide open space (some of the dogs have never been outside of a house, or even outside of a cage), a door slamming shut, stairs, and so on. These fears are usually the result of the dogs not being exposed to these things during their hoarding experience, and so such objects and noises are frightening.

**Not wanting to be touched, picked up, or held.** Another prominent finding that would be classified somewhere in between a fear and a dislike is the hoarded dogs’ tendency to not want to be touched, picked up, or held. This almost certainly has a connection to the causes of fear of people — that is, a loss of confidence and trust in people. Once again, there are many rescued hoarded dogs who react normally to human contact, but as a group, the dogs exhibit more negative reactions to human touch than the normal pet dog group. Interestingly, the decreased desire for actual physical contact with humans is in contrast to an increased desire to be near humans, as seen in the next item.

### **Increased attachment and attention-seeking behavior**

It is not surprising to see that dogs deprived of adequate human companionship show more desire to be close to humans. Many of these dogs were pets before they ended up in the hoarder’s possession,

so they likely missed the human company they had during their previous time as a family pet.

### **Increase in undesired behaviors when left alone at home, such as house-soiling**

Dogs in hoarding situations don't have restrictions on where they may urinate and have bowel movements; they can go pretty much anywhere they want, anytime they want. Even the dogs who were formerly pets in someone's home may have been in the hoarding environment so long that they forgot the "proper" place to "do their business." And in fact, even those who didn't forget and may have wanted to go in the proper place (i.e., outside) would likely have had no chance to do so if confined strictly inside a house and especially if kept in a cage. Therefore, it is no surprise that when they are rescued and adopted into homes, their elimination behavior isn't a model of perfection.

### **Increase in compulsive and repetitive behaviors**

In rescued hoarded dogs, behaviors that appear compulsive and occur in repetitive patterns include spinning in circles, licking themselves excessively, pacing, chewing and licking blankets and carpets, and (oddly enough) hoarding objects and toys themselves. Research has shown that dogs and other animals develop these types of behaviors when in stressful situations, and performing the behaviors is believed to be a method of coping with that stress. The stress can be composed of fear, anxiety, boredom, conflict, frustration, and other distressing emotional states. Many repetitive behaviors continue in animals removed from the stressful environment, perhaps because the behaviors have become ingrained as a habit.

### **Decreased aggression**

A number of rescued hoarded dogs have been reported by rescuers and adopters to show aggressive tendencies, but as a group overall the aggression level of these dogs toward unfamiliar people and toward other dogs was found to be significantly less than what is seen in typical pet dogs. We consider low aggression levels to be, in general, a good thing. However, if aggression is decreased due to the very high fear levels — such that a dog sensing a threat is paralyzed with fear

rather than psychologically prepared to defend himself if need be — then what we have is a good thing but for a bad reason. This appears to be the case in many rescued hoarded dogs.

### **Decreased trainability**

It was no surprise to find that rescued hoarded dogs are less responsive to training than typical pet dogs are. The most likely explanation for the decreased trainability is that fear levels are accompanied by a rise in stress levels, and elevated stress interferes with concentration, attention, and memory, thereby impairing the brain's learning mechanisms. Fearful and stressed individuals exhibit shifts in focus, mental drifting, and an inability to solve problems or follow rules and directions. Poor trainability is exactly what we would expect to see with these psychological processes.

The crucial thing here is that for any animal (any person, too, for that matter) whose impaired learning is attributable to underlying fear or anxiety, any effort to push, exert more control, assume more power over, demand more compliance, force more obedience, or dominate the animal in any way will only be detrimental to the animal's well-being. Fear-induced impairment of learning is not the fault of the animal, not a misbehavior or stubbornness. In fact, it's not even within the animal's power to control. Punishment or more forceful attempts to train will only heighten the frightened animal's fear, leading to suffering and an even poorer ability to learn.

## **Results of the follow-up study**

The results above came from the first part of the study, which made up the published report in the journal *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*. After that part of the study was completed, I developed a second questionnaire that focused on many aspects of formerly hoarded dogs that weren't adequately covered in the original study. I emailed all of the participants of the first questionnaire and invited them to fill out this follow-up questionnaire. The number of dogs entered into the second questionnaire was 296. What follows are the results of this second study. I've included the important

questions just as they appeared in the questionnaire, followed by the results, including examples of written-in comments. All of the names of dogs and people, as well as any other identifying features, have been changed in order to preserve confidentiality.

One important point: This follow-up study was conducted only on the formerly hoarded dogs enrolled in the first study; no “normal” control group was used. Therefore, while the results of this second study give us a very good characterization of rescued hoarded dogs, we can’t determine whether the results differ from the normal dog population, where they differ, and by how much.

### Sociability

Many of the questions in the first questionnaire asked about fear as well as aggression toward people and dogs. As important as these traits are, however, they don’t evaluate all aspects of sociability. For example, there could be two dogs who are both nonfearful and nonaggressive toward humans, but one could be extremely sociable and friendly with people and the other could have no particular interest in being with people. The two dogs couldn’t be more different in that regard, yet they score identically on the fear and aggression levels. Therefore, to find out more about the dogs’ sociability, I asked this question:

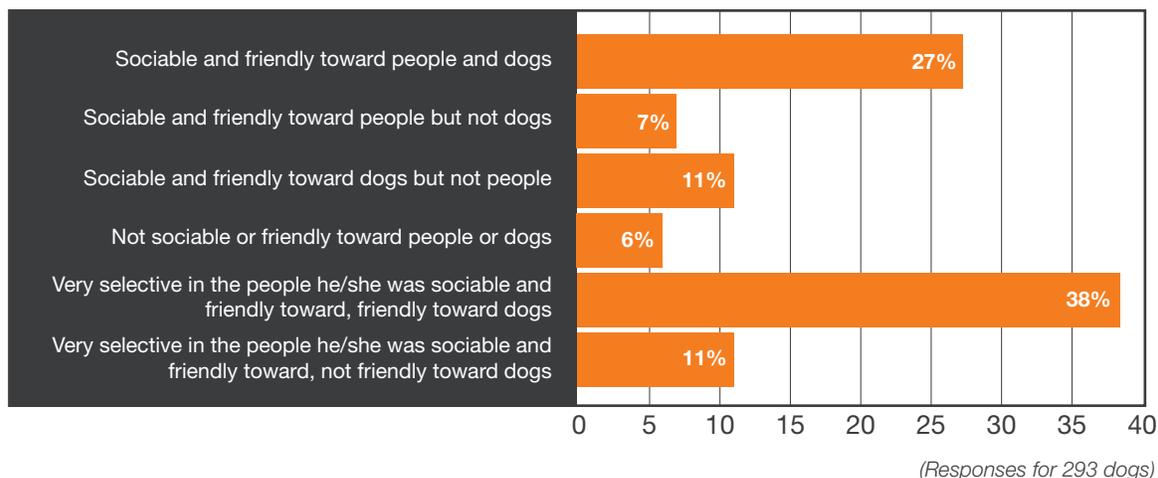
***Dogs, like people, have different desires and abilities to socialize with others. Please check the choice that comes closest to describing your dog’s current sociability.***

The choices offered and the percentage of dogs with each of them are on the graph below.

A reminder: We asked about the dogs’ *current* sociability, which means we are seeing what these dogs are like after being in their adoptive homes for an average of 2.2 years. Therefore, this data represents the dogs’ level of sociability after becoming well-adapted to their current household — more than enough time for a dog’s true personality and demeanor to become evident.

These results tell us a number of things about the sociability of rescued hoarded dogs. Just over a quarter (27%) of the dogs are comfortable and friendly with everyone — people and other dogs. The largest percentage (38%) are friendly toward other dogs but selective about which people they are comfortable and friendly with. Overall, almost exactly half (38% + 11% = 49%) of rescued hoarded dogs show selectivity in the people with whom they prefer to form bonds. This is not surprising, since our other studies of dogs who have been through other types of hardships and adversity (such as abuse and

**Dogs, like people, have different desires and abilities to socialize with others. Please check the choice that comes closest to describing your dog’s current sociability:**



confinement in puppy mills) also show this type of selectivity, which is likely due to the trust issues they have toward humans (the subject of the next question).

Here are some representative examples of the written-in comments on sociability:

- Minnie is very timid around people and dogs. She has never shown any aggression toward either, but clearly is very timid and frightened with anyone other than me.
- Crosby acts relatively “normal” with me. He is finally trusting of my husband. He has lived with both of us the entire time, but bonded very closely to me. He is still terrified of other people but tolerates being in the same room now with people that he sees on a regular basis. He will retreat to a different room in the house if people other than myself or my husband are there. He has never had a problem with other dogs or cats. He actually seems to rely on them for support. He will approach people he knows for a treat if he can stand behind the other dogs.
- Daphne has come a long way. She used to be very selective in who she liked, but as we have socialized her more, she has become loving and friendly toward all.
- She wants nothing to do with other dogs — very, very afraid.
- Loves my husband and me, but nobody else.
- Maya is very sweet, but scared of everyone. She hides or cowers around unfamiliar people, but is more relaxed once she gets to know them. It's the same situation with other dogs.
- Daisy really has to get to know someone and see them many times before she will be sociable with them. She is not even particularly sociable with my sons, who live in the house and whom she sees most days.
- Starsky does not have issues with other dogs but rarely engages in play with them. Instead, he prefers to interact with people and play with people with a ball.
- Loves other dogs, was initially very fearful of all people, now shows excitement at people he knows and less timid toward strangers.
- Loves to play with the other dogs in the household but won't dare come near me or any other person.

- She is sociable toward nearly all people (just a few she did not like) and selective toward dogs.
- Hesitant at first but not unfriendly. Warms up to both dogs and people, especially when Summer (her companion dog) does.
- Loves everyone — kids, dogs, squirrels, you name it.

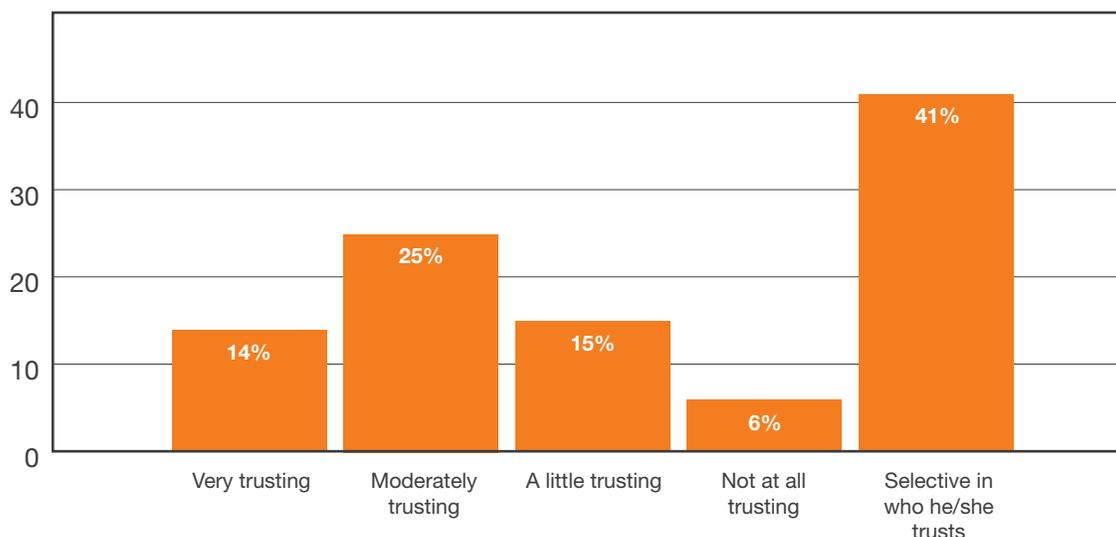
### **Trust of humans**

The fear of humans that showed up significantly elevated in the first questionnaire was often described by adopters in terms of trust, since trust is often regarded as the inverse of fear (one rises as the other falls). Technically speaking, however, lack of trust and fear aren't quite the same thing. A dog could have a low trust and low fear level of a person at the same time. For example, a dog who does not fear you may come to trust you to behave in consistent ways — such as feeding and arriving home at particular times each day — and if these behaviors became less consistent and unpredictable, then your dog's trust in you could go down but fear levels wouldn't rise. This just means that the lack of trust isn't necessarily related to anything threatening, like the fear of being punished. But having said that, for most of the dog's emotional experiences, trust in humans and fear of humans are opposites: When one goes up, the other goes down, and vice versa. I specifically addressed trust of humans in the follow-up study with the following question:

#### ***Hoarded dogs show a wide range in their level of trust of humans. How would you rate your dog's current trust of humans?***

This selectivity of trust (41%) showed up in the previous question about bonding, and it is a prominent feature of rescued hoarded dogs. Many people involved with the rescue of these dogs had already seen this, but finding it to be so extensive as to be considered a part of the nature of these dogs was important to understand fully. It is very valuable to be able to provide such information to adopters and prospective adopters, in order to properly guide their expectations and thereby avert any disappointments after adoption.

**Hoarded dogs show a wide range in their level of trust of humans.  
How would you rate your dog's current trust of humans?**



*(Responses for 293 dogs)*

Here are some of the comments on the dogs' trust of humans and observations about how, in many cases, it improved over time:

- She was not trusting at all when I got her, and has developed greatly in the four years I have had her, but I still see remnants of that behavior. She has been given a lot of love and security to help her.
- Biscuit has always trusted me completely. It has taken quite some time but she will now trust my parents and brother, but most definitely not to the level she trusts me. I always say that the dog people get to see is not the Biscuit that I know.
- Once she finally trusts someone who has been around her for six months or so, she is wide open and responds like a normal dog with attention-seeking behaviors.
- She trusts me, but after three years is still terrified of my husband. Trusts a man at her day-care, and the dog walker and her husband. Only recently will she come in the room if my parents and/or son are there, but runs past them to the couch and gets up if they do. She is on anxiety meds that have allowed her to do this.
- Sometimes I think she only trusts me because she has to trust someone. But I have made a huge amount of progress!

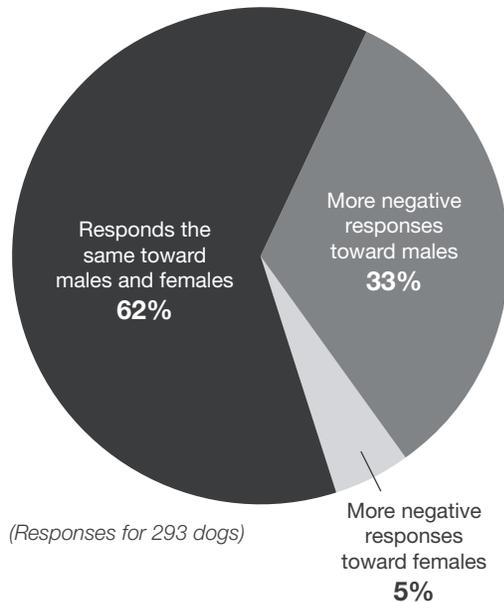
- He has bonded with his adopted person very well but still is very wary of her husband four months after adoption. When I visited him in his new home, he was slow to come to me but did eventually allow me to pet him. With his new person, he is very happy and trusting, as he was with me. He seemed to transfer all his trust from me to her very quickly after he was adopted.
- He is not trusting if he thinks you may put your hand on him. He sort of trusts us because we respect his aversion for the most part, but he does need occasional handling and then he will revert to non-trusting for a short period of time.
- We have not been able to recognize a common factor in the people Brandy chooses to trust, but her reaction to different people ranges from immediately friendly to quite shy.

**Sex preference**

Many people who filled out the first questionnaire commented that their dog disliked all men or, the opposite, preferred men to women. Because this was something the first questionnaire didn't ask about specifically, on the second questionnaire I asked the following:

***In their interactions with people, some***

**In their interactions with people, some hoarded dogs respond differently toward one sex than they do toward the other. Does your dog show any difference in his/her response toward people based on the person's sex?**



***hoarded dogs respond differently toward one sex than they do toward the other. Does your dog show any difference in his/her response toward people based on the person's sex?***

The choices were:

- A. No, in general he/she responds the same toward both sexes
- B. Yes, he/she has shown more negative responses toward males than toward females
- C. Yes, he/she has shown more negative responses toward females than toward males

What we had been presuming from all the personal reports is confirmed here, with some very precise percentages. There is a little less than 40% chance that a rescued hoarded dog will show any preferences based on a person's sex, and one out of every three of these dogs will prefer females to males. Because studies show that most hoarders are women, the most likely explanation for the sex preferences in rescued hoarded dogs is that the

low level of contact with male humans leads to greater fear responses toward males after removal from the hoarding environment and placement in an adoptive home.

Some comments about the more common preference, a preference for females:

- She is scared to death of men.
- While reactive to all strangers (shivering, corner hiding), with males she will add drooling, defecation.
- Kona has been very slow to warm up to my husband. She definitely shows extreme fear of tall males and will put herself in harm's way to get away from a man.
- Not aggressive toward males, just fearful. Comes around after awhile but very wary. My neighbor is a female, and he likes to run around in her yard when she is outside, smelling new smells. My sister and my son's girlfriend are females he has been around, and is still shy but less so than with males. We are trying to acclimate him to as many males as we can. Progress is slow.
- In time, he has learned to trust my husband almost as much as he trusts me.
- It wasn't just negative. Faith was terrified of males. After two years, she would sit next to my husband, but never ever allowed him to touch her.
- Sweetpea was supposed to be my husband's dog; he bathed her, took care of her, taught her to walk, etc., after we rescued her. But from the first time she could walk, she came to me. After over four years, she will finally sniff males' hands, but always goes to females more easily.
- Hoarded by a woman. Bonded with female in household. More open to women approaching him than men, but distinction is less now than it was 10 months ago.
- Did not like any males until my husband won her over with treats over many weeks. Now she is his special friend.
- She has not warmed up to my husband yet. When he walks in the room, she moves away from him. She is curious, though, and will watch him from a distance. He has been able to hand-feed her, although she is quite unsure about him.
- know her hoarder was a woman and I don't think she ever saw men until she was removed from the

hoard. She runs from all men unless they have her leash in their hands or have treats for her.

And some typical comments for the less common preference, a preference for males:

- Prefers my husband and “tiptoes” around me.
- She more readily goes up to new males, but tends to be standoffish with new females.
- Mooshie is more comfortable with my husband than with me.

### Eye contact

An issue that was not included in any question on the first questionnaire but has been observed by rescuers and adopters of hoarded dogs is that the dogs will often avoid making eye contact. I’ll explain the importance of this characteristic below, but first here is the question and the responses.

#### **How frequently does your dog make eye contact with you and maintain it for at least a few seconds?**

It’s important to understand why I included this question, as it seems like it might be a minor issue with only academic importance. It’s not. All social animals, including humans, view direct eye contact as a positive social message. (There is one exception, eye contact during aggressive

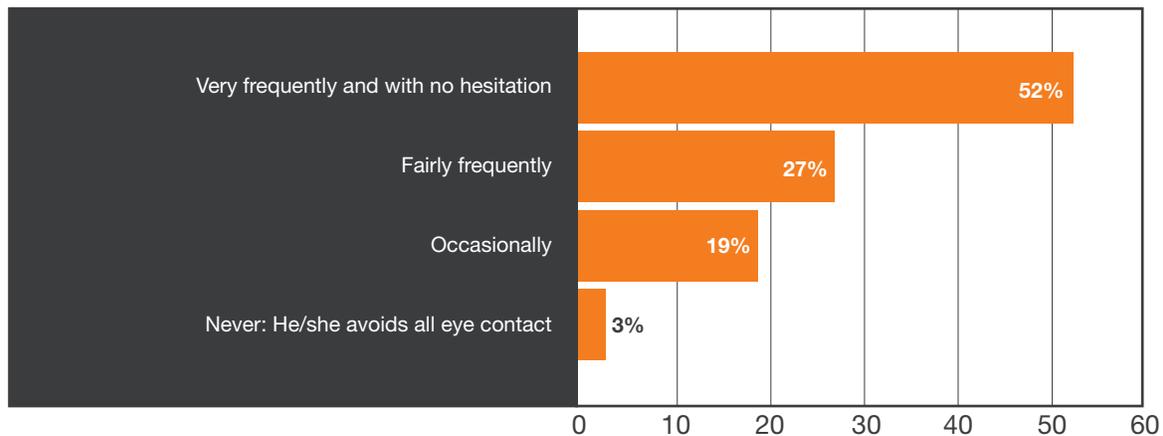
confrontation, but that is accompanied by abundant other signs, such as growling, certain ear and body postures, and hair-coat erection.) What this means is that when another social animal refuses to make eye contact, it is perceived, consciously or subconsciously, as a social rejection. And what this readily translates into is a perception on an adopter’s part that the dog who is unwilling to make eye contact dislikes or is rejecting the adopter, which can be interpreted as a failed adoption and lead to a possible return of the dog to the rescue group.

So, it’s important for adopters to know ahead of time of the possibility that their dog may not make eye contact like non-hoarded dogs do, and to not consider it a rejection. This is one of the characteristics that show that these dogs have different mental make-ups (they’re “wired differently”) than typical pet dogs, and therefore we can’t use normal dog behavior, standards, or expectations with rescued hoarded dogs. The only expectation that adopters can have when adopting these dogs is that they will be taking into their care a very special one-of-a-kind member of the canine species. All the “normal dog stuff” is an added bonus.

### Coping with change

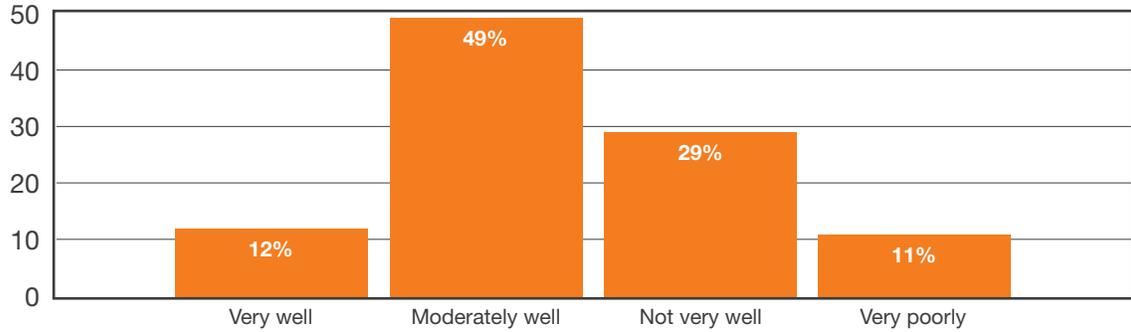
One comment that showed up frequently on the first questionnaire is that many of these dogs were

**How frequently does your dog make eye contact with you and maintain it for at least a few seconds?**



(Responses for 288 dogs)

**In general, how well does your dog adapt to or otherwise cope with change?**



(Responses for 292 dogs)

not good at dealing with changes in their routine — such as furniture being rearranged, a disruption in the timing of daily events like walks and feeding, or a move to a new house. To get more information, I asked the following question:

***In general, how well does your dog adapt to or otherwise cope with change?***

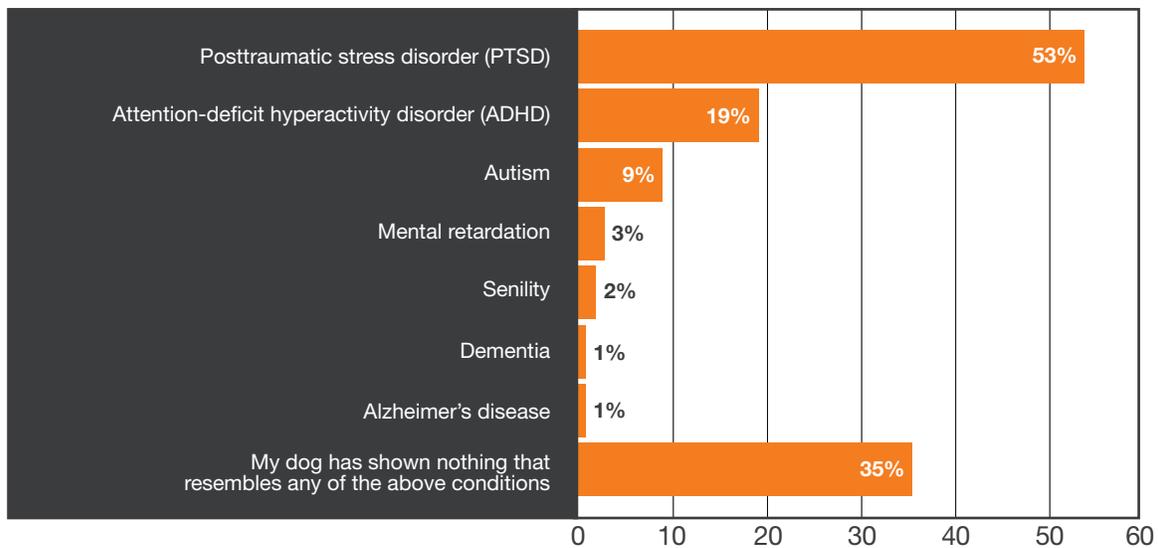
These numbers are in line with what we had expected, based on both the long-term experience of rescuers and adopters as well as how psycho-

logically traumatized people cope with change. The lesson here is to try to maintain consistency in the dogs' routines, and do any necessary changes gradually with any of these dogs who show signs of trouble coping with change.

***Mental functioning***

Many people who have adopted a rescued hoarded dog use certain analogies to describe the animal's psychological state. The goal of this question was to focus specifically on this topic:

**Have you ever considered your dog's current behavior or mental capabilities to resemble any of the following human conditions? (Check all that apply.)**



(Responses for 291 dogs)

***Have you ever considered your dog's current behavior or mental capabilities to resemble any of the following human conditions? (Check all that apply.)***

In the graph on page 13 are the responses people selected, ranked in the order of frequency of the choice.

One important note here: Neither the adopters nor I were making a “diagnosis” with the answer to this question. I just wanted to know, using human analogies, how people viewed their dog’s mental make-up and behavior. This sometimes makes it easier to get an idea of the dog’s psychological state as a whole, rather than trying to construct a cohesive picture out of a long list of abnormal behaviors.

Here are some of the comments offered by adopters:

- **Senility:** Moby sometimes forgets he just went outside and goes out a second time to potty. His thinking is a little slow — it takes him a minute to get out of the way of other dogs, for example.
- **PTSD:** Any noise (it doesn’t necessarily have to be loud) causes her to startle and cower. She feels safe backed into a corner and uncomfortable standing in the open.
- **Total ADHD!** He is very easily distracted, so training sessions can only last 2-3 minutes at a time before he just can’t stand it anymore. During a simple stay/recall, he can’t simply trot back to me. He has to bound toward me as fast as a race-horse. He’s over-the-moon thrilled about absolutely everything, no matter how often he’s done it. For example, every time he sees the leash or his food bowl or gets in the car (e.g., normal, daily activities), you’d think he’d won the lottery. Every. Single. Time. He received the Most Enthusiastic Award in his basic obedience class.
- **Autism:** Diva is very intelligent in certain scenarios. She also does certain repetitive motions compulsively, which seem to comfort her. (She circles the house counter-clockwise. If she doesn’t go out the back door the first time but needs to use the yard, she will make the loop before exiting the house.) **PTSD:** We know Diva was not fed well during the hoarding. After two years with us, regular meals and a regular routine, she is still extremely nervous about eating. She is easily startled with the slightest noises. She is terrified of small children and basketballs. She is generally “shell-shocked.”
- **Classic symptoms of PTSD:** Exaggerated startle response, hiding in dark places, fear of the unknown and, most notably, learned helplessness. For instance, if something (such as the doggy gate) fell on top of him, he would not even move out from under it, but would lie there passively under it. This changed over the time he was in foster care and he had more normal responses by the time he was adopted, although his default mode if frightened was still to hide or become very passive.
- **ADHD?** Maybe. He gets into frenzies of licking his blanket, or licking anything he can. It’s like he gets in a trance over it and I can’t get him to break his focus on the licking. He has several obsessions like that. **PTSD:** He has severe food issues from being deprived of food. Also, he cannot be put into a carrier, kennel at the vet or any confined space. If so, he will start a real shallow breathing (almost not breathing), gums and tongue start to turn blue, eyes get glazed over. He has distorted reactions to very small things. He will become terrified of his food dish for weeks at a time and I have to hand-feed him. Then, just as suddenly, he will get over it and eat normally again.
- **ADHD:** Distracted easily, anxious, overactive at times in a nervous way, cannot concentrate, over-stimulated from outside stimulus.
- **Autism:** Repetitive spinning when nervous. Wanting to be social but somewhat unsure how to do that.
- **ADHD and PTSD:** Extreme anxiety and excitement in new situations, an inability to calm down, panic attacks in which he needs to be held by me to calm him down, a “zoning out” with repetitive behavior (e.g., jumping, head-butting), loses focus in situations.
- **PTSD:** She will become shy and clingy with her parents if loud noises occur. She will run and hide from things like vacuums, hangers, tape measures. She is scared of foil or things that have a shiny surface and she avoids her reflection in the mirror even if we are holding her. She will flinch and sometimes run if she is eating and someone walks by. And she looks for encouragement to go potty if you are with her when she does it, as if she isn’t sure if she’s

going to get into trouble. Sometimes she will seem confident and great, and then something triggers her “run” and she loses that confidence.

- PTSD: He sometimes stares off at nothing very intently, has over-reactions to small things (wind, a noise outside), sometimes acts very stressed out, has bouts of extreme hyperactivity followed by a very mellow calm, barks incessantly at a small movement or a well-known person.
- Autism and PTSD: Stares at walls, stays in corners and stares at corners, hugs the side of the house when he goes out. Does not venture into the open yard. Hates loud noise, voices, thunder. Any kind of commotion, he runs and hides. Hides in closets and laundry room. Always likes to have his face near an air vent. His nose was a little flattened — it looks like by living in a crate. Never socialized with the rest of the dogs and family when they were all together. Would hang alone in another room. You could try and get him to come and join everyone but he always preferred to be alone.
- PTSD: Picasso exhibits fearful and jumpy behavior whenever a movement or noise occurs that she was not expecting or is unfamiliar with. Also, I would describe her fear at times as hitting the level of sheer terror. In addition, Picasso struggles with how to play with humans. When we try to engage in any type of traditional human/dog games, she appears confused and won't engage.
- PTSD: Mitzi will be fine and acting normal, then all of a sudden without warning, she'll get fearful and shy and bolt. I can't figure out what I did or said that might have caused it. She'll be fearful for a while, go off to her bed and “chill out,” I guess, then later she'll let me approach her and start to warm up again. She's an enigma at times.
- Autism: OCD-like compulsion surrounding her toys and other possessions.
- PTSD: He is over-responsive to loud noises, things falling unexpectedly (even a pillow falling from a couch will send him running), change in routine, raised voices, knocks at doors or doorbells. Often looks worried, hides frequently, finds it difficult to relax, will be stiff when I lie next to him. Yet despite all of this terror-like behavior, he seeks out love and affection. And seeks out my company.

- PTSD: Jasper was very fearful, hyper-vigilant, responded quickly and fearfully to the point of panic at loud noises. He was almost constantly anxious. All that has been significantly reduced. He still runs from bangs, bumps, or unusual noise.
- PTSD: Initially, for the first few years, she seemed to show PTSD-like behavior. Now that we have had an opportunity to safely socialize her, I don't notice any of that behavior.
- PTSD: She can be acting her comfortable “normal” and all of a sudden it is like a switch is thrown and she is in “duck and hide, slink away” mode. The trigger for that switch is not consistent.

### **Sleep disturbances**

One aspect of psychological trauma that is well known in people, especially in the case of PTSD, but has not been examined in dogs is disturbances of one's sleep. There are many ways that someone's sleep may be disturbed, and I wanted to know how that might manifest in rescued hoarded dogs, so I asked this question:

#### ***Does your dog show any of the following sleeping disturbances once a month or more frequently? (Check all that apply.)***

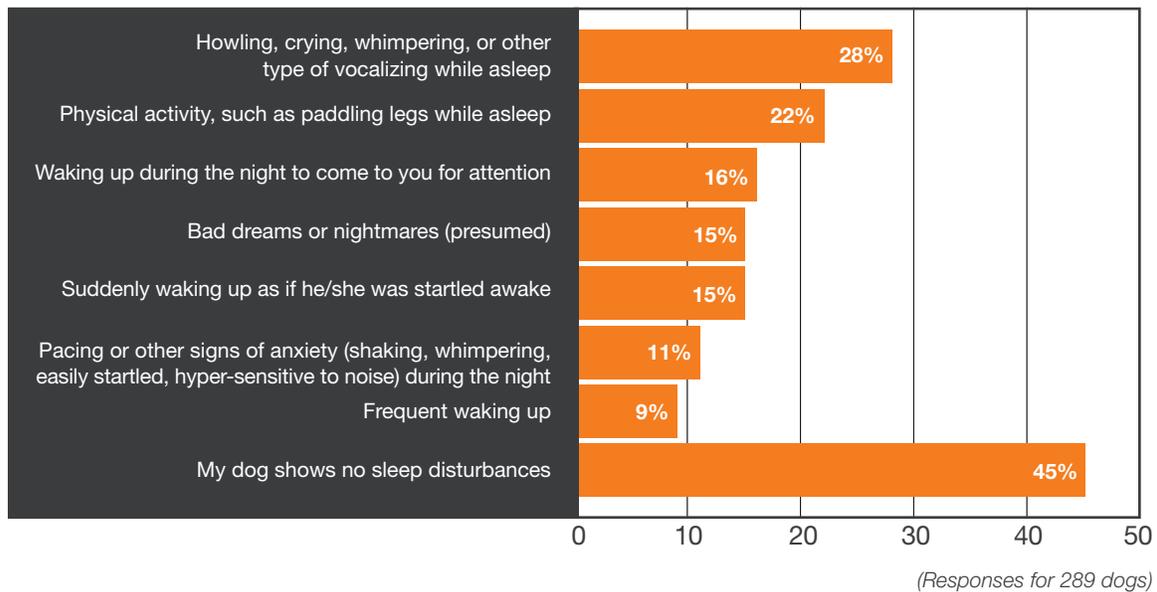
The graph on page 16 shows the responses, ranked in the order of frequency of the choice.

We are hampered in interpreting these results, since we have no idea what the “normal” occurrence is of each of these factors in the general dog population. Also, of course, the scoring of bad dreams or nightmares is based on our presumptions and cannot be confirmed. It is relatively reassuring that 45% of the dogs show no signs of having disturbances to their sleep (again, not knowing how normal dogs would score), but that does mean that 55% of rescued hoarded dogs — a slight majority — do experience sleep disturbances of one type or another.

Here are some of the descriptions we received:

- When we first adopted him, he had terrible dreams, during which he would whimper and howl and growl and flinch like he was being struck—not the ordinary, happy, chasing, excitement dreams I've seen in my other Scotties. He was clearly

**Does your dog show any of the following sleeping disturbances once a month or more frequently? (Check all that apply.)**



being threatened and hurt in these. (I would wake him up; sometimes he'd go straight back into the dream and I'd have to wake him again.)

- He is vocalizing much less now in his sleep than he did the first few months. He still wakes up in the middle of the night and comes over to me. He sleeps on the bed with my other two dogs. Wants physical contact with me.
- Ramona is hypervigilant with noises when sleeping (and anytime). She is much better in sleeping longer periods now than when we first got her. She sometimes goes all night without waking me for attention. She is also more likely to sleep on the bed with us now, which has resulted in less disrupted sleep.
- She moves her feet and yelps, and makes what seems like a bark but with her mouth closed. Frequently when we got her, but less frequently now, she makes sounds like she's screaming or trying to get away. We think it's a nightmare.
- She cries in her sleep and it's so disturbing to me that I wake her and talk to her and pet her till she settles. The nightmares seem to be getting more infrequent; the first six months, it was 3-4 times a week. The noise she makes breaks my heart. I hope I'm doing the right thing by waking her.

- She will wake in a startle, then come snuggle on my head and paw at me for attention, then she insists on staying in physical contact with me.
- Wakes up every time anything in the house moves (people, dogs, cats, anything). I have NEVER seen him sleeping; he's always awake if I'm in the house.
- He starts to move his legs and then starts crying. Within less than a minute, he spasms frequently and then he wakes up. He runs in his sleep but he is also crying and his head sometimes comes up while he is doing that. He runs so hard that he literally kicks me multiple times and can bruise me.
- It doesn't occur as frequently as it used to, but she still occasionally has "bad dreams," with muffled barks, whimpering, crying and "running" legs. I wake her by gently saying her name and lightly stroking her. She seems relieved to see that it's me and will usually go back to sleep afterward.
- Nearly nightly, Tanner cries out, growls, woofs, shakes his body, and seemingly remains asleep.
- She frequently whimpers, shakes, jerks, twitches, paddles and kicks while sleeping. She often jumps awake and looks around fearfully. When she realizes where she is, she becomes dramatically more comfortable.

## Unusual things

Outside observers often notice things that a dog's people do not. I approached this issue using the following question:

### ***Is there anything about your dog that has caused a visitor to your household to comment on as being unusual?***

Sixty-two percent of people responded "yes." Here are some of the specific comments:

- They have said he doesn't like to be looked at in the eyes by them.
- His shyness and cowering or barking and hiding.
- Most people ask me how can you live with an animal that is basically wild. Unfortunately, that is the only side of Elton that people get to see. They see a dog that hides and shakes or runs away.
- They are amazed at how far she has come since we got her.
- Everyone comments on how easygoing, affectionate, and trusting she is with people. She will sleep with complete strangers on the guest bed with them when friends come to stay.
- Her begging for attention.
- His continued fearfulness, and the fact that when I have company he completely glues himself to my lap or side. Seriously, not kidding.
- Some visitors never see her, or sometimes she does what we call "drive-by glarings."
- Friends that visit frequently finally were able to walk by her in the living room without her bolting away. They commented that finally, after two years, she was allowing them to get close and told her, "See, we won't hurt you."
- Just that they feel bad or a little hurt that when Nellie sees them she runs and hides (especially people who consider themselves "dog people" that most dogs usually love).
- Said Buffy is a very "happy go lucky" dog.
- Barking at strangers, even after they've been in the house for several hours.
- He stares at me and never breaks eye contact. I've gotten used to it, but anyone coming over will always ask, "Is that dog staring at you?" He will even fall asleep staring at me, wake up,

continue to stare and then fall asleep staring at me again.

- Visitors have never seen him. He is always under the bed if there is anyone other than myself in the house. He is beside the bed when I am home but ready to bolt under the bed.
- Well, yes. He is such a cute little guy and so very, very aggressive.
- Everyone comments on how friendly and sweet he is.
- He acts like they are there to capture and kill him.
- Linus hides under the couch and barks when company is over. My daughter-in-law once stated that she doesn't believe that I really have a dog, only a tape recorder under my couch, because she's never really seen Linus.
- He looks very sad.
- People often comment that they feel bad for how scared she appears.
- She has NEVER BARKED since we've had her and has taken people by surprise when she shyly peeks around a corner to see who's here. "Oh, I didn't know you had a dog!"
- Oh, yeah. Everyone who meets Luke knows that he is not normal. He stiffens when he is petted, will run from eye contact, will watch visitors but will not approach a visitor, will run and hide if startled or sees anything he doesn't like. (And he doesn't like a lot of things.) Watches visitors from a distance (a room away). He has a wide-eyed look on his face around visitors. Visitors have said they are afraid of him, though he NEVER growls.
- They can see how afraid she is and how she shakes, and they know it's sad for her to be scared.
- Those who know her see how her confidence is growing.
- How normal she is after the hoarding situation she lived in, and how warm and friendly she is to guests.

## Part 2: Rehabilitation and treatment methods for rescued hoarded dogs

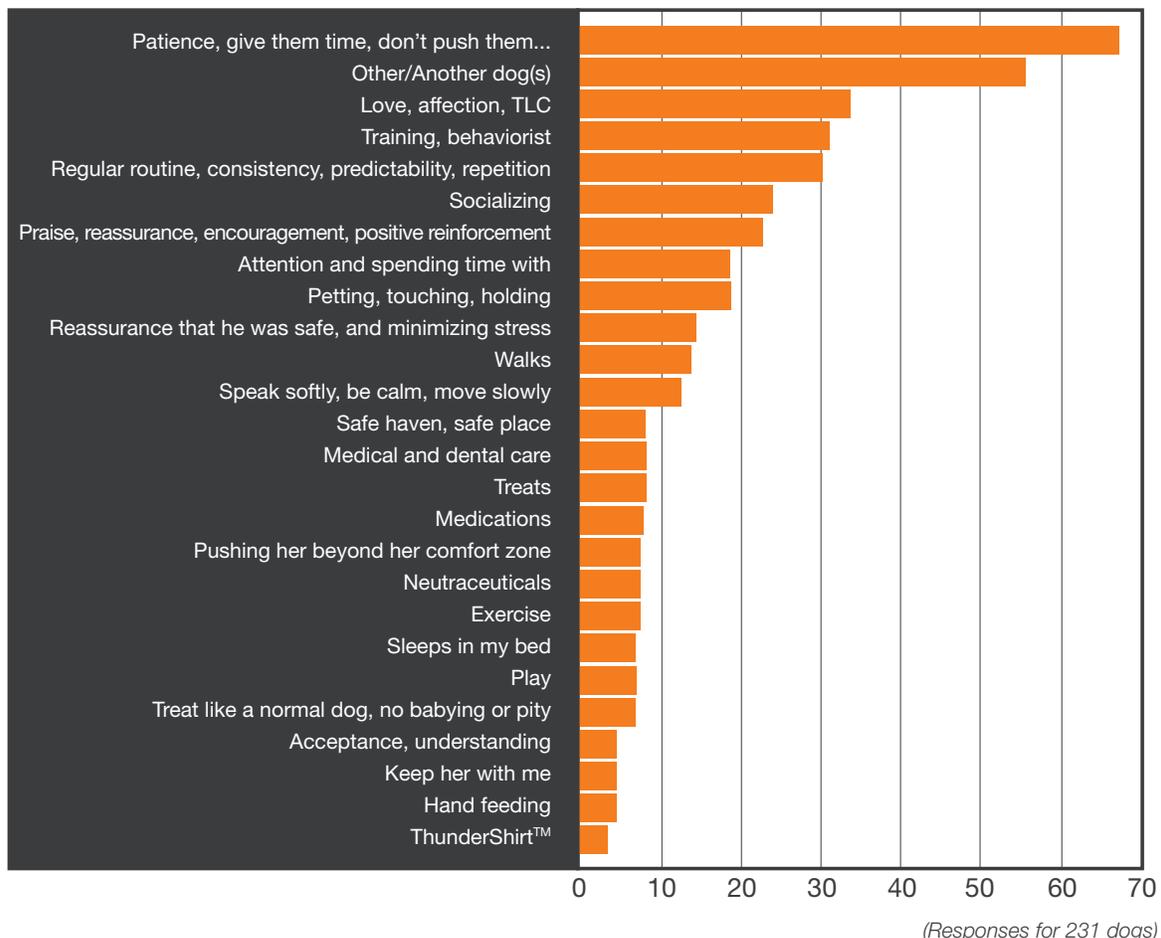
When rescued hoarded dogs were first being adopted into homes, very little was known about their psychological make-up and there were no specific techniques known to be particularly effective in helping them to adjust to their new lives. Many different methods were tried — some helped and some did not. When I decided to put together a guide for caring for rescued hoarded dogs, I knew that the best way to determine the most and least effective methods for rehabilitation was to ask the adopters themselves. Therefore, I wrote some very specific questions for

the follow-up questionnaire in order to fully benefit from the wealth of knowledge held by the people who had worked most closely with these dogs.

### Most effective methods of rehabilitation

The graph below shows the results for what worked best with rescued hoarded dogs, ranked

**Of all the things you have done to help your dog to overcome any difficulties he/she was showing upon arrival to your household, what do you feel was the MOST helpful or effective?**



from the answers mentioned the most number of times to those mentioned the least. Keep in mind that even those mentioned least were, for some dogs, the most effective method in helping them to heal emotionally.

Below are the answers, accompanied by selected adopters' comments that best represent and describe each of the rehabilitation methods.

***Of all the things you have done to help your dog to overcome any difficulties he/she was showing upon arrival to your household, what do you feel was the MOST helpful or effective?***

***Patience, give them time, don't push them, let them go at their own pace***

- PATIENCE. LOTS of patience.
- Letting Scout take everything at his own pace. We didn't rush anything, from meeting other dogs to accepting our petting.
- I just try to ignore him and let him come around on his own. When I go in the bedroom where he always stays, I make a point not to look at him and will even back in so I don't "see" him. I don't push him to be more than he can be and I let him choose how much interaction he wants to have with me, which means how much he feels comfortable walking past me while I am on the couch. I don't make a big deal out of it.
- Mainly just giving him time to get used to his new life, not pushing him or forcing him to face things that terrify him.
- Never forcing her to do anything she did not want to do.
- Patience, welcoming her into our pack, letting her be to adjust to life in a home. We put no pressure on her to adapt. Never got mad at her, never yelled at her, ignored her when she needed ignoring, loved her when she wanted attention.
- I quit trying to make her do new things. I let her decide when/what advancements she was going to make.

***Other/another dog(s)***

- Having a calm, accepting and nurturing dog already in residence helped tremendously.
- I think the most helpful thing was the other dogs;

namely my female Doberman and my male German shepherd taught her how the house works. They taught her how to urinate outside, how to go through the door, how to navigate walking on carpet, how to go up and down stairs, etc. She watched them intently all the time.

- After two years, we were able to get another dog for her. We got a slightly smaller, younger, male dog (Shane). Lexi's improvement was immediate. Now, when my husband is not home, Lexi runs around playfully, picks up toys, wags her tail in circles, comes up to me for petting, and comes into the house without being chased. Shane also taught her to chase squirrels and sit on the couch. Before Shane, she would only use the big backyard to sit in one spot; now she runs around with him and barks at squirrels.
- Six months [after adopting Holly] I got her a dog, a Siberian husky [Laguna] who was a couple of years older and full of confidence. I worked with Laguna to let Holly see that it is OK to come for a treat, to get the leash on for a walk, to get in the van to go for a drive. When Laguna comes to be petted, now Holly comes also.
- Introducing him to our two dogs. He loved having a pack. He thrived and was very happy with his friends.
- Having another dog helped bring her out of her shell.
- When we go on group walks, the other dogs respond well to my husband and Zeke is learning that it is OK to trust him.
- We did a lot of things, but we saw the biggest change after we adopted a second dog. We allowed Sheba to pick this dog. We introduced her to several dogs, and when we introduced her to a dog that she practically ignored, we knew that was the right one. (With other dogs, she showed some aggressive posture and growling.) By the way, Sheba and her sister are now the closest of friends.
- I feel when we brought in a rescued puppy (about one year after Madonna) she started to come around and became more trusting of us. She will greet people alone with Winnie (her best friend now). I feel her being able to see the love and attention we gave Winnie showed Madonna that she was in a safe and loving home now. I would do it all over again.

- She has become very close to one of our other dogs who has a huge personality and is very confident. At times, we will take this dog along with us, which seems to help Olive feel more comfortable and more willing to take a risk.

### **Love, affection, TLC**

- Showing her affection.
- Just giving him love till he trusted us. When he arrived, he sat on the steps of our house for two weeks and wouldn't come near us. Now he will leap into our laps. We just gave him a lot of treats and love!
- Lots and lots of love and affection, particularly on his own.
- Being consistent with love and caring.

### **Training, behaviorist**

- Agility training. He has developed a lot of confidence and overcome his fear of riding in a car from going to play with me once a week. He loves to learn new things and he now plays tug with me in class.
- Training — obedience classes, one-on-one work with a trainer, daily training sessions.
- We were given free obedience classes, which we chose to attend. My husband and I attended with her and were given instructions on which behaviors to ignore and what to expect of her. We would not have gotten as far as we have without the trainer and shelter staff.
- A mid-level obedience class got his confidence up to start.
- Lola attends once-weekly agility lessons, and she has been in several trials. I feel that exposure to other people and dogs in this venue has increased her comfort level, given her a “job” and reduced her fear behaviors.
- Positive reinforcement training. Maggie is clicker trained — and since she is deaf, I use a thumbs-up sign in place of an audible click. I never use any kind of punishment with her at all, and I never tease her at all either — nothing negative at all. She has responded beautifully to the 100% love and understanding that she receives.
- We did obedience training for the better part of two years with Toby. Being around other dogs and

people helped him and also helped with some of his separation anxiety. It also helped that he would get attention from all sorts of people; he enjoyed that. He currently does agility and that has helped his confidence immensely.

- I wish I had known about K9 Nosework then, as it is helping him gain confidence now.
- Training and exercise.
- I think the [obedience and shy dog] classes helped to some degree.
- Clicker training: He liked it and looked forward to it. It helped stimulate his mind and keep him focused on behaviors and treats instead of possible fearful surroundings or situations.
- During ongoing adjustment, having him complete basic obedience strategies and/or drills for confidence and security seemed to ease his anxiety.

### **Regular routine, consistency, predictability, repetition**

- Consistency.
- Predictable environment.
- Repetition, repetition, repetition!
- Routine is important: trying to do the same things at the same times every day. When I break routine, even small things, like holding him for 10 minutes in the same chair when I come home from work, before going for a walk, are very important to him. He gets confused when we change routines, however slight. I think it's important to him to know he can trust what is going to happen next at any given time.
- Consistency in feeding routines plus treats to make him realize that food was going to be available.
- Establishing routines has helped a lot. When she learned her schedule, she was able to start blossoming.

### **Socializing**

- The most helpful has been socialization and guidance for him around any new things.
- Getting him out and socializing with people in different places; taking him on animal/people retreats and having people and their pets over to the house.
- Lots of socialization. I took him to Home Depot, the paint store, tile store, dog park, everywhere



that I could. His new foster parent is taking him on regular hikes with other people, etc.

- Got him out to events where other dogs were around (e.g., Yappy Hours).
- (1) I take him to doggy play dates put together with a local shelter that allows 10-15 dogs and owners to be off-leash and socialize for an hour. At first he would never leave my side. Now he will follow his sister Abby around. (2) I take him to my neighbor's house and we sit and visit together. Although he is still afraid of both of them, he willingly goes into their house and lays down on their dog bed with their dog. (3) Exposing him to different things (like parks and new walk trails, taking car rides, etc.) helps him get more sure of himself.
- He is very leery of other, larger dogs and people. We have brought in other dogs and people on a weekly basis. Some are familiar and some are not. Some stay and some leave. It has helped him to overcome some of the fear.

### ***Praise, reassurance, encouragement, positive reinforcement***

- Positive reinforcement of appropriate behaviors.
- Exposing her to new experiences in small doses and providing constant positive reinforcement that redirects her from the focus of her fear.
- Letting her do things on her own terms with positive reinforcement of good behavior.

### ***Attention and spending time with***

- Having the time for her, and focusing on the tiniest improvements.
- Paying a lot of attention to her; she is very needy.
- We went through a period of what I would call extreme bonding; allowing her constant access to me seemed to take away a lot of her nervousness.

### ***Petting, touching, holding***

- Lots of holding, touching, and talking to him.
- Comforting physical contact.
- He was skittish at first, so I would hold him on my lap and speak in a soothing voice while I petted him. He seemed to settle down after that rather well.
- Simply spending time holding her (at first she resisted but she got more and more fond of it over time) and talking to her gently over a period of years has seemed to make the most impact.
- Physical contact. I had to go very, very slowly with touching her. But I've made a point of letting her smell my hands and being aware when she comes up behind me to smell me to stay calm and let her take her time. Gradually, it's been almost two years with her, our routine has become after each meal, she gets up onto her favorite bed, I give her a doggie treat, which she eats out of my hand, and then I pet her. In the past several months, she seems to actually enjoy being petted.
- Just keep touching her and loving her.

### ***Reassurance that he was safe, and minimizing stress***

- Making her feel safe.
- Constant reassurance that he is safe.
- Teaching her that she is very safe and secure.
- Our efforts to ensure her [that] she's exposed to as little stress as possible are paying off.
- Limited the amount of activity and noise around him and introduced things slowly to him.
- I tried to provide as much of a calm environment that I could.
- Exposure to situations gradually. Some things will never be easy for her, no matter what strategy I try, so I limit her exposure to them.

- My husband and I make sure to comfort and help Murphy when he does not feel safe. He's come to realize that we will strive to help him always feel safe and not expose him to situations he doesn't yet have the skills or confidence to handle. When in doubt, we pick him up and create distance between him and whatever makes him anxious. If Murphy is not too agitated, we lead him away from what's making him anxious and stand between him and that thing if it is passing by (e.g., people or dog on the street when we have Murphy out for a walk).

### **Walks**

- Leash walks, leash walks, leash walks. Walking through her fears and obstacles is most absolutely what increases her confidence.
- Winning her with treats and taking walks, which she loves. She is much less shy when in her walking harness and loves to go to the park.
- Finally getting him to accept the leash and walking on leash with pack.
- Daily extended walks.
- Most recently we go for long, long walks and we see lots of people, cars, dogs. This has really helped. She's much happier.
- We taught her to walk and took her outside on a mountain path every day with the other dog.
- Long walks have been good to get rid of some nervous energy at times, too.

### **Speak softly, be calm, move slowly**

- Responding calmly to his anxiety behaviors with a firm but friendly voice.
- I rarely raise my voice or punish.
- We tended to respond to Gracie's startling (we were four houses from the fire station, a busy fire station) with responses like "Oh, what was that?" in a happy tone ... and tossing a treat.

### **Safe place, safe haven**

- One thing that was helpful: We gave him a new bed upon his arrival. We put him in it when we arrived home and moved it into his crate for night-time sleeping and even carried him in it when we were out initially. He appreciated the security of it and knew it was his safety spot.

- Having a crate for him with an open door for him to retreat to when he is feeling insecure. He doesn't spend as much time in it now, but in the beginning he was in there quite a bit.
- Just letting her be. We put her house (a crate, her safe spot) where she could see us and what was going on in the household. Then we just let her do whatever she felt like doing. Initially, she spent most of her time in there, but she gradually started to venture out to explore. Of course, then we'd do something "scary" like flip a light switch, open a drawer, etc., and she'd scramble back to her safe spot. Eventually the scary things became less scary and she'd venture out more. When we would drop something that made a scary noise, we'd show it to her and say something like "Sorry, Ginger, I dropped this on the floor and it made a scary noise didn't it? Want to see it?" (then hold said object out for her to sniff). This seemed to help a lot once she was brave enough not to retreat to her house immediately. We always moved her house into our bedroom at night and put it where she could see us. Nowadays she hardly ever goes in her house when we're at home; however, her house still goes everywhere with us so she has a familiar safe place to go if she gets scared.

### **Medical and dental care**

- Proper vet care.
- Dental work (pulling rotted and broken teeth and cleaning teeth).
- Getting him healthy was a big step — physically and emotionally. Giving him daily baths, putting lotion on his skin, etc., meant that I had to handle him. For us, I think the interaction helped to build trust.

### **Treats**

- We gave her an excellent diet and good treats.
- Making sure she knew what she should and shouldn't do by giving treats to say she is good. I realized (fortunately very quickly) that she didn't enjoy being petted and that she could misunderstand voice encouragement when she first came, so treats were the thing to make her know that she was good. We still use treats a lot.

## **Medications (anti-anxiety, antidepressant)**

- [Anti-anxiety] medication seemed to help some.

## **Pushing her beyond her comfort zone**

- The most helpful thing I did for Penny was to not allow her to hide anywhere in the house. I blocked my bed so she couldn't get underneath and I shut off rooms where she would go and not come out. This forced her to become part of my pack of three other dogs. It only took about a month for her to settle in.
- Making him face situations instead of avoiding them.
- I forced him into a lot of uncomfortable situations and still do.
- I suppose the most helpful has been "tough love" in a least one circumstance. When I first brought Samantha home, she immediately cowered in one corner of the yard (which I expected, since that is exactly what she did at the foster home). I have another dog that I walk on a daily basis. She would see me leave with Baxter every morning, but still hid in her corner. By about the second week she was curious, and would watch through the fence every time we left. By the end of the second week, she started howling and kept it up until we were back. It was then that I decided she was ready to go for a walk also. In her previous life, she had never been for a walk and had never been on a leash. I had to follow her to her corner and put on a choke chain and pull. When it got uncomfortable for her, she came along, but tried to get away from the leash. I looked like a circus act going down the street, as she continued to run around me trying to get away from that pesky leash. My other dog, Baxter, just kept walking straight as she circled both of us. I stopped frequently to praise her and give her encouragement. Day number two was a little bit easier. By day number three, she actually came up to me when she saw the leash in my hand and was ready to go. So, in this circumstance "tough love" worked. I have also used it to carry her into rooms in the house that she is afraid to walk into. I bring her in, pet and praise her, and hope that she starts to understand that it is OK to move around the house.

## **Nutraceuticals**

- I started her on L-theanine shortly after we got her and, over the last couple years, we've tried a few other prescription meds. Prozac didn't work for her at all. It made her even more anxious and had her bouncing off the walls.
- Harmonease – VERY helpful!
- I also rely heavily on valerian root for situations like fireworks that I know will push her into so much stress that she freezes and can't chew her stress away.
- Sun-theanine is helpful for calming.
- Bach brand herbs. We've used numerous formulas. It's been trial and error. Some worked. Some didn't. Some worked for a time and gradually didn't do anything for her. But the Bach formulas have worked miracles with her.

## **Exercise**

- Regular exercise.
- Lots of exercise.

## **Sleeps in my bed**

- Cuddling as a pack in bed.
- Sleeping together, with me in a protective position.
- We let her sleep with us in the bed, and that helped her to bond to me and my daughter.

## **Play**

- Playing chase with her.

## **Treat like a normal dog, no babying or pity**

- We try very hard to treat him like we do our other dogs. I acted calm around him and acted like I expected him to behave like everyone else.
- Treating him as we treat the other dogs — not allowing negative behavior.
- Not doting over him — treat him like you would a "normal" dog.

## **Acceptance, understanding**

- Accepting her "as is" knowing some of the behavior could never be corrected.

## Keep her with me

- From the moment I literally picked her up at the Clubhouse, I kept her with me 24/7. She didn't appear to have ever had any people interaction and being picked up was, and still is, very scary to her. However, she seemed to develop more confidence by always being with me and with my other two dogs. For the most part, she travels with me, sleeps on my pillow, and is constantly with me in my arms or very nearby.
- I think that one of the best things that I did for Samson was I carried him everywhere and took him everywhere. I literally stuffed him in my sweatshirt and that is where he stayed for the first few months. I know that this is not something that everyone can do, but I am lucky enough to be able to take my dogs to work with me.
- I have found that tethering Lulu to me, when someone comes to the house that she doesn't know, really helps. She will bark and become hysterical, running away and sometimes lunging at a stranger, out of fear. When she is tethered, I can calm her down so she doesn't get to the point where she is out of control. I tell her "no bark" and I do a quick pull on the leash (she wears a harness) to get her attention. This snaps her out of the barking frenzy and she will actually calm down. I keep her tethered until everyone is settled, then release her, and she is calm and usually will go and lie down.

## Hand feeding

- I hand-fed her for about three weeks. I would sit with her every day and slowly worked my way to gently petting her until she was completely relaxed.

## ThunderShirt™

- The most helpful was the discovery of the ThunderShirt. Her biggest issues are surrounding loud storms. After that discovery, life is grand.
- We got her a thunder vest and that seems to help with storms.
- The anxiety wrap and ThunderShirt help a great deal.

## Having other dogs in the home

The recommendation to have another dog or dogs in the rescued hoarded dog's adoptive household has been shown to be critically important for most hoarded dogs' emotional recovery. Note that item number one on the above list of most effective rehabilitation methods — having patience — is not really *doing* something as much as it is simply maintaining a particular attitude (and, in fact, *not* doing something). Thus, the second item on the list (have or get another dog as a companion and role model for the rescued dog) is the most appropriate answer to the question "What is the best thing to do to help rescued hoarded dogs get better?"

How does the presence of other dogs help the rescued hoarded dog? There are at least four ways that hoarded dogs may benefit from having another dog or dogs around.

**1. The first is the one people think of most often: that the rescued hoarded dog learns from and models his/her behavior after the normal-acting pet dog. The canine species is imitative in some of its behavior and hence, if not severely inhibited by negative emotions like fear, would be receptive to following the lead of the behavior of the other dogs in the house. Here are some adopters' comments along these lines:**

- Having another well-adjusted dog to show her "normal" behavior and be a leader (to go outside and potty without fear and not be afraid to come back in the house, playing, walking, etc).
- Our other dogs as role models. We have two rescued males, ages 12 and 6. They clearly have helped show Stella how to be a typical dog. It's wonderful to see how she learns "normal" behavior from them, be it finally beginning to smell things to recently having the courage to bark at noises outside the house. Watching me interact with the other dogs has helped her learn to trust.

**2. The second way that the presence of other dogs may help the emotionally struggling hoarded dog is by a psychological phenome-**

**non demonstrated in scientific studies, termed “social buffering.” Social buffering is an effect whereby the presence of companions can reduce the intensity of — or buffer — the dog’s emotional reaction to something frightening or stressful. For example, one study showed that monkeys who are fearful of snakes when by themselves do not have a fearful response if they have monkey companions with them when they encounter a snake. The effect is seen even in rodents. When rats were placed in an unfamiliar environment, their fear response was significantly lower when they had a familiar companion with them than when they were alone. But there is even more that may be helpful to rescued hoarded dogs.**

The scientific evidence also shows that the emotional response of the companion is key for the social buffering to work. A study with rats showed that when the rat being studied was accompanied by a fearful rat companion, the benefit was much less than when the companion rat was unafraid. What this means for rescued hoarded dogs is the presence of confident and calm companion dogs offer the greatest benefit to the hoarded dogs’ emotional state in situations when they are fearful. If the companion dog is himself fearful (as we see, for example, when two rescued hoarded dogs are adopted together into the same house), then the companion dog may hamper the emotional progress of both dogs. In other words, if a fearful dog looks to another dog for emotional support and sees that the other dog is fearful himself, then the one looking for support repeatedly learns that being fearful is the best response.

However, when the dog who’s fearful of people sees over and over how the other dogs in the house never express the slightest fear as humans approach, talk to and physically interact with them, the learning is subtle but persistent and repetitive. The fearful dog is thinking: “No one else is troubled by this thing that I see as such a threat — so it must be OK.” The emotional message is clear: “Nothing to worry about here.” Here are some adopters’ comments that appear to illustrate this effect:

- Being around my other dogs and fosters. She notices their comfort level and it helps calm her.

She has always looked to them to register their reaction when a possible threat is present. She sees them relaxed and relaxes herself.

- I think already having a dog in our household was a HUGE help to Rusty. A lot of the credit for how well Rusty adjusted to life with us should go to Annie, our border collie mix. She is super even-keeled and on the aloof side, perfect for a second scared dog. I think Annie had a big calming effect on Rusty, and he took cues from her about us.
- Exposure to a well-adjusted dog. He clearly learned and continues to learn from watching other dogs, and picks up their emotional cues.
- We’ve just recently enrolled him in daycare and we saw a huge improvement in confidence and playfulness the same and next day. He needs other dogs to be comfortable.
- She really bonded with our other female Chihuahua, Lilly. Madison would gain confidence in her company. She would see Lilly jump on our lap; she would follow. She would see Lilly playing with toys; she would play with Lilly. Lilly would explore the yard; Madison would follow. Lilly was a huge help with Madison, without even trying.

Interestingly, three people who adopted more than one rescued hoarded dog stated that the companionship of another *hoarded* dog was what helped most. From our studies of rescued puppy mill dogs and of hoarded dogs, this appears to be the exception to the rule. Here are the comments from those three adopters:

- He had a dog from the hoarder he was friends with and that dog stayed with us for a few months and that seemed to help a lot.
- Having another dog fostered with her from the same place that liked affection.
- To bring one of his pack with him.

As mentioned above, however, the negative effect of having frightened dogs together is that if they look to each other for how to respond emotionally, then seeing the other’s fear teaches both of them that fear is the best response. This can greatly hamper our attempts to help the dogs overcome their fear.

**3. The third way the rescued hoarded dog benefits from having other dogs around is that it takes the one-on-one intensity, or pressure, off. When the hoarded dog is the only dog in the house, all of the human-dog interaction is toward the hoarded dog. This can be too intense for a shy or fearful dog. A very rough analogy would be the elementary school student in a classroom. Being surrounded by fellow students greatly diminishes the pressure of the teacher-student interaction on any one student. But if one day all but one of the students didn't come to school, it's a whole different story. Everything this student does or says — every move he makes — is being watched and evaluated by the teacher. This student would be unable to relax the entire time he's in the classroom.**

The shy hoarded dog would likely have a similar sense of unease when the humans in the house, even in their attempts to be loving and caring, are focused only on her. And because we know that rescued hoarded dogs do not, in general, respond well to pressure, this kind of personal intensity may slow their progress in emotional healing.

**4. The fourth way that rescued hoarded dogs benefit is more indirect than the other three ways. When adopters have one dog in their house and that dog fears them, won't make eye contact with them, and won't let them touch her, it's very difficult and frustrating for even the strongest, most loving and most patient of humans. And because we now know that hoarded dogs can show these reactions and behaviors for months and even years before improving, the patience required when this is a person's only dog is almost superhuman.**

However, contrast that to the adopter who has a couple of other pet dogs in the house that interact with that person in a "normal" way. This person — let's say a woman — receives all the love and positive feedback she could want from her two pet dogs, and this makes it much, much easier to give the hoarded dog all the time he needs to recover emotionally from the hoarding experience. And this is exactly what the hoarded dog needs: patience and time. The benefit of having the other dogs around is that those dogs give adopters all the

"dog love" they need while the hoarded dog heals at whatever pace he needs.

We see, then, that the presence of companion dogs is an enormous benefit for the adopted hoarded dog. However, as with virtually all psychological issues, there are a few very minor possible negative effects of having these other dogs around. One is that when dogs learn by imitation, they can just as easily learn bad habits as good. If the companion dogs dig in the garden or urinate in the house or bark excessively, the hoarded dog could do the very same things. The other potential down-side to the hoarded dog having one or more companion dogs is that it seems, on occasion, the dog fearful of humans may become overly dependent upon the companion dogs and use them as a security blanket. If the fearful dog is always able to gain a sense of security from her companion dogs, then she may have little or no motivation to overcome her fear of humans.

-----  
**Important note:** *Several people mentioned how helpful it was to not offer comfort when the dog is fearful because it might "reinforce the fear." This is a myth, and a dangerous one at that. Please see the special note about this point in the discussion for the next question (page 31).*



## Least effective methods of rehabilitation

The next logical question after asking adopters what was the most effective thing they tried was to ask about the least effective. This information is very beneficial in helping to prevent adopters from repeating things that other people have found to be ineffective.

I didn't include it in the list below, but one of the most common answers was "Nothing." Examples of comments:

- Nothing that I can think of.
- I don't think anything has been "least helpful." I haven't noticed anything that has worked against her.
- I think everything has helped her in some manner.

In some cases, the answers for this question were simply the opposite of the answers to the previous question. For example, if having patience was the number one answer for the most effective method, then its opposite — "being impatient" — showed up quite often as the least effective. But, as you

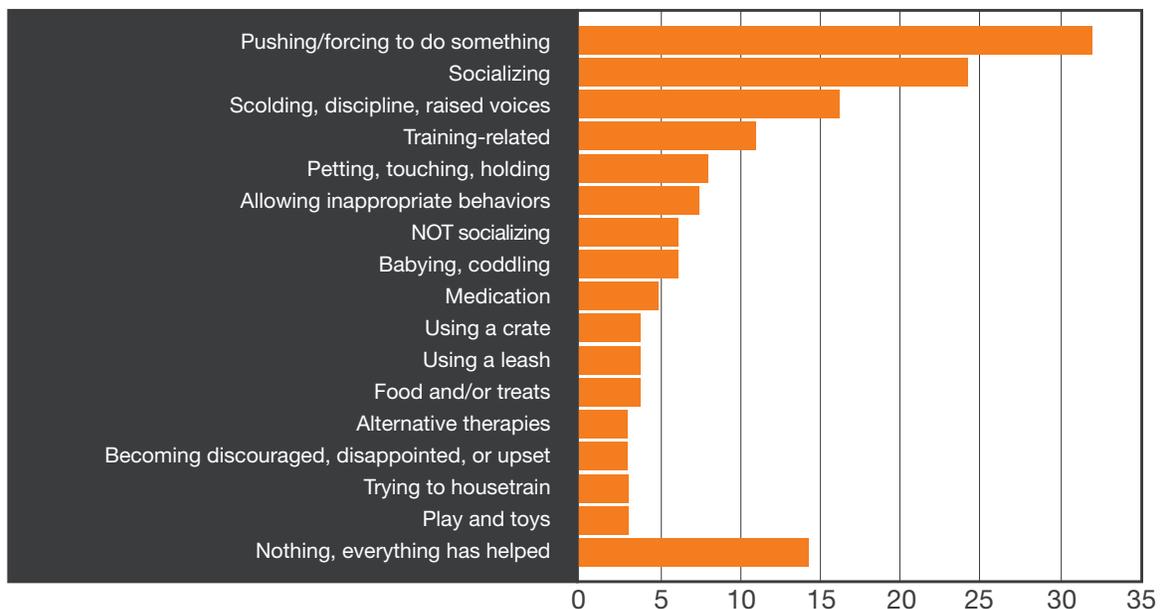
will see, something else happened quite often: The exact same thing showed up on both lists. In other words, what some people found to be the most effective thing to help their dog was something that other people found to be the least effective, and vice versa. We'll look at how we deal with that later in this section.

***Of all the things you have done to help your dog to overcome any difficulties he/she was showing upon arrival to your household, what do you feel was the LEAST helpful or effective?***

### **Pushing/forcing to do something**

- Forcing her to do what I wanted her to do. Trying to make her "normal."
- Trying too hard to push her out of her comfort zone. At times I've pushed too hard and too fast and it hasn't been helpful. I keep needing to remind myself that with Molly I need to go very slowly and not push too much when we're in a situation she's not comfortable with.
- Trying to force her to interact with me when she wasn't ready to.

**Of all the things you have done to help your dog to overcome any difficulties he/she was showing upon arrival to your household, what do you feel was the LEAST helpful or effective?**



- Trying to force something on her, like making her stay in the room while we vacuumed and trying to comfort her. She only focused on the vacuum and not the comfort. Also, friends or family trying to pet her almost immediately. She was not OK with that.
- Trying to push her to do things too fast. My hubby thought she was ready to try a walk last fall and boy was he wrong! We took Katie and Jasmine (our well-adjusted dog who loves to go walking with him) on a walk together. By the time we got to the corner (about half a block), she was shaking like a leaf, panting like crazy and slinking along the ground. When she and I turned around to go home, she pulled so hard I thought she was going to choke herself to death! Katie and I had been working on going for walks by looking around the front yard, just going down to the next house or so and then going back to the house. I was trying to gradually increase the distance a tiny bit at a time and should not have let him talk me into trying to go farther. Now Katie and I will have to start all over again this spring, as right now she just makes a beeline from the van to the house with no desire to investigate the yard/neighborhood like she was starting to do last fall. We are hopeful that our newest addition (a friendly, outgoing mini-doxie that Katie loves) will continue helping her with her confidence.
- Because we were anxious to make her feel loved, we may have made her uncomfortable by trying to give her more affection than she was ready to accept.
- I was also told to use flooding on the dog (take him places, take him into stores, ask people to give him treats). I now know this contributed to failure of a few years and made the dog worse. A girl in our area uses this as a training technique on similar dogs. Also the use of coercion, fear and the good old leash jerks. Please educate people that these training methods are detrimental to the well-being of any animal.
- When I first got her, she used to bark and bark at cars. I tried a recommendation of the “immersion” training theory and walked her along a busy street, hoping she would get used to the cars and calm down. It didn’t work, and it only made her even more agitated. I will never try immersion training again!
- Exposing her to scary things too fast. Now that

I know what will overload her, I can avoid those things and instead systematically try to desensitize her to them.

## Socializing

- Exposure to the things/situations that terrify him (public places, strangers, etc.). It seems like each time we would try, he would go backward and get worse again. He also tends to get very sick with diarrhea when he is stressed.
- The least helpful thing was constantly taking her for walks down my street in hopes of socializing her. She fears men, loud noises and most strangers. I live on a street that has kids, dogs and married couples (men and women). She would come in after a walk and throw up the next day or sooner. She’s happiest just running around the backyard with the other dogs.
- Too much socialization too fast. She did fine, but would have done better if we had not overwhelmed her.
- Attempting socialization in areas involving more than 1-2 people or dogs at a time. The trainer kept pushing to do this, but he could never handle that and it made him more neurotic and fearful. Once he was allowed to be within his comfort zone, he became slightly more outgoing, but he has to stay within his “safety net,” which means no strangers or strange dogs outside of his controlled home environment.
- A dog socialization event was not very productive.
- I introduced her to my neighbor’s dog the very day she came home from the shelter. Big mistake. Although my neighbor’s dog is very friendly and outgoing, Misty viewed her as a threat and to this day “lunges” at her, even through a glass door.
- Our first day with her, we took her to the beach and I think it was completely overwhelming. She’d been locked in a cage in a dark room for three-plus years. I think everything we did the first few weeks should have been slower. We wanted to show her the world but I think it was all too much for her.
- Coming from a hoarding situation, we thought she’d be great with dogs and so took her to a dog park (it’s so stupid in hindsight). It was very stressful for all of us and we had to remove her quickly.

- Forcing Oscar to be around men was NOT helpful. But we would only try to walk past men, and not force any closeness or interaction. It seemed to scare him more.
- I tried to introduce Tyson to social play groups at the shelter. It was a disaster. All he did was look for me and hide between my legs the entire time.

### **Scolding, discipline, raised voices**

- The least effective is raising my voice. I have to catch myself sometimes and not yell at him when he is doing something wrong. It does nothing but scare him.
- Any type of punishment — yelling, spray bottle, etc.
- Stern voices.
- When I discipline the other dogs, he gets very nervous so I have to be careful of my voice.
- Any kind of punishment didn't help; it just freaked him out, even just raising my voice. It worked better to just say wrong and move on to something else positive. He is very people-pleasing so he learned quickly what worked.
- Does not respond to being talked to in a loud voice at all.
- Dixie does not do well with correction, as it causes her to be fearful. She has developed a taste for hard plastic items (e.g., remote controls, cell phones, and game controllers). Initially, we tried verbal correction. This caused her to revert back to hiding under the table for a few minutes. We do not use verbal correction anymore. We now work exclusively with positive reinforcement for Dixie. She is responsive to this and it does not cause fear.

### **Training**

- Basic obedience: Being so shy and scared, Foster would often just shut down and could not do simple training.
- Going to training classes at PetSmart: I decided after about three classes that the only thing he needed to learn was "leave it," in case there was something on the floor that he shouldn't eat (because of the food issues). He learned that very quick. He is actually a very smart dog.

- All the tips and tricks that dog trainers usually give: She did not respond to conditioning very well because she was too chaotic and unfocused.
- Obedience training: We have taken all of our dogs to obedience training and believe that it helps the bonding process with a rescued dog, while building their self-confidence. The process was not successful with Mia.
- Trying to teach her "sit." (My method is to move the treat over her head and back.) She'd run away and avoid me every time. Once I let go, she started showing small signs of trust and improvement.

### **Petting, touching, holding**

- Picking her up and holding her: It really freaked her out and she became more distrustful. Now we can pick her up without her pooping or peeing, which I think is a major accomplishment. :)
- Petting her right away and paying a lot of attention to her: She needed to be ignored so she could watch us and acclimate.
- You just want to hug them and comfort them so much. However, I now feel that letting her have her own space and only giving that attention when she is ready for it is very important. I feel that it requires time and maybe we should have not pushed that in the beginning.
- One trainer told us to acclimatize Patches to touch by holding him until he calmed down. He never calmed down and it was horrible for us both. We did this for quite a long time (three months, once a day) and it didn't do anything to help him.

### **Ignoring or allowing inappropriate behaviors rather than correcting them, giving her too much autonomy, not providing structure**

- Ignoring his behavior and hoping he would get better on his own.
- I felt bad for how he was raised his first few years of life, so I let him get away with everything. I realized that this also doesn't help get him rehabilitated.
- Allowing small annoying behaviors, like howling and jumping on furniture, rather than correcting them, as with a normal dog.

- Giving her too much autonomy: She needs structure (crate, consistent feedings, etc.).

### **NOT socializing**

- Keeping him home safe instead of socializing him more.
- I think not encouraging my family to spend more time with her. I was cautious about the children, as I didn't know her disposition and I kept them away from her for the first little while.
- Keeping her away from people: Not on purpose, but should have taken more effort to go to dog parks and/or local pet store.
- Not exposing him more to the outside world: I probably should have taken him on walks, even if they were only for 20 feet, but I was afraid of overwhelming him.

### **Babied him, coddled him**

- Coddling and allowing him to hide behind us or in rooms of the house.
- Making her special.
- Because of the situation that he supposedly came from, I think I initially felt sorry for him and maybe babied him somewhat, which might have led him to become too attached to me and therefore too protective of me.

*See special note on page 31 about the myth that you shouldn't comfort or coddle a fearful animal.*

### **Medication (anti-anxiety, antidepressant)**

- Giving him acetylpromazine to calm him down when he panics because of storms.
- Anti-anxiety medication (fluoxetine).
- Medication (Xanax).
- Prescription doggy psych meds (Prozac).

### **Using a crate**

- The least effective would be crate training. I found Marley at the hoarder's in a back room with no windows and living full-time in a wire crate, so he is extremely stressed when crated. He appears to find crates a form of punishment, so instead he is

left in a bright, sunny room with my other crated dogs when we are out of the home.

- Tried crate training, but he broke teeth trying to get out and he is freaked out by crates to this day.
- Crate training to try and help with house-breaking. She was terrified of it! For her, it caused so much fear that she had instant diarrhea. Nothing I did could get her over that fear.
- Least effective for Teddy was trying to keep him in a cage or sectioned off in a room when we were not home. He tore things up that were in reach and had accidents in the cage. We noticed when he was out and about he seemed much calmer. We made sure the house was safe, and tried a day when we just let him roam, just for a few hours. He did not touch a thing, slept on the couch looking out the window, and had no accidents. He has been great with that. He is great with holding out until we come home to go to the bathroom outside. So for Teddy, the cage did not work.

### **Using a leash**

- Leash walks.
- Trying to make him walk on a leash properly outside at first: He was like a Vietnam veteran, crouching and darting and was completely flooded.

### **Food and/or treats**

- Not motivated by food at all. She didn't know what a treat was.
- Trying to train her with treats. She is not at all food-motivated.

### **Alternative therapies**

- Herbal supplements.
- Herbal medications (chamomile and valerian blended for animals).
- Music therapy (he doesn't hear perfect), aromatherapy (didn't really respond).

### **Becoming discouraged, disappointed, or upset**

- The least helpful thing was when I became discouraged that his progress was so slow. When

I look back on it, I think he progressed very well indeed, considering that he was virtually catatonic when he arrived and would not eat, drink, walk, or look at anyone. I know now that my feelings of discouragement were unnecessary.

- Unrealistic expectations: Expecting her to be like every other dog.
- My feeling of helplessness: Animals know, and the first few weeks were tough so I got busy to find resources to help me.
- Expecting things to change quickly has never worked for us. Getting upset when she did things instead of figuring out why she did what she did.

### **Trying to house-train**

- Trying to house-break, realizing that she was 11 years old and blind and most likely would never be house-broken.
- When we got Pepper, she was not house-broken and peed anytime and anywhere she wanted. My wife and I first tried the traditional methods of putting her nose in the mess, and dragging

her outside. Time and again, nothing seemed to work. We were at a point where I was ready to send her back to her foster mom. We began by leaving her in one of the bathrooms with a tile floor when we were away. Eventually, on her own time schedule, she stopped peeing in the house.

### **Play and toys**

- He doesn't know how to play with toys.
- She still doesn't play with toys ... no effect on her at all.

### **Causes of setbacks**

Originally I had intended the previous question to include only ineffective methods of helping the dog and then follow that question with the one below, which asked about things that were not simply ineffective, but caused the dog's recovery to be set back. As you will have seen, many people included the setbacks in their answers to the

## **The myth about comforting a fearful animal**

There is a damaging myth out there that you shouldn't comfort a fearful animal because you might reward or reinforce her fear. Numerous adopters offered comments that involved this myth. For example, in response to the "What was most helpful" question, one adopter said, "I wouldn't coddle her in times of fear." And in response to the "What was least helpful" question, adopters said things like this:

- Expose him to MANY different places and things, ignoring him totally anytime he decided to panic.
- We have not pacified her. For example, a ringing phone scares her to death. We don't coddle her and tell her "it's OK" and pet her. We try to act as if nothing is wrong.
- Trying to avoid things he was indicating being fearful of only reinforced his fear. Best to pretend he wasn't reacting, totally ignore the fearful thing, and keep on walking (dragging him along if necessary).

This concept of not wanting to "reward their fear" because it will "reinforce their fear" is no longer considered by animal behaviorists to be valid. It is not possible to make an animal (or person) more afraid of something by rewarding their fear response. If it were, it would also be possible to lessen an animal's fear by punishing her fear response, which is preposterous. As for not wanting to "reward the fear," ask yourself what you would do if you were traveling on an airplane with a child and she became frightened because of some heavy turbulence. Would you refrain from saying anything comforting because you wouldn't want to reward her fear?

previous question. In addition, the answers to this next question covered a little more ground than the question inquired about. For example, while I asked for things that the adopters themselves did, when answering the question, the adopters also included events that happened. However, that actually worked out for the best, since we learned more than expected.

***Was there anything that you did that made things worse, that caused your dog to have a setback?***

***Vacation, attached human away***

- While I think it was a minor setback, boarding him was not a positive experience for him. I currently have five dogs ... and the other dogs were fine, but not Tucker. He was just so afraid that he would be left alone.
- She does not like to be kenneled. We put her in the kennel one time for vacation and didn't after that one time. It was as if that experience made her fears/anxiety worse. It took about a year to get back to her "normal."
- I left him home with a dog sitter for five days and he was a mess mentally when I returned.
- The first time I had to travel out of town and left him with a friend, he exhibited strong separation anxiety upon my return.

***Loss of companion***

- He had a major setback when our two dogs (his pack) passed away only two months apart.
- My own dog, our 12-year-old pack leader, passed away suddenly. Cookie (and my other pets) had a severe setback and began willfully squatting on the carpet. She also would no longer leave her safe spot on the couch to play with toys and other dogs on the floor. She overcame this again in about four weeks.

***Scolding, discipline, raised voices***

- YES! If I lost my temper with him, he had a terrible setback. He would shut down, belly crawl and I would have to be very calm and positive to get him back to where he was. He taught me that me taking my frustrations out around him was not an option and did more damage to him emo-

tionally. Luckily for me, he is a very forgiving dog, but he sure did teach me a very valuable lesson.

- When another dog misbehaved, I would in a loud voice reprimand them. It would take hours for her to come out of hiding. That cured me of that behavior.
- At agility class, he was screaming while watching the other dogs. In order to train him not to do that, my instructor sprayed him with water in the face. He was OK with her doing that but when I did it, he was very upset and didn't come near me for two days afterward. I have worked to rebuild the trust and it has come back very quickly, but I was shocked by how he reacted.
- When we raise our voices, she rushes to get away from us so we have to remember not to raise our voices loudly. When this does happen, even if it is not applied to her, she usually cowers in a corner with her butt against the wall and watches us without making eye contact for a few hours.
- Scolding her.

***Something scary***

- She slipped once and because it was while she was getting into my lap, she was fearful of doing it again for a few days. She also did not like being out in a storm once, and it took a full day before she would go out again.
- Nothing in particular, but when we would have several family or friends stay at the house, this seemed to set her back, especially if there were small children. She still is timid but has come a long way and doesn't hide in the closet (one of her safe places, with dog bed) all weekend.
- Loud noises.
- Every time we allow her to get stressed out (if we're caught by surprise by an off-lead dog or similar), it causes a small setback and we have to work to lower her tension again so that she will be able to listen to our instructions when we're distracting her from people or dogs.
- On one occasion, I was throwing a ball for him to fetch. He jumped up as I threw, and my hand hit his head. He freaked, and it took weeks for him to regain complete trust. And months for him to return to playing fetch.

- I think that expecting things to be normal sooner than possible has been our biggest setback. We got her to go through doors fairly quickly. However, in the beginning we thought we had gotten her past that fear and took her to PetSmart to help her with socializing, and the automatic doors just totally freaked her out. It was sad to see. So we had to start over with the door training. It did not take as long as when we first got her.
- Emma was sitting on the couch and we were watching football. My husband was sitting across the (small) room and got upset at the game. He threw his shoe to the floor, but it accidentally bounced up and hit Emma. She was a nervous wreck for a week.

### **Exposure to other dogs**

- We both had a setback after I brought my friend's dog over.
- Yes, we brought an adolescent intact male puppy into the home to foster, and it seemed to give her flashbacks. We had him neutered but he still did some inappropriate behaviors and she began pacing and seeking perimeters again. We worked with her to help build her confidence and she is able to handle those situations now — but at that time, she was not.
- I took him to the dog park when there were too many new dogs to meet all at once. At first he seemed to enjoy it, but after a few visits, I noticed he was getting more stressed, and be-



coming wary or aggressive toward dogs his own size or slightly shorter. (He has always been fine with small to medium-size dogs.) We stopped going. I wish I had taken it more slowly. He is great with small/medium dogs, but unpredictable with medium/large dogs; sometimes he's fine with them, sometimes not-so-much and will lunge, air-snap, etc. I wish I had set up opportunities in a more controlled environment for him to learn better "leave me alone" signals with other dogs his size.

- When I took another dog from the same awful situation: It took her a few weeks to get back to where she was. But she did recover. Then I added a third dog from the same house after about a year. She took that in stride.

### **Forcing him to do something, pushing out of comfort zone**

- Because we didn't understand the depth of his fear, we initially approached him as we would any "normal" dog we have always had; that meant taking him for walks, playing with him, wanting to cuddle, etc. Ollie was terrified by close contact, terrified by any and every environment he wasn't used to. He became, within two days, a dog who bit us, hid under the furniture and bit at us to keep us from pulling him out, and one who threw himself down on the ground outside because he was too scared to walk down the street, biting us numerous times when we went to pick him up. We would have altered our behavior drastically had we known that we were causing him such intense discomfort with things we thought were beloved by every dog. Education for potential adopters is essential!
- Tried to make him walk when he would freeze in place, instead of sticking to his comfort zones until he was familiar with the environment.
- During the first week she was with us, my husband cornered her and tried to force her to relate to him, and now she will never feel unafraid of him.
- Flooding.
- Forced harness/leash training. I still feel guilty. She'd feel a tug from the leash and drop to the ground for up to four hours.
- I think I took her to obedience classes too soon (about six weeks). I thought the socialization

would be good for her, but it was more than she could deal with. We dropped out and I allowed her to just hang out and get adjusted.

### **Change**

- He also does NOT like change of any kind and it will set him back for a few days.
- We've moved every year and she's lived in three countries. I think that the first two moves made her take longer to adjust to us and she had setbacks. But after we moved to the Middle East, I think something clicked for her that we were all still going to be together, because at that place she totally changed into a more confident dog.
- Changing location: We went to the beach in the first month we had Petunia and that set her back a great deal.
- Placing unfamiliar objects in places that she wasn't familiar with.
- For Maximus, it is too easy for him to become too set in a routine. He literally will travel the same path in the house and yard and do the same thing day in and day out. It wasn't until he lived with us for a year or so that I noticed how bad it had become. If I moved his crate, he wouldn't go into it because of the fact that the location had changed. If I change his dish, he won't eat and so on and so on. I now make an effort to change things on him. At first, this would cause him a lot of panic and set progress back, but now the panic only lasts a few minutes and he recovers.
- Moved in with my fiancé: Bo had made progress on potty training but that has disappeared and we are starting from scratch.

### **Medical-related**

- Letting the vet put him in a kennel while waiting to start his teeth-cleaning and minor surgical procedure, even though I knew in my heart he didn't like to be confined. I left the vet office and he called me 20 minutes later and said to come back immediately; Louie was turning blue and becoming cyanotic. He was traumatized for days. I have never let that happen again.
- Bongo had a melanoma on his eye that had to be removed and he needed to have eye drops several times a day to support its healing. I had to restrain him and touch him to treat him

and we got through it and the eye healed, but our relationship lost trust for almost a year. He would shy away if I put my hands anywhere near him.

- Taking him to the vet after we adopted him traumatized him for a while.
- Heartworm treatment.
- She had surgery on her eye (cherry eye) and was spayed at the same time, and that set her back some but she quickly readjusted.

### **Uncertain causes**

Some adopters pointed out that it isn't always clear what causes a setback. Here are some examples:

- Rocco had setbacks regularly. His progress was always two steps forward and one back. But I was never able to correlate his setbacks with anything I did, although I examined that and kept careful records so I could monitor what I did and his reaction and progress. I think it is simply the way that such recovery from trauma happens. It is never a smooth track, in people or in other animals.
- Most of the time, I don't even know what causes MooMoo to have a setback. She still has good days and bad days, but now she has more good days. For example, for a week, she will go in and out the door when I hold it open. But then I stand in the same place, open the door wide, no one else in the house, etc., and she just can't come through the doorway.

### **How to know what to do**

The information offered by adopters gives us a vast amount of guidance in how to best care for rescued hoarded dogs, but it also creates considerable confusion. Some of the methods help the dogs. Some of them don't help. Some of them can harm the dogs. And some of the methods — like pushing them out of their comfort zone, socializing them in public, or holding and petting the dogs — help some dogs, don't help others, and even hurt others. How can we know what to do? How can we know whether a particular method will help or hurt a particular rescued hoarded dog? What methods should adopters use?

First, we should not be surprised by this apparent confusion. Individual dogs, like individual people, respond to adversity in very different ways. This is because all individuals (humans and other animals) vary in their resilience to stress and trauma. The severity of harm varies: Some individuals are unharmed, some are harmed a little, and some are severely affected. The type of harm also varies between individuals, as the response to trauma may be fear in one individual and depression in another. In addition, individuals recover at different speeds and to different degrees. Some individuals bounce back quickly from a traumatic experience, while others do not. All of this leads to the dilemma of different dogs responding differently to the different methods of rehabilitation and therapy.

The individuality we see in rescued hoarded dogs in terms of how they are psychologically affected and how they respond to various treatment methods is exactly what we should expect. Here is a comment from an adopter that illustrates the variability in treatment (and the frustration):

“I gave her some time (maybe too much time) to adjust to her new living situation. Nothing was changing so I did challenge her, maybe more than I should have. I did pick her up and put her on the couch beside me. I massaged her while I watched TV. Then I pushed her by putting on a collar and leash and taking her outside for the first time in her life. She blossomed outside. I sat with her on the grass, fed her treats occasionally for an hour at a time. I think I did the right thing. I would still be waiting if I let Josie make the first move. Michelle (with [her dog] Sandy), who also did your survey, probably has Josie’s sister. She hasn’t pushed and Sandy has still never been outside and can only be touched on her terms. Josie has moved way ahead of Sandy. It’s hard to say if there is a right way.”

The lesson from all this is that every dog’s rehabilitation must be individualized for that dog. There is no one single right way to promote emotional healing for rescued hoarded dogs, which is very much like the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in human trauma victims. There is no one method of treatment for all affected people;

therapy is individualized for each and every person. Every treatment method attempted must be closely evaluated to see whether it creates positive change or seems to make problems worse.

In treating rescued hoarded dogs, it often takes some imagination and creativity to come up with something that works best with any individual dog. One adopter summed up this issue quite well in this comment about rehabilitating a hoarded dog: “A lot of trial and error. Normal training methods that I had used for my other dogs (past and present) didn’t work for her.”

The good news is that many websites, blogs, and online discussion and support groups are now devoted to the topic of caring for fearful dogs — mainly puppy mill rescues, but using principles very appropriate for formerly hoarded dogs. (Some of these resources are listed at the end of this document.) Through these avenues, many new ideas are being exchanged all the time. They won’t all work, and some of them may even be harmful — such as the concept of “not rewarding their fear” discussed above — so everyone must be very careful, of course. But new techniques will be devised for as long as dogs continue to come out of these horrible living situations.



## Part 3: Outlook for recovery and long-term well-being

What we know about the psychological scars rescued hoarded dogs can suffer from is very distressing, and the work we do to try to help them is often heartrending. But through all of this, there is a lot of good news. The outcome for these dogs, as a group, is very, very promising. And the experiences of the kind souls who adopt these dogs are, as you will see, incredibly uplifting.

I want to share a brief word about the information below. It is extremely difficult to do a scientific study and end up with the absolute truth on what is being studied. Our work with rescued hoarded dogs is no exception. First, we are obviously only able to study the dogs who made it all the way through the process of being rescued, being cared for by a rescue group or person, possibly being in foster care, being adopted, and staying in their adoptive home. Sadly, not all dogs from hoarding environments make it through this entire process. In some cases when animals are recovered from a hoarding situation, many dogs may be euthanized due to poor health, extreme fear of people or aggressiveness.

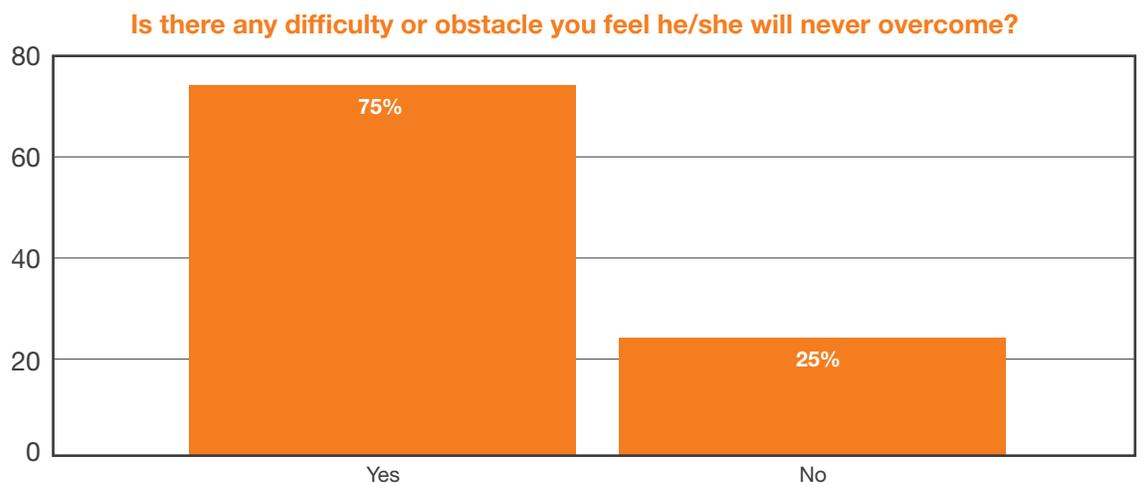
Second, because all of our information was collected from people who volunteered to participate in the study, it is possible for the results

to be skewed in the direction of more positive outcomes, since the people who are unhappy with the adoption may be less inclined to participate in the study (due to lack of interest, worry that they will be criticized for things they did or didn't do, or for "giving up" on the dog).

Third, a small number of adopters are so dissatisfied with the adoption that they return the dog to the adoption organization. These people would not be part of this study. So, the portion of this questionnaire that deals with adopters' satisfaction may miss some of the more negative situations. In other words, the results may end up looking more positive than they truly are. But with that said, the news is still overwhelmingly positive. The first question deals with a less positive issue, but after that things get really good.

### Insurmountable obstacles

Our studies show that many of the psychological challenges that afflict rescued hoarded dogs improve over time, although some don't improve or improve to a point but then they don't seem to show any more improvement. An extremely valuable bit of information to help people foresee how



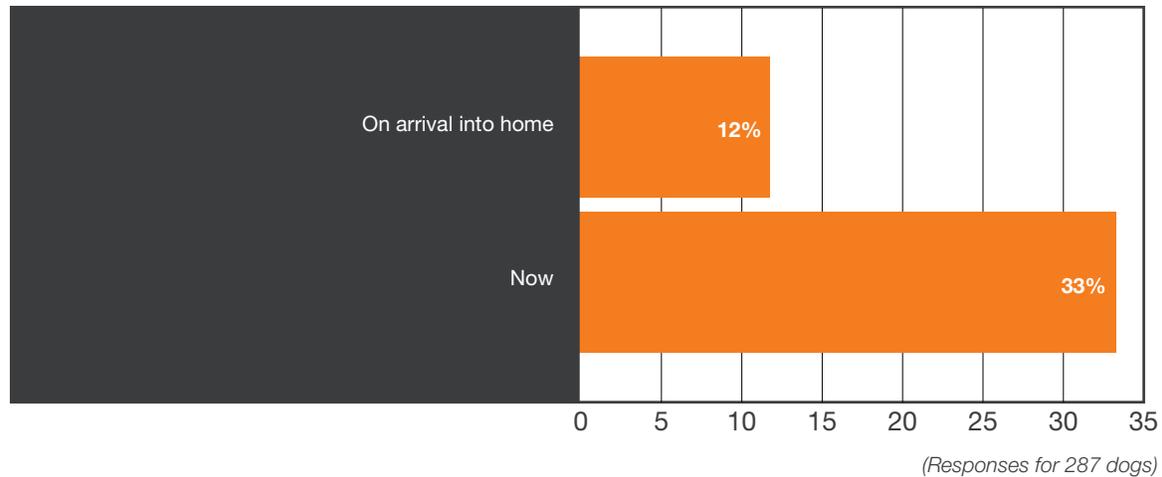
(Responses for 252 dogs)

these dogs may progress over time is to find out what those who have cared for them have noted as major stumbling blocks for the dogs.

Here are some comments about what people believed were likely insurmountable obstacles for their dog:

- I honestly don't think Snoopy will ever get over his trust issues with people he doesn't know or with men.
- She still cowers when approached to be petted. I don't think she will ever be outgoing and seeking of affection from strangers the way Clipper is.
- Sensitivity to loud noises and sudden movements.
- After all this time, I'm not sure she will ever be able to gain that level of confidence and just be a happy "normal" dog. It's OK, though; I love her as she is. :)
- I'm afraid we may have gotten as much out of him as we can. The damage he incurred in the beginning of his life, I'm afraid, is too deep to undo all of it.
- Generalized fear of people and low threshold for sudden changes in the environment.
- Thunderstorm phobia.
- Not sure he will ever overcome his fear of anything new, strange, or sudden.
- At this point, I do not feel she can overcome being without me.
- I don't think he will ever be fully comfortable with my husband.
- I don't think Wolfie will ever do well in novel situations that aren't highly controlled and totally predictable to him. I have adopted other reactive dogs, but he is peculiarly hard-wired to find novelty unbearable.
- Not being completely housebroken. He doesn't go to the door to let me know he needs to go out. I leave pee pads out for him while at work. I have to say that I haven't seriously done work to make him go to the door, as I had another dog that was elderly when I got him, so I had pee pads out at the time. It's not a problem for me at all.
- Her fear of being outside. She will never love being outside, but I suspect she will learn to be less afraid as we continue with training.
- We don't see any reason to expect Sasha to ever become a normal dog. We decided early on that our job is to love her, feed her and keep her safe. Whatever she becomes is OK with us.
- Fear and anxiety will likely always be part of her character.
- I tend to think she won't get over her fear of being picked up.
- I'm not sure if he will ever get over his fear of men. I do hope so and hope that my friends who are male will help him overcome that fear. Until then, I will always be diligent when a man is around him.
- Not sure if he will ever be confident enough not to bite — but either way, he's home for life and will move at his own pace for improvement.
- 1) He is not housebroken and our vet says he likely never will be. He is puppy-pad-trained and we are fine with this. (2) He does not play. Any kind of toy, especially those that are thrown, scares him. It took a couple of years, but he now plays "hands" with my husband, and he and Mona play a bit (mostly just kind of tussle with each other).
- I think Mannix will always spin. Now he spins out of excitement (food time) and less out of fear.
- Ability to cope with the normal things outside her home environment like a well-adjusted dog [is able to do]. Does cope somewhat better if our well-adjusted dog is with her.
- Fear of eating alone or without protection; need to hand-feed.
- Urination issues: He gets that I prefer he goes outside, but considers it optional and will never have perfect manners this way. He will never enjoy or accept physical affection the way most dogs do, and he will always be a klutz.
- He will never be able to cope with being touched by hands. We have tried training, drugs, anything suggested and finally gave up. We have learned to accept and support him in a way that allows him to be happy and function to the best of his ability and we don't expect him to normalize at this point. He does the best that he can and he loves us the best that he can and we love him back.
- She still has trust issues, but after seven years, she has probably come as far as she will. We are happy with her improvement.

## Would you consider your dog to be a normal, well-adjusted dog?



- Now that she is comfortable in her own skin, in our home, backyard and my office, it doesn't matter to us if she never gets closer to being a "normal" dog (one that goes for walks, interacts with other people, etc.). She has made tremendous progress from where she was when we got her. She is who she is and we wouldn't trade her for anything.
- I don't think she'll ever be totally normal. She's very needy and yet cannot stand touch or any kind of affection. She'd have a heart attack if I tried to hug her.

### The well-adjusted dog

We were interested in how many people felt their dog was "normal," both when the dog arrived in the household and now (which was, on average, a little more than two years later). Having the "on arrival" score served as a starting point for comparison with the later score. The two questions required yes or no responses. Here are the two questions we asked:

- Many, but not all, hoarded dogs are considered to be different than a typical, average, well-adjusted, emotionally healthy — "normal" — dog. Would you consider your dog to have been a normal, well-adjusted dog when he/she arrived in your household (after the first couple of weeks of adjustment)?

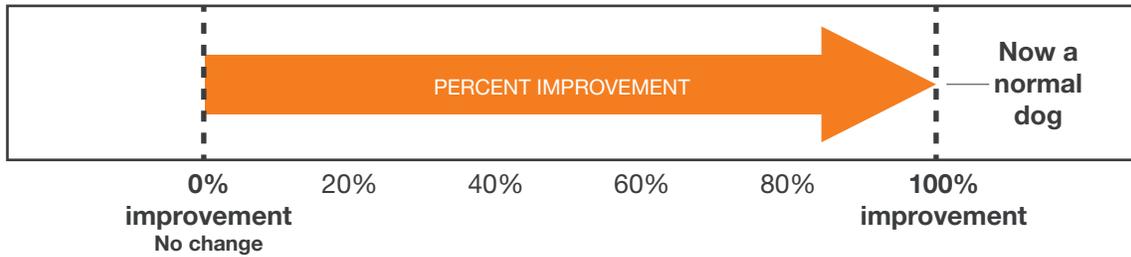
- Would you consider your dog to be a normal, well-adjusted dog now?

Here are the results:

About one in eight rescued hoarded dogs were considered to be normal and well-adjusted at the time of adoption (after a few weeks to adapt to the household). Then, about two years later, one in three were judged to be normal dogs. This is very good news. However, it still means that two-thirds of the dogs remain different than normal, well-adjusted dogs after that passage of time.

### Percentage improvement over time

The next question was more specific about the amount of improvement the dog made over the time since adoption. For this question, it didn't matter how mild or severe the dog's problem was to start. For example, the dog could start off with nothing other than the very minimal problem of urinating in the house once a week, or start off with severe debilitating fear causing the dog to cower, tremble, and hide in the closet 24 hours a day. I just wanted to know how far he or she had progressed, from whatever level of emotional or behavioral difficulties the dog started with. Looking at this on a scale, it looks like this:



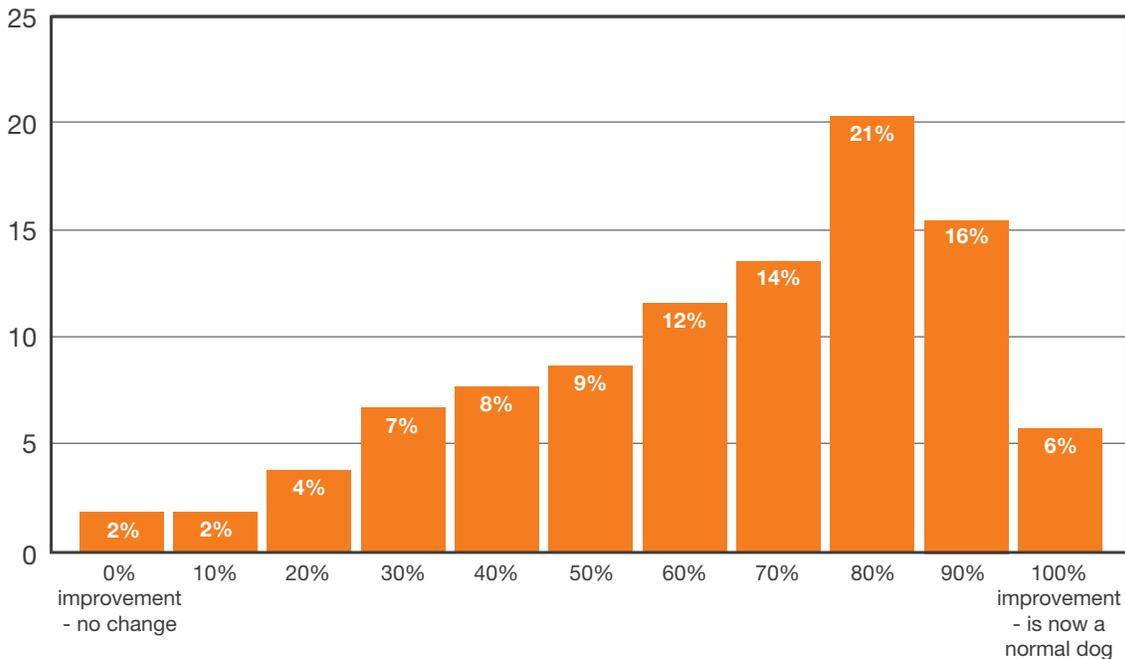
Here is the question:

The characteristics that make a hoarded dog different than “normal” dogs often, but not always, resolve with time. They may also resolve partially but not completely. ***If you believe that your dog was not a typical, normal dog when he/she arrived in your household, what degree of overall improvement have you noted in becoming a normal dog?*** As an example, if your dog has made very little improvement you might say he/she is 10% improved, whereas if he/she has made dramatic improvement and is now very close to what you would call a normal dog you might say he/she is 90% improved. If you have noted no change, you would score it 0%.

Here are the results:

What we were hoping to see here is a heavy concentration of scores toward the right end of the scale, which indicates the greatest degree of improvement. And that is exactly what we see. The major grouping of dogs is in the region of 70% to 100% improvement, which is outstanding. With this information in hand, adopters can be informed in rather precise numbers about the likelihood of their dog improving, and by how much. For example, a dog would have a 22% chance of improving 90% or better in two years, a 43% chance of improving 80% or better, and a 57% chance of improving 70%. This is very encouraging news.

**What degree of overall improvement have you noted in your dog?**



(Responses for 267 dogs)

## Happiness and related experiences

Taking the previous two questions one step further, I wanted to know about the adopters' opinions of the dogs' happiness and the other psychological concepts related to happiness, such as quality of life, emotional well-being, and enjoyment of life. The question was put like this:

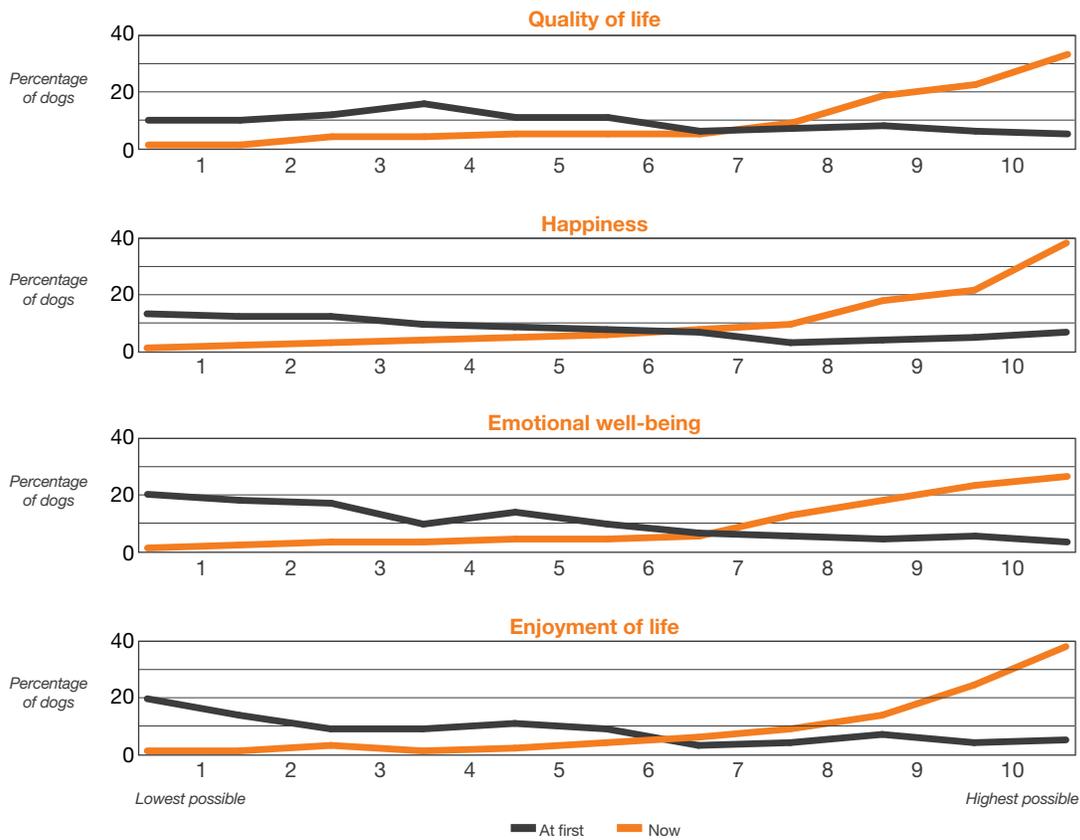
Quality of life, happiness, emotional well-being — everyone has their own ideas of what each of these terms mean. Most people find overlap between these concepts; some people may even regard two or more of the factors to be the same thing. There is no right or wrong on this issue. **Please rate the following factors on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being the lowest**

**possible and 10 being the highest possible you could imagine a dog having: quality of life, happiness, emotional well-being, enjoyment of life.**

The responses are illustrated in the graphs below. The graphs show the breakdown for all four factors (quality of life, happiness, emotional well-being, enjoyment of life), comparing when the dogs arrived in their adoptive homes and after an average of two years in those homes. "At first" means when the dog arrived, and "Now" is approximately two years later. On the bottom of each graph are the numerical ratings; the lowest scores are on the left and the highest scores are on the right. On the left side is the percentage of dogs receiving these scores.

Looking at the scores for "At first," we can see that for each of the four happiness-related fac-

**Quality of life, happiness, emotional well-being, enjoyment of life (after the dogs had been in homes for an average of two years)**



(Responses for 285 dogs)

tors, the dogs scored predominantly in the 0-4 range — the lowest scores possible. So the dogs were generally very unhappy and not enjoying life when they joined their adoptive households.

But look at what happened after two years had passed (“Now”). There has been a massive shift of scores for all four factors from the lowest values to the highest. The dogs now fall overwhelmingly into the 8-10 range — the highest scores possible. This is incredible news because it shows that the outcomes for rescued hoarded dogs, as a group, are extremely favorable.

As positive as these findings are, however, a couple of things must be kept in mind. First, we mustn’t lose sight of the fact that even after two years with adoptive families who are doing everything to help them, some dogs were still scoring 0, 1 or 2 for these happiness-related factors. These are the dogs who continue to struggle, who have extreme problems overcoming the psychological harm they’ve suffered.

Second, just because some dogs received scores of 9 and 10 for these happiness-related concepts doesn’t necessarily mean that these dogs have become 100% “normal” — that is, they may not have fully overcome their emotional challenges. What it does mean is that they have successfully adapted to their challenges. For example, if the

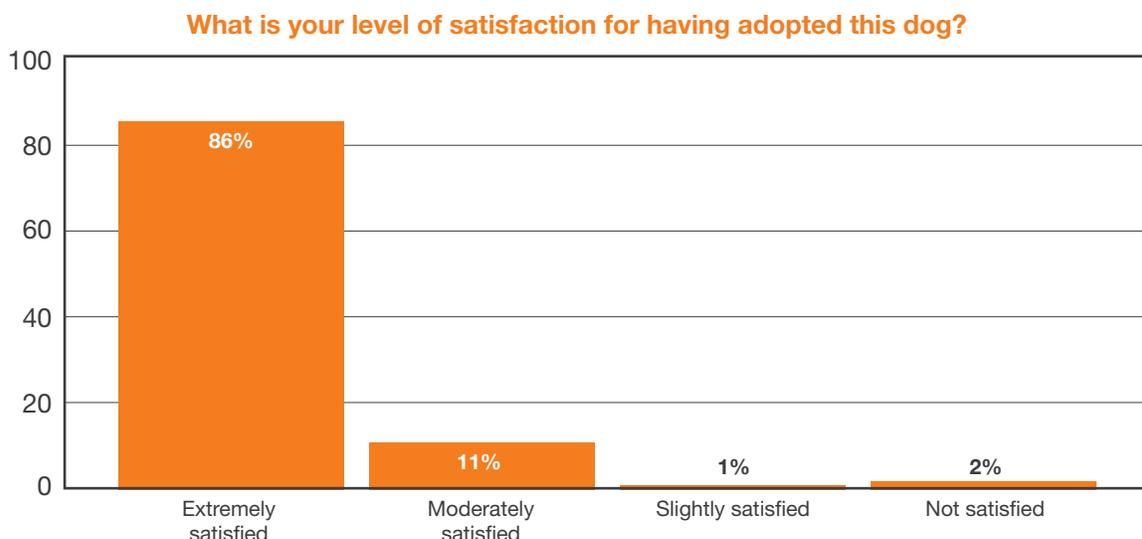
dog has not overcome his fear of strangers, but learns that every time a stranger shows up at the front door he can scurry off to the back bedroom and feel safe, then in between strangers’ visits he can live a very stress-free and enjoyable life. A comparable scenario is someone with a terrible fear of flying. As long as the person doesn’t fly, her life can be an extremely happy one. One adopter’s comment says it best: “She is truly a happy, happy little soul when she is inside of her comfort zone.”

## Adopters’ satisfaction

No issue carries more weight in our understanding of the adoption success of rescued hoarded dogs than the level of satisfaction that the adopters have about their experience. No information is more important to convey to prospective adopters of hoarded dogs. The question here was very simple:

### ***What is your level of satisfaction for having adopted this dog?***

Of course, the unspoken part of this question was “in light of all the problems and challenges you have faced.” The four possible answers were extremely satisfied, moderately satisfied, slightly satisfied, and not satisfied.



*(Responses for 278 dogs)*

These results are simply astounding. Think about how important this information is for rescued hoarded dogs. When we can tell prospective adopters that in a survey of nearly 300 people who had adopted hoarded dogs, 86% rated their adoption experience as “extremely satisfied” and 97% rated themselves extremely or moderately satisfied, the chances for hoarded dogs to be adopted are greatly enhanced.

An important additional comment is needed here about this incredibly high satisfaction level of the adopters of these dogs. The adopters answering this questionnaire were overwhelmingly people who have the heart and mind to take on special-needs dogs with significant challenges. These are very special people adopting very special dogs. It’s similar to adopting a special-needs child: It’s not something that just anyone can do, or should do. So we are seeing the satisfaction levels of people ready and willing to adopt an animal who has had a very hard life and will need a lot of extra attention and work.

One other point to keep in mind is the comment I made earlier about the fact that a small number of these adoptions fail and the dog is returned to the adoption organization. The people who’ve returned a dog are not included in this survey, since they no longer have the dog and hence would not be answering a solicitation to participate in the study. So the level of satisfaction has a slight skew toward more positive results.

We received many comments in relation to this question, and I’ve included a lot of them here because they each have slightly different things to say:

- I lean toward the less adoptable dogs, so having one with issues is no problem. She’s my buddy, more so than any of my other dogs.
- Even with her quirks about people in our home, she is a really good dog. If she gets out of the yard, she always comes home, doesn’t bark, is friendly to everyone and everything. Good in the house, just a good dog.
- Fostering and finally adopting has been a difficult but very rewarding experience. Seeing where he was and where he is now has been great. We feel we did rescue this dog from a horrible life.
- She is our world and she always will be.
- OMG! He is my best friend. I never tire of delighting in him. I love him.
- I was Rex’s foster home, not his adopter. His adopter is 100% happy and satisfied with having adopted him, and is giving him a wonderful home. The experience of having fostered this dog for 1.5 years and helped him in his growth was one of the best things that ever happened to me. I learned a huge amount ... more than I can put into words. I also had an emotional experience with Rex that defies words and was exquisitely beautiful and intensely enjoyable. Celebrating every little victory for him, seeing him grow to trust and love me, watching his incremental progress, and growing in my love for him — all were wonderful experiences for me. I think fostering Rex was possibly the best thing I have ever done and I would take on another shut-down, terrified dog in a heartbeat. I hope I have the chance someday to share that journey again with another dog. Rex gave me far more than I gave him, and being a part of and a witness to his transformation was a great privilege.
- Scooter is a wonderful addition to our family. He is goofy and loving and playful. We love him so much.
- Truly a gift, her having come to share our lives.
- I picked this particular dog because I knew she was a bit off. I love her so much and she has taught so much about patience.
- We love him and look forward to many years of fun with him.
- Even with his difficulties, I love him dearly. He makes me smile every day.
- My husband and I adore this little dog. She is pampered and accepted for who she is.
- She is a great dog. We love each other and she is definitely my dog. She is never more than a few feet away from me. She does her best to show me love and it is a beautiful thing.
- I adore this dog. We were just fostering her and had nine applications from people to adopt her, but once they saw her lack of hair and elephantiasis from the mange, no one wanted her. Now I’m grateful they didn’t want her!
- I run a dog rescue group and Lennon came in and I fostered him. Once we found out how bro-

ken he was, we tried everything we could to help him improve and realized that it wouldn't happen. I could have had him put down, but he was so sweet with the other dogs coming into our home and did everything that I asked him to do that he just stayed and stayed until the thought of euthanization was just wrong. He relaxed and showed us that he could be happy and playful and very sweet and we could give him the sanctuary he needed to function.

- We don't care that she is not social with other people; we work around what she is.
- She is one of the sweetest, most loving dogs I've ever met.
- Feefers has adjusted to living in two households (she stays with my widowed mother when I work part-time), she is an agility champion (superior level in Teacup), and we are totally bonded. I never thought I could love another dog so much!
- I knew he would be a challenge, but I also knew he was meant to be my baby boy.
- This dog lives on love. She gives it just by being herself!
- She has taught me more than any other rescue I have come across. She has inspired me to push for more options for these "unadoptable" dogs through sanctuaries and barn dog programs.
- So happy to have watched a dog with so much emotional hurt be transformed into a little life that is peaceful and content.
- Teddy has grown and adjusted wonderfully! He was initially afraid of life, and now he enjoys his life. He gets off-leash romps on our 30 acres of woods, and he is very obedient and well mannered.
- I have always had a lot of dogs and this little dog is amazing. Riley came from a hoarding situation with 150+ dogs where he was neglected and had little or no human contact before he was rescued. He was so hungry for love and affection that he has become one of the sweetest, most loving dogs I have ever had.
- Choosing to adopt her even though she was considered to have "problems" was the best decision we have ever made.
- This little dog has woven her way into the fabric of our hearts. We have a digital frame and occasionally the photo of her when we first rescued her comes up and it not only breaks our hearts,

it warms them to think that we saved her. She is amazingly dear.

- I can't imagine life without him. Everyone who meets him loves him. People stop us when we're away from the house and want to meet him and comment on how cute and sweet he is.
- Waffle is the love of my life and I wouldn't trade him for ANYTHING.
- I adopted Bruno because he needed so much help. I knew he wasn't going to get it from a normal person. He was a challenge and sometimes still is, but he is 99% a great dog. We're just dealing with that 1%! He is very loving and happy and enjoys being loved. I feel I've made a great difference in his life and that makes me very happy!
- To see her make improvements and be brave in her scary world is a joy. To see her interact with other dogs in our home is wonderful to see. She lights up the world with her joy.
- I am so glad we adopted her. Even if she never changes, she is adorable and we all love her. She is one of the most loved dogs at the dog park even though she won't let anyone pet her or love on her. Doggie brother and doggie cousins take care of her.
- Sparky is the best! He has his own rescue now devoted to deaf and blind dogs. He was recently in a children's book about special-needs dogs. He also is used in educating the public about special-needs dogs.
- I didn't understand what I was getting into when I brought her into my home, but after the initial shock wore off, I knew that she needed someone who wouldn't give up on her. Learning with her has enriched my life so completely that words can't describe. She is an angel that deserves to be loved.
- She is a joy! She's come so far and granted she still has a way to go, but I'm so proud of her! Couldn't love her any more! She's priceless!
- She is the sweetest, most gentle dog who only wants to please, love, and be loved.
- Sammy is my FAVORITE pet ever, to the extent that I can have favorites. I am more bonded with him because of his emotional neediness.
- She has been a source of a lot of stress for me, but there's nothing better than when she has a



milestone. It's obvious she loves me, and she is the sweetest dog. I am very happy that we adopted her, but it's definitely not for everyone.

- I'm crazy about her — she is practically velcroed to my arm and I take her everywhere. Interestingly, she no longer shows fear when I'm out with her, provided I'm always holding her.
- Could not imagine life without her!
- It's a wonderful feeling to see a dog from a situation like this start to blossom, come out of her shell, and simply enjoy the life she was meant to have.
- She is very loving and affectionate. She loves to play with our cat (he is very relaxed and confident). Her progress is amazing.
- He turned into a great dog. Even with a couple of issues, he is an outstanding friend and will forever be in my life and thoughts. I have no regrets and would rescue a hoarded animal again without hesitation.
- She is the sweetest, most loving dog anyone could ever ask for.
- To have adopted any animal out of such a horrific situation is very satisfying, but for Shadow to have come out of his emotional/physical neglect to such a wonderful level makes the experience all the better!
- Tessy has been the biggest challenge we've faced in eight-plus years of animal rescue work.

We have mainly had to follow our hearts when we brought her home. No one we asked really had any insights. Having said that, Tessy has taught us so much it is hard to sum up here. She gets excited in the mornings for breakfast. She loves rides in the car. She uses the doggie door in the evenings. She has recently taken to barking in the morning when she wants breakfast. She makes us laugh. She makes us proud every time she shows the slightest spark of life or happiness. Tessy is not an easy dog to live with most of the time. It is often heartbreaking that she is still so terrified after two years of love. But she is part of our family.

- Charlie is a wonderful dog. Once he felt safe and accepted us as his "pack," he truly blossomed.
- Noodle is possibly one of the sweetest dogs on the planet. She is happy and plays with total abandon.
- It has been a long, long journey together, but I have never regretted adopting her for a single moment.
- He is an absolute joy to be around. So happy, playful and sweet.
- She makes you want to smile and will snuggle when she knows you don't feel your best.
- I kept a brief journal for the first few months that Hershey lived with us and it is amazing to go back and read it now. She has come a long way.
- He is truly my soul-mate dog.
- ZsaZsa is the most loving, sweet, compassionate dog — she is a blessing.
- He is a real joy. We are in love with him and adopted another hoarded dog a few months later.
- Cece is one of the greatest things I've ever done. It was definitely a labor of love and the purchase of a house to ensure that she remained in my life. We needed each other, we rescued each other and watching her come to life has been a genuine thrill.
- Lil'bit has been worth every struggle. I consider her to be my "heart dog."
- While it's been very trying emotionally and physically, we can't imagine life without Jazzy.
- I am very grateful to be in a time of life that allows me to love Button, be his family, and it does not matter one bit if he ever becomes perfectly behaved. There have been times in my life when I

never could have done this well. I can now. Wow, a great feeling!

- I loved watching her learn to be a real dog. She has turned out to be so playful and loving. It's hard to believe she is the same dog.
- I love him to death! He is adorable, sweet, funny, very playful. Unfortunately, he doesn't show that to anyone else but me, for the most part. I don't care that he is somewhat "damaged" in other people's eyes, I love him anyway! Wouldn't give him up for anything.

## Most rewarding experience

In the previous question, we received many comments about why people rated their level of satisfaction the way they did. I wanted to know something a little different in this question, in which I asked people about what was most rewarding.

### ***What has been most rewarding about your experiences with this dog?***

- It is so heartwarming to see how far Toffee has come in a comfortable home, with consistency and love. My favorite experience with her is when she settles in my lap with a satisfied sigh, releases all her tension and enjoys just being. Of course, she often falls asleep. :-)
  - Watching him come out of his shell. We recently had a great training session, which I could see was hard for him, but he was so happy when he handled the situation so well. He also did extremely well in his first group outing of about 500 dogs raising money for cancer research in Manhattan. His love for other dogs who visit is a sight to see.
  - The most rewarding moment for me was when he came and laid in my arms on his own. I sat there and cried. I knew at that moment he had decided to trust me. It's funny how much you appreciate small goals with a dog like him. I remember how excited we were when we saw him carry a dog toy through the room. You would have thought our child just took his first steps. Or the first time he wagged his tail or did a play bow. All things that we expect dogs to do and don't give much thought to. I never thought I would be so excited to see a dog roll in grass
- or dig a hole in my yard. To most people that is either normal or a problem. But for us it was reason to celebrate. Everytime Muggles did a "dog" activity, we got so excited! We still do. It truly makes us appreciate the little things.
- How much she wants to please and her joy in doing it.
  - It didn't happen overnight, but teaching her that the world really isn't such a bad place is the most rewarding thing I have ever done in my life.
  - He has taught me patience and to look differently at fearful dogs.
  - To watch him learn to love life, that people are kind and nice to know, and that he can trust me and other people. I have ended up with a dog in Felix that is irreplaceable!
  - Watching the emergence of such a beautiful spirit in this dog, and being privileged enough to be the person who made a safe space into which he could emerge. Hutch did all the hard work; I only helped him along and encouraged him. It was probably the most rewarding experience of my life, and made me not only a better dog person but a better person in general.
  - Knowing that he has a forever home and all the love he could ever need. Plus the unconditional love that he gives back.
  - Just knowing how bad the beginning of his life was, and that now he is being spoiled and loved. We will always rescue animals, because we believe firmly in this practice. We understand that an adopted dog, especially a dog that was in a hoarder situation, will present problems, but we are up for the challenge, because it is worth it!
  - Seeing such a sad, shut down, pathetic creature blossom into a total goofball. She and my female Dobie are the best of friends. We also just took in an obnoxious puppy that was abandoned up in the mountains (and barely survived starvation and dehydration) and Meadow lies on the floor and wrestles with him even though she has almost no teeth. He's fierce with her, and she is so gentle and sweet with him. It's like she's come full circle.
  - It makes us happy to see how happy this little nut bar is despite his limitations, which he doesn't seem to see as limitations. Maybe he is a life lesson wrapped up in fur? We realize that we love him very much and the fact that he is getting

a bit creaky strikes sadness in my heart. He has been loved and has felt safe and happy with us. He will be missed when he has to leave us and that is all that matters in the end.

- She really responds well when she knows I'm proud of her and happy! I truly think this dog would walk through fire to be with us.
- Mika has added so much joy to our lives. Seeing her take her first steps, learn to like dog treats (at first she would only eat grass and dirt outside), stop covering her food with the blankets, learn to wag her tail, all of it was so amazing. Mika's joyful playing and bright eyes make us all happier and filled with love.
- His unconditional love and his amazing attachment to me versus other members of the family. He loves to be loved by everyone, but wherever I go, he goes. I am his comfort and he is my joy.
- Having saved him: I worked in the shelter to help with the care of the rescues after they were brought in and he literally reached out to me. Watching him grow in confidence and personality and making this house his home — barking at the doorbell, etc. Curling up and sleeping next to us. Plus he has a certain prance about him that melts our hearts.
- Seeing her go from a scared dog who was nervous about any new experience, would run away from people and follow me from room to room, to a dog who sleeps in the bed with me and my husband, will go on runs with us and deals well with even stray dogs who walk alongside us, and even being able to have friends over and she will sit on the couch and socialize. It's just been a very rewarding way to help rehabilitate a dog to give her a better quality of life. She started in a trailer home bathroom with no food, no socialization, etc. She ate the paint off the door because that was all she knew. Now with all her skin conditions, allergies, emotional issues, aggression and anxiety issues, she is still the best dog anyone could ask for.
- Watching him come around and finally liking us. At first, I called the rescue group back and told them that this dog hated us and I didn't think he would want to live with us. They told me to give it time and we did and he really loves us now.
- I am a vet tech and adopted him after falling in love with him when he was hospitalized for

a week at my clinic. He was 30 pounds underweight (he was a 28 pound collie), completely dehydrated, full of parasites and had Lyme disease. Nursing him back to health, gaining his trust, and making him feel safe for the first time in his life was the most rewarding experience.

- To watch him make more and more progress on a daily basis. I often think back on how he spent the first 10 years of his life, and to look at him now and see a happy, well-mannered, loving dog just means the world to me.
- Seeing Ivory as she is today compared to how she was a few years ago brings total joy to my heart. She follows me everywhere and has total trust in me. Knowing she loves me unconditionally and feels safe with me is a big reward. She is a true gentle soul.
- I have a loving, wonderful dog! His new sister loves him. Zelda, who is his sister, was a puppy mill dog so she never played, but now plays with Oodles. It is wonderful to see both of them play. He also loves my cat, and the cat will lie down, and Oodles will lick her from head to tail, and then she will wrap her arms around his head and lick his head and he closes his eyes. Every day with Oodles is a rewarding day for me!
- Every day that Kassie shows improvement in any situation makes us want to throw a party for her! You would not believe how excited we get when she is no longer afraid of things as simple as the trash can.
- Watching her figure things out and realize that she is safe. It took me a year and a half to housebreak her completely. Watching her face when she finally got it, I swear I could see the aha moment. It was so worth all the messes. It has also been so amazing to watch her figure out how to be a dog. She didn't know how to play when she came to me. A few weeks ago, she discovered fetch and is constantly asking me to throw the ball. She is a miracle every day and I know that there are still more discoveries to make.
- Watching him improve, and build trust with me, the way he smothers me with kisses all the time he's in my arms. Realizing I saved him from misery and certain death, and he will never forget it.
- Seeing how much love he has in his heart.
- I love this little girl so much and I love seeing her happy. I started herding with her a year ago

and she loves it. I took her to a trial in San Diego and she played on the beach and played ball in a big green meadow. Seeing her do these things brought tears to my eyes.

- Watching this shy, fearful dog blossom into a happy dog. She is our princess.
- She is the sweetest little girl and I know she loves me as I do her. Watching the progress she has made in what I feel is a short time, considering her age. When we leave the house to go walking, she prances and hops and sometimes vocalizes her happiness. That just makes my heart sing.
- Witnessing tiny, almost imperceptible improvements that are huge steps forward for her.
- Just watching her slowly progress and become more confident and trusting. I really believe she knows she is loved and cherished, and she does have lots of fun every day. Watching her wrestle with our other Chihuahua, and run around the room in excitement is truly a joy. Giving Keesha the life she deserves is such a good feeling and I am beyond happy we were able to adopt Keesha. Seeing her come into her own and be a little confident girl (at times) is wonderful.
- Moonpie is the second rescue dog my family has had and both times it has been a truly rewarding experience. Moonpie just wants to be loved and to be safe. He brings more joy to me than I ever could have imagined. Watching him go from an unsure, scared, and sick (he had heartworms when I got him) dog to the healthy, fun and loving dog that he is now has been a joy.
- Seeing the situation he came from (confined to a small room in a trailer with several other dogs, living in his own waste, no exercise or outside time) and how scared he was when I first got him compared to how happy and fun-loving he is now. He is great with my animals and others that I foster, loves to run and play, especially enjoys rolling on the couch and playing with my other dogs and his toys, but mostly loves just my attention and sitting with me.
- I will never, ever forget the first time he wagged his tail or the first time he laid his head on my arm while I was reading in one of his “comfort zone” spaces. I didn’t move for fear he would move his head. It brought tears of joy to my eyes.
- I love seeing her do new things. It took us almost a year to get her to take a walk in the neighbor-

hood with us and Trixie. It took 4-5 times of visiting the pet store before we didn’t have to call for cleanup on aisle 3. I was so proud of her last summer when we attended Pet Expo at a large arena with her. She walked around all the people, booths, and dogs for about 90 minutes. She was nervous, but she did it!

- Watching Looper become confident, trusting and happy has been an amazing experience. Seeing him wag his tail for the first time was such a happy moment and a milestone. Because of what we have been through together, our bond is so tight. He has enlightened me and changed me for the better.
- That first tail wag. I never thought I would get to see one and then one day, there it was and I knew that we had a trust and a love between us that would always be undefined to anyone but us. The look she gives me ... you can see the love in her eyes and there’s always a touch of gratitude in them, too. It was definitely a long road, but I’m beyond thrilled to be the one who gave her the life she deserves.
- I think just being able to bring him some sense of safety, to see him sleep soundly without having nightmares, to help him have a sense of joy and comfort and predictability that things are good and decent and that humans can be kind and loving.
- Being able to know that he now has a stable home, someone who loves him unconditionally. We need each other and we both know and appreciate that.
- Enjoying agility classes with her and her loyalty and love for me. She definitely fits the description of faithful companion. She is a joy. She loves everyone.
- Her development into a happy, healthy doggie. She was 11 pounds when I got her and is now 18. She is a princess in my house; she does what she wants and lives life to the fullest. I just wish I could do it for so many more.

## Disappointing or troubling experiences

As much as we want to think about the positive aspects of these dogs and their adoption, it is important to find out all we can about the negative

aspects so that we can learn from them. With that in mind, the next question I asked was this one:

***What, if anything, has been disappointing or troubling about your experiences with this dog?***

Starting off with the good news, even though the only people who should answer this question are those with something disappointing or troubling to report, 54 people wanted us to know that there was nothing bad about their adoption experience. A small sample of these comments:

- Nothing! We adore her and love who she is.
- None — very happy.
- There is nothing disappointing with him. I am so impressed with him. I just wish that he would understand that under no circumstances would I ever hurt him or allow him to be hurt by anyone or anything. I hope that he can trust 100% at some point and can really just relax and enjoy the rest of his life. He deserves it!
- Not a thing.
- There hasn't been any disappointment whatsoever.
- None. I am just sorry that such a sweet and brave little dog has had such a hard life.
- Nothing. OK, he has to wear a sweater in the winter. Never thought I'd have a dog who needed a coat.
- Nothing at all. He is wonderful and we love him very much.

The responses showed that people experienced two different types of disappointment. One focused primarily on the dog's well-being; the second was more focused on the adopter's satisfaction. These two types of disappointment were not mutually exclusive, as there were responses that would apply to both types, such as when a person was unhappy (not satisfied) about seeing the dog fail to overcome her fear (impaired well-being).

**Examples of comments focused on disappointment about the dog's well-being:**

- Knowing what her life could have been if she did not live in her situation for the six or seven years she did. She is such a sweet girl that others do not see because of her fear of people.



- There is little to no help available dealing with dogs with such social developmental deprivation. Dealing with physically abused dogs that have a basis of human trust in the beginning is VERY different than dealing with a neglected-from-birth hoarder dog. Behaviorists I've spoken to had no real concept of the differences; they are vast and the approaches are very different. Hopefully, your study will help educate others so that these dogs can be saved instead of killed because no one knows how to approach their care. They are not more difficult; their needs are different.
- He is on meds for the rest of his life due to his poor health condition when he came. Watching the fear in him during a storm hurts me.
- Seeing the sadness in her and knowing the horrors she went through.
- I am just disappointed that a dog has ever had to have this kind of trust issues with people.
- How helpless I feel when I cannot help them. I do not have the knowledge or experience with such emotionally crippled animals. I feel like I have failed them most days because they aren't further along in the recovery process.
- It is still almost impossible to think about how damaged she was when we first brought her home. How could a situation exist that could tear an animal down that far? And after two years, at the age of four, not knowing if she will get any more comfortable with her world.

- The realization that few pet owners and an [unfortunately small] number of trainers understand the most humane and effective ways to work with scared dogs.
- It is troubling to me that someone would have done this to him. I know they probably meant well, but it just was so unfair to him. I wish I would have found him before he was ever hoarded. I tell him every night before I go to bed, “I was looking for you my whole life and finally found you. God must really love us to put us together.” And he will, every single time, give me a little kiss.
- The most troubling thing is that she always appears to look sad. We want her to be happy and tell her she’s beautiful and loved every day and we want her to know that.
- Just wondering what she experienced in her past and wondering if she’ll ever totally get past it.
- The most troubling part about this experience is that there are no effective aids to help Paisley transition from a “feral” dog to a “house” dog. After checking through and researching on the internet, I have not found anything better than love and support to help Paisley overcome her fear.
- I worried in the beginning that maybe I was doing something wrong because she wasn’t trusting of us. It just took a little time and I feel I am blessed to have her.
- I wish I had known that this would be a process of years to the rest of his life. Television wrongly leads people to believe animals can be “cured.”
- I just feel bad that we can’t figure out what makes her whine and cry so we can help her deal with it.
- I worry about what will happen to him if I should have to leave him somewhere for any reason or if something should happen to me.
- Not being able to find a way to calm her when she is in the height of fear.
- The dishonesty of the rescue group I got her from. They were telling everyone that she was a well-adjusted, happy dog, completely house-trained. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The first night she was with me was one of the saddest moments of my life. I remember having gotten into bed and shut off the lights and she let out the most heartbreaking howl and ran out of the room. I found her huddled behind a

large houseplant in a corner, shaking. I sat down on the floor several yards away from her and just read, trying to get her used to my voice. My other dog kept trying to coax her out. Two and a half hours later, she finally ventured out of that corner. It was another hour after that before she was willing to let me touch her. Her whole back end was soaked in pee. I cried so hard that night. No animal should have to be that frightened.

- I suppose her fear of strangers and even friends who often visit. My husband and I will most likely forever remain the only people who will ever know her charm and uniqueness. She is beautiful, cute and active only around the two of us. When in the presence of strangers, she becomes a scraggly bundle of trembling paranoia, ugly even — so strange, yet flattering.
- I fear his issues are too severe and ingrained for him to ever be a normal dog.
- Pibb continues to have problems with reactivity, and we have had to provide him with a smaller world than I had hoped he could at some point learn to enjoy.
- We couldn’t help him.
- How long it has taken. Worried I can’t take him to the vet or, if I do, how hard that would be for him. Afraid he will get out and how terrified he would be and how he could get lost. Concern for his safety and his welfare.
- Just seeing her afraid of things that should not frighten her.
- I wish I could alleviate her fear. I wish I could communicate to her that I will never hurt her and will do my best to protect her.
- Wishing that I could do more.

**Examples of comments about disappointment primarily focused on the adopter’s satisfaction:**

- Birdie was adopted/returned twice due to behavior problems before I adopted. Requires much patience daily even after 9 years.
- We love him and will keep him forever but he is a difficult dog with issues. He was in a house with 149 dogs and had to fight for food, etc., so his behavior is very understandable.
- I have always adopted dogs and she has been the hardest.

- Not only does she have emotional problems, but she is allergic to everything under the sun and plagued with chronic yeast infections. Just had allergy testing done — waiting for results. Much more expensive than ever anticipated — medications, vet bills, prescription food, etc.
- That we got him so late in life and won't be able to enjoy him for many more years.
- Her super dependence on me ALL THE TIME.
- Doodle was extremely difficult to house-break and it took over a year until he could be considered 100% potty-trained. This did cause a lot of disappointment and stress over that time period.
- Troubling in that I have to be so careful he doesn't bite anyone, but I know that will always be a consideration. He has never disappointed because he is who he is, and my job is to make the very best life for him that I can.
- He has bitten me too many times to count. I wanted a little dog that I could cuddle with and he was wonderful for the first six months or so, but after he started feeling better he turned into a pain for me. I love him but I have to be careful how I pick him up, my tone of voice, etc., or he is just evil. He is good for almost everyone else and I swear I don't treat him mean!
- His continuing fear of people and aggression toward strange dogs. I wish I had worked with him more — exposing him to new experiences — when he first came to live with me and was “learning the ropes.”
- The wetting.
- His propensity to escape.
- She has not taken to my husband, which is sad. But she tolerates him and since he respects her space, they coexist fine. He would just love to be part of her trusted circle, too.
- Trying to be patient as he works through his behavioral issues. Our other dog, who was rescued from a 40-dog hoarding situation, adjusted faster so we need to reset our expectations.
- The transformation took so long to complete.
- We used to have a lot of people over to visit, but these situations have become more and more stressful so we don't anymore. I think people don't come because they are not comfortable

around him. We have tried to crate him or sometimes gate him in another room, but his insistent barking becomes very unsettling.

- Her ongoing separation anxiety.
- Biting is scary, obviously. There is a part of me that is never relaxed when she is around other people. I am more comfortable than before — and more attentive. I wish this didn't have to be.
- It troubles me that I'm her trigger and any sudden movements by me make her crazy (when my husband isn't home). It is very frustrating when she's spinning and chasing her tail and bleeding and I sometimes want to scream. I wish she would stop but I've accepted that this is part of who she is. I wish she wouldn't hurt herself, and I wish I could trust her around strangers but I can't.
- I would just like to see him panic less. I know how to handle him; he just likes to be held or I take him to the car where it's quiet but some people don't understand. He is a big pit bull and when he's panicked it frightens people. If I could get him to be able to cope easier or quicker, I think I could expose him to many more fun things in life.
- His needs impose some compromises in my life. He can't ever be left home alone. He has to be carried up and down stairs. He has mild to moderate urination issues.
- That it takes so long for her to make progress in what seems such small steps. But then I think of what she must have experienced and stop being so impatient for her to feel comfortable and safe.
- Inability to make peace with another dog in the home.
- No bonding with the dog. I wish she would enjoy some attention ... or anything to see her get excited.
- The lack of affection she shows me. I am very affectionate with her and I can't wait for the first nuzzle! I know the prancing when we are outside is a sign but I want that climb in my lap, slobber all over my glasses and snuggle in just to be with her human. I know (it takes) time, but I also have to prepare for the fact it may never happen. I pray that won't be the case!
- We've had foster dogs before with problems (separation anxiety, nervous peeing, etc.) and we tried very hard to avoid these problems. We were disappointed that, despite being careful in

selecting a dog, she has a whole new (to us) set of problems that we hadn't anticipated.

- The level of advancement is far less than I expected. She makes messes on the carpet out of fear daily. I am exhausted and frustrated at constantly having to clean, despite all measures I've taken to alleviate her fears.

I include these comments to show the reality of rescued hoarded dogs. However, do not let these negative comments discourage you or detract from the larger picture, which is immensely uplifting. Remember that 86% of the adopters in this study said that they were extremely satisfied with having adopted their rescued hoarded dog. There is even more good news along those lines in the next question.

## Would you adopt this dog again?

There is another way to look at the adoption experience through the adopter's eyes, which is to ask this question:

***If you had to do it all over again, knowing what you know now, would you adopt this dog again?***

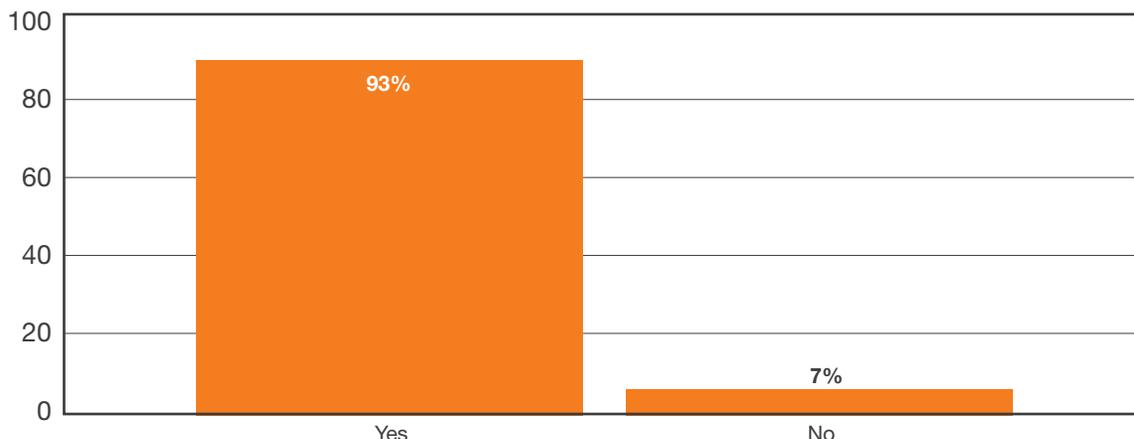
This question is another one that trumps all of the questions showing that rescued hoarded dogs present difficult challenges to the adoptive fami-

lies. In essence, what I was asking in this question is this: "Considering all of the challenges, difficulties, and frustrations you have encountered in your experience with this dog, would you do it all again?" And we learned that 93% of adopters would. This, like the numbers for level of satisfaction, is enormously valuable information for prospective adopters who might have hesitations about adopting a rescued hoarded dog.

This is incredibly good news, telling us that only 19 out of 278 dogs would not be adopted again. The follow-up question I asked was "If no, why not?" Here are some of the answers from people who said they wouldn't adopt the dog again:

- Too difficult to control and train.
- I have too many dogs; she would have been better as an "only" dog.
- He has a great personality and would never bite a stranger, but every night around 4 a.m. he wants in the bed, which is fine (he has a bed next to ours with baby blankets in it). I spend the rest of the night lying perfectly still because he will bite me if I bump into him. Otherwise, he is great, as long as I don't touch him unless he wants to be petted. He adores my husband and sits on his lap when he's home and let's him hug him, etc. I haven't hugged him in years. He wouldn't tolerate it and I don't push it.
- No. I hate to say this because I love her so much.

**If you had to do it all over again, knowing what you know now, would you adopt this dog again?**



(278 responses)

- I have had a lot of dogs, cats and other animals during my lifetime and never had any problems raising my children with fur. However, I was not familiar with the little dog mentality that I had heard of but figured that I would be able to handle it. I had even thought of returning Newton and the other dog that I had to adopt with him, but I am not one to give up so easily. Also, I saw that the other dog seemed to have a lot more potential and her behavior was more manageable. I also believe that you should adopt for life and that I should try harder.
- We love this dog dearly and would never take her back, but financially it's a killer! She's a sweet girl. Hopefully we can get this allergy/yeast problem under control so it won't be so expensive.
- I feel like she would be better off with someone who can stay home 24/7 and spend more time and trust with her.
- I don't know. Maybe someone would have been able to help him more but I hate to think of him ending up in a shelter and put down.
- It's easy to say no, but if I saw her cringing in a cage again with no hope I don't think I could turn my back.
- The time and energy required to live with a dog like this is more than I want to commit to again. The understanding that there is no guarantee how much improvement a dog will be able to make prevents me from wanting to add another special-needs pet to our household.
- Probably not. We don't think we were completely (aware) of her past and potential for acclimating. We are social people with an unsocial dog.
- Let me preface this by saying I'm a very experienced dog trainer and have gone to great lengths to help this dog. But he was so poorly socialized for the 1.5 years prior to rescue that he will never be normal. All of the dogs from this situation are this way. It's very sad.
- The fear of men (including my husband, who was here when she arrived) is amazing. She actually went through a screen door (the solid part, not the screen) to get away. She came from a place where it was one woman and she had never seen a man or been off the property when I got her. She would do better with a single woman. She has come around at least 50% with me when I am home alone, but still hides when my husband is here.

**Even though the follow-up question asked “If no, why not?”, we received many comments from people who would adopt the same dog again. Here are some of them:**

- Without a doubt. She has taught me a level of patience I didn't think was possible, and she continues to challenge me to find new training techniques.
- I would, but my spouse would not. I have been dealing with difficult animals (horses also) all my life. He is not an experienced dog trainer but a good spoiler and loves the dog very much.
- Every time.
- Absolutely!
- I chose him then and I would choose him again! I love him.
- I think Oreo is also good at keeping my old dog (Handsome 17!) active mentally and physically, thus keeping him alive.
- IN A HEARTBEAT!!!!!!
- Wonderful dog, even though not cuddly.
- Yes, because I can now estimate the situation that dogs from hoarders from Eastern Europe are in and know what to expect.
- EMPHATICALLY YES!! I can't imagine our life without Zach. He's the perfect third dog to our older two!
- Absolutely, positively, resoundingly YES. It has been one of the most important experiences of my life.
- Over and over again! I was just going to foster him until he found a home. I have fostered dogs for 17 years. He was my first “foster failure.” He has taught me so very much — more, I think, than any other dog.
- Because of his risk for being euthanized or dying from lack of good medical care. Otherwise, he was not an appropriate fit with other animals and he limits our other dogs' happiness. After all this time, though, I love him to death and can't picture life without him.
- Fell in love when I first saw her — no way to say no!
- In a heartbeat. He needed a forever home, my older dog had just died at 16, so I had room in my home and my heart for him —no hesitation if there is a vacancy (max load: two dogs, two cats). All these guys need is patience, love, un-

derstanding, and training. BTW, that’s also what people who adopt hoarding dogs need, too!

- Although keeping Champ safe and feeling secure is sometimes a challenge, I have never regretted adopting him, and it is gratifying to be able to provide him with an environment where he can enjoy his life.
- I hate her problems and they upset us dreadfully, but she needed a good home and we could provide her with a forgiving and patient home. And her friendliness, athleticism, intelligence and all-around good attitude make all of the crappiness worth it.

## Would you do anything differently?

“Hindsight is always 20/20,” the saying goes. Questions that ask people to use what they know now and look back to judge what they did earlier can elicit very valuable information. So I asked this question:

***Knowing what you know now, is there anything you would have done differently with this dog after adopting him/her?***

The response is in the graph below. This is a very interesting response, particularly because we are

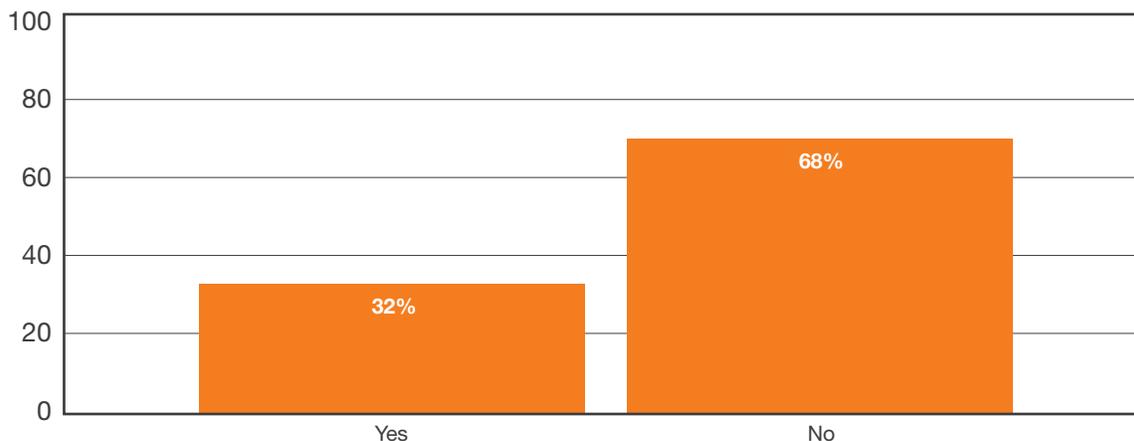
at the earliest possible phase in knowing the best way to rehabilitate psychologically harmed dogs, which includes rescued hoarded dogs. When much of what we do is still trial and error, it would seem more people undertaking the endeavor would want to do at least one thing differently. And yet, nearly 7 out of 10 adopters would not do a single thing differently.

I wondered if 70% of parents feel the same way about how they raised their children. So I looked into it and found a recent study that asked this exact thing of 2,000 parents<sup>2</sup>. Here is what was found: More than 75% of parents have at least one thing they regret doing — or not doing — during the early years of raising their children. And two-thirds state that they would do things differently if they could do it all over again. Of course, raising children and adopting a rescued hoarded dog are two very different things, but the contrast in the percentage of people who would do things differently if given the chance is intriguing nonetheless.

Here are some of the comments offered by adopters:

- I probably would have kept him out of some situations that were too much for him.
- We would have adopted him sooner.
- I should have recognized her need for medication sooner. I have brought several previous

**Knowing what you know now, is there anything you would have done differently with this dog after adopting him/her?**



(278 responses)

<sup>2</sup>From DailyMail.com in the United Kingdom: [dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2203025/Spending-time-work-children-young-parents-chief-regret.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2203025/Spending-time-work-children-young-parents-chief-regret.html)

puppy mill survivors out of their “funks” without medicating them. Muffin really is a “nervous sort” of dog, and the medication has been a lifesaver for her. She has a very bright future now. :)

- Tried to teach him how to play. Sadly, to this day, he’s clueless about a ball or chew toy. He likes his Kong only for the treat. We’re still working on it, though.
  - I would have made sure they got professional help immediately. Almost feral dogs from a hoarding situation have almost no chance with the average animal lover. I won’t be underestimating this fact ever again.
  - Socialized him more during the first couple of months he lived with me, while he was still adjusting. Walks with neighbor kids, visiting with neighbors (people and dogs), inviting visitors to my house, trips to PetSmart or the dog park, etc.
  - Wait longer to take her to obedience class.
  - I wouldn’t have put him through so many months of intrusive desensitization exercises. Once I got over wanting him to be and do the things that I defined as normal and began to work with him to modify our situation to allow him to be included and safe, then we began to enjoy each other and our life together.
  - Not push so hard, especially at the beginning.
  - Take her out of her comfort zone a little more.
  - I didn’t want to answer no, because I am concerned that I could have addressed the peeing in some other way, but not sure how. I did consult the vet but most dogs don’t pee in their house, so that is one area I would like to find a way to do differently.
  - I know a good trainer now that uses only positive reinforcement techniques. Hiring someone like her when we first got him might have helped us get him to overcome his fears and to trust us sooner.
  - I would have started working immediately on her separation anxiety.
  - I would have started with clicker training.
  - I wouldn’t have tried to show her the world in her first week and would have introduced her to things slowly.
  - I would have adopted our other puppy sooner if I had known the difference it would make in Ebony’s life.
- Try to use “piddle pads” for housebreaking since she was so accustomed to going in the house!
  - Taken him for obedience and socialized him more. He only ever encountered other dogs when he went for a bath or to the vet, which to him were probably all negative experiences.
  - I would have paid a lot more attention to her body signals. I tried to treat her like she was normal and hadn’t been through hell. I know that some of the things I did were very hard on her. She still can’t deal with normal training methods. A simple “uh-uh” will send her scurrying for cover. I have learned to listen more to what she is trying to tell me.
  - I would have done more research on what types of things to expect with dogs from these types of cases, so that I would have been better prepared to help her cope without having to research after the fact.
  - Would have gotten another dog sooner, because when the puppy came she was full of life and I had never seen her play the way she did.
  - We would have lowered our expectations for her (or at least lengthened our timetable for progress) and we would have put her on anti-anxiety medications sooner.
  - Worked on more socialization skills, but he was in such bad shape when we got him that this may be the best he is capable of.
  - Offer more structure, more quickly. But as far as I could see it was a waiting game, and needing to know when to wait or move forward. I know more now, but I could get no knowledgeable input from “professionals,” who really didn’t understand her needs.

## Inspirational stories

Another question I asked adopters was about sharing inspirational stories about their dogs. Below is the question and some of the responses.

***Many adopters of hoarded dogs with emotional and behavioral problems have described how their dogs have managed to overcome their problems in a way that would be an inspiration to dog lovers — stories that could be called***

***heartwarming, poignant, even heroic, and that demonstrate some of the admirable traits of dogs, such as courage, perseverance, resilience, devotion and, especially, forgiveness. Is your dog's story anything like this and one that you would want other people to hear about?***

### **SCOTTY**

Scotty had had four homes by the time he was 18 months old. He ended up living with a senior woman, in a back room of her filthy home, no windows and very rarely getting outside. He lived, ate, slept and relieved himself inside a small wire crate. When I first met him, he was extremely cage-aggressive and I was too frightened of him to allow his crate door to be opened with me in the room. He was caked in his own filth and could be smelled yards away. Once out of his crate, he was no longer aggressive but was a wild child, to put it mildly. He was not housebroken, had no manners but did have a spark in his eyes that made me agree to take him out of that disgusting situation and find him a new home.

Well, four years later he is still here and there is NO way he will ever live anywhere else. He has completed obedience classes, rally obedience classes, and is a registered therapy dog. Weekly, we visit seniors in nursing homes and he excels at it! He is kind, gentle and sweet. I work with special-needs adults and children often in my home, and he is so patient with them and is a wonderful dog for them to interact with. He has very big exercise needs still, which is great with me because we snowshoe together, retrieve, swim, fish, hike, and he loves nothing better than running behind our four-wheeler.

One thing that has really changed in Scotty is his eyes. He was a wild-eyed, fearful dog when he arrived and now his eyes are kind and very intelligent. He is one of the smartest dogs I have ever owned and when I think of all the time he spent caged and that mind being wasted, I am so glad I took a chance on him. He is worth every effort I have put in.

### **CAMMIE**

Cammie was born in the home of an elderly woman who had several unaltered animals. It was told to me that she was five years old and had lived her entire life under a sofa trying to escape attack from the other dogs in the house. She was

actually left behind on the first “sweep” by animal control because they did not see her. (She is a dark chocolate color and the house had no electricity.) Though she is a 14-15 pound miniature poodle, she can fold herself in half to hide in the tiniest of spaces.

She spent her entire life afraid of other dogs, but since coming to live with me she has discovered that dogs are her best friends — more so than me in the beginning. Cammie is a very forgiving little creature. She still has a ways to go toward being a “normal” dog, but we love her regardless and feel that she has fully accepted us as her family at this point.

### **OZZIE**

When Ozzie came into foster care, he was virtually catatonic. He would not move, eat, drink, or look at anyone. He could hardly walk, due to having been kept his whole life in a small wire cage. He had to be carried outside to go to the bathroom, and when put on the ground he would stand in one place, perfectly still, staring at the ground. Once he started walking, he moved like a 15-year-old dog with arthritis. He was terrified of everyone and everything. He had a severe case of what psychologists call “learned helplessness” and wanted only to hide from the world.

Today, less than two years later, Ozzie has been adopted and has a true forever home. In tiny, incremental steps, Ozzie came out of his shell. His journey was amazing to witness. People would say to me, the foster mom, that I must be very skilled, or a saint, or that I did such good work to bring him along, but in all honesty I have to tell you that Ozzie did all the hard work, and deserves all the credit.

His courage was and is amazing. As frightened as he was, as lacking in the experience of even the most rudimentary aspects of being a dog, he still worked hard to come out of his dark place. Although he had never had kind treatment from a person before being taken into foster care, he was willing to learn to trust. Having never had love, he nevertheless learned to give love. His life had been harsh and sad and lonely, but given the chance to learn to play, he crept from his hiding place and joined in. Tentatively at first, but soon with great joy and abandon. He learned how to be a dog and to love and be loved by a person.

Every step was very small and the steps came slowly, but his progress was celebrated each step of the way. Eventually Ozzie went out into the world, and even attended dog classes. He showed himself to be a dog of great heart, courage, affection and joy. Ozzie was adopted after being in foster care for a year and a half, and has a wonderful life ahead of him.

He will probably always be wary of strangers. Probably will never be a bouncy, outgoing, happy-go-lucky dog, but there is no need for him to be. He is happy and contented and obsessed with playing, and he loves and trusts his people. He is deeply loved by his family and will always have a piece of his foster mom's heart. Ozzie not only transformed his own life, but also the life of the person who fostered him and the lives of the couple who adopted him. He will always be a great inspiration to those who have been lucky enough to know him.

### **BUTCH**

Butch came not only from a hoarder situation, but from a situation where the owners tried to make him mean to guard their business and drugs. He now visits schools for hundreds of children to see, love and learn about bite prevention. He visits nursing homes and is the most gentle dog I have ever had with elderly people. He is absolutely the best dog with other animals, making them feel loved and protected. He has been photographed



helping everything from a bearded dragon to a kitten to a parrot to a goat. It is amazing that he has spent the last years of his life making such a difference in the animals and some people around him.

### **CUPCAKE**

Cupcake was found in a home with 320 other dogs, of which about 90 were euthanized due to their poor condition. She then spent the next three years in the pound as evidence (a pound that keeps almost 800 animals). The conditions she lived in were just horrific, both in the home and the pound. She was so frightened, depressed and shut down and had no knowledge of what "normal" was. Yet somehow, after a few months with us, she became such a loving, gentle, peaceful girl.

I can't even begin to imagine how she could be so forgiving of what people did to her. She is patient, resilient, gracious and easygoing, where she could have easily been a stressed-out, unhappy freak who could never bond with anyone or anything. I have nine dogs in my house now, all with sad stories but none that match what Cupcake went through. I describe her as the sweetest dog in the house. She has never met a dog or a person she didn't want to kiss. The fact that she is as normal as she is, without any apparent PTSD, blows me away.

### **FANCY**

Fancy was born into a rescue group that evolved over time into a hoarding situation. As a young pup, he was attacked by an older dog. From that day on, the only person who could touch him was the hoarder. This was the life he had for his first 10 years.

When the SPCA brought him and 27 other dogs to the shelter where we volunteered, he was one of the most terrified dogs I had ever seen. His kennel was the only one with a sign on the front: DO NOT TOUCH, AGGRESSIVE. It took 10 days before he would voluntarily leave the back corner of his kennel and another week before he got to go on his first walk ever. He eventually got to the point where any of the volunteers who dared to come to him were welcomed if they had a bowl of food, a treat, or a leash in their hands.

When he came home with us, he was not house-broken, marked anything that didn't move, thought

closets were toy boxes, and that shoes were chew toys. Two weeks later, all was good. The big surprise was that any dog he saw was his new BFF, including his kid brother, Parker. Because Fancy had such a positive influence on Parker, we have been able to have five other dogs come through our house during the past 18 months — one hospice and four fosters. He is saving the lives of dogs at a local high-kill shelter because of who he is.

### CASPER

Casper was living with 150 other dogs in the desert in Nevada. During her life in the desert, she never had any human contact. Once a week, a caretaker came by to throw food over the fence. The larger, stronger dogs would get the food and the smaller, shyer, less dominant dogs were left to their own devices. Some of the larger dogs would attack the others out of starvation. Some of the dogs had makeshift shelters made of haystacks, but would not let other dogs in.

Casper was the shyest dog there, according to animal control. She dug a tunnel to try and keep warm and protect her pups. Her pups were stolen from her to be eaten by the other dogs. Several animal welfare organizations coordinated an epic rescue for these animals. Many of the dogs were placed with rescue groups across the country. The 30 most unsocialized dogs remained at a temporary emergency shelter for further rehabilitation. Many were un-placeable and those involved in their rescue and subsequent care stepped up to foster and attempt to rehab these dogs. Casper was one of these dogs.

To look at her now, five years after rescue, there is a dramatic difference in her eyes. One can see calmness and peace. Even though she is not your everyday, normal canine companion, she still gives me as much gratification and love as the other dogs in my life. Watching her go from being paralyzed by fear, always in survival flight mode, to the point where I can walk past her and pat her on the head has given me so much satisfaction. It took five years, but she is able to show me love and trust in a completely different way than the other rescues I have, but it was oh-so-worth-it. I hope others can learn from this hoarding experience and give these so-called “unadoptable” dogs a chance. They don’t need to be “normal”; they just need to be dogs.

### PERSIA

When we got Persia, she was between one and two years old. She had been living in a greenhouse with over 200 other dogs for over one year with a woman who was using donated money to feed herself. We actually adopted her because we took our other dog there and Persia was the only one she didn’t try to bite. Persia just sat there in the dirt as if she were a stone.

After we got her, we couldn’t get her to eat. She thought that grass was a treat, and when we put her down outside she would lick the dirt until we picked her up again, and she would cover the food we gave her with the blankets in her dog bed. She couldn’t walk, and it took us five baths to get the smell out of her fur. For several weeks after we got her, she didn’t leave her dog bed willingly. We had to turn it inside out to get her out to take her outside. At first, my husband got her to practice standing on shaky legs, and eventually to walk. After a few weeks, we tried to set her down in other places in the apartment, but she would scramble back to the dog bed.

Then one day we came home and she was in the kitchen by the other dog. But when she saw us, it was back to the dog bed. As time went on, she started getting out more and more during the day and one day just didn’t go back inside except when she got scared. Eventually, she would come up to us without us chasing her down to put her leash on. Over time, her tail, which had been permanently down under her body, started to give a small wave under her body, then it started to wave even with her body, and after about two years it was curled over her body with a full wag, where it still is today.

Persia hadn’t known any kindness in her short life, but has become the most joyful, exuberant dog and is constantly trying to play with us and our older dog, making everyone smile who sees her.

### SMITTY

Smitty was raised in a group of 65 dogs that had no shelter or containment. This was in southern Ohio. When rescuers were triaging the dogs, Smitty got in a fight and was labeled dog-aggressive. He was fifth on the list of those to be euthanized. Debbie, a rescuer, saw something in him and took him home to her stable dog family and healed his

physical injuries and helped him learn to be loved. She had him a little over a year. Then he was adopted and the family gave up on him within a month because Smitty was fearful.

Debbie then asked a rescue group in our town to take him, and they in turn asked us to foster him for just two weeks. Well, that two weeks turned into a lifetime. He has learned to trust us, grown to know he is safe here, and he is the most obedient, responsive, loving dog! He is a testament to how dogs can relearn to trust people, and how poor or no socialization is so harmful to dogs. Debbie helped him become non-aggressive, and we helped him know he is part of our family forever. When we take trips to our woods (which require a one-hour car ride), Smitty kisses and snuggles Dennis with no fear. Seeing Smitty wiggle on his back asking Dennis for a tummy rub is so wonderful. Smitty lived to share his heart!

### **RINGO**

A rescue group took Ringo out of his hoarding situation, but he was so hand-shy and nippy when they tried to handle him that they felt he would be unadoptable. They brought him to the vet I worked at to be euthanized. He huddled pathetically at the back of his crate, avoiding eye contact with his big chocolate velvet eyes, perhaps the saddest dog we had ever seen.

I had been thinking of getting a second dog but hadn't found the right one. I asked the rescue group if I could take him home with me to see if he got along with my dog, a malinois mix three times his size. I figured even if he didn't like people, if he got along with Cleo, at worst he'd get a little more time. He cowered in the car, froze as I carried him in. I set him down. The second he saw Cleo, he was transformed. He greeted her like a long-lost friend. He pranced and played and smiled. His tail went up at a jaunty angle for the first time since I had met him. He was instantly Cleo's dog. That's the beginning of how she taught him to be a regular dog.

### **BUNGEE**

Bungee came from a hoarding situation that a man and his mother were living. The man died, leaving the older mother to care for all the dogs and one cat. She couldn't care for herself, let alone the animals, so the rescue group came

in and took in all the dogs and the cat. Bungee was very scared when he went to the shelter. He wouldn't come out of his crate at the shelter; they even left his door open.

One of the rescuers let me know about him, so I said I would adopt him, sight unseen. I went to fill out the paperwork, and while I was doing that, he came out of his crate and put his head on my lap. I told him, "You're already coming home with me. Don't worry, buddy."

Even though he has been through so much in his life, he trusts me and is unconditionally devoted to me. He has somehow in his heart forgiven the ones that neglected or abused him, and found his peace within our home. He continues to try to not be so afraid of the outside world, and anyone that tries is a hero in my book, and shows courage like none other. He has every right to be aggressive, yet he shows no signs of aggression. All he shows is love, and brightness in his eyes. Can't imagine the household without him, would never have changed a thing in my decision to adopt him.

### **ROYCE**

He arrived from a hoarding situation, where he lived in a barn and slept on hay. He was severely neglected in terms of health and emotional care. Royce was adopted (after losing his tail to infection) and was returned to the hoarding situation by a different set of adopters. Other potential families had given up on him previously. He was scared of everyone and everything, constantly finding places in the house in which to hide.

It wasn't until he showed me how little I really knew about dogs that I began to study his patterns more closely in order to get a better understanding of how I could bond with him. Once trust was brought back into his life, he accepted me and became incredibly attached. Over the years, he has come out of his shell to become more confident in himself and requires little to no guidance. I have never had a dog pay attention to me in the detail that he does. He learned my own patterns and gestures down to the slightest movements, and we are able to fully communicate with each other without words. He has taught me more about dogs, myself, and how to be a good leader than I could hope to repay.

## Final comments

As a last chance to allow people to tell us about their dogs and the adoption experience, I included this final catch-all question:

***Is there anything about your dog that you would like to tell us that this questionnaire didn't cover?***

Here are a few comments from adopters that acknowledge the reality of hoarding:

- I think that one of the biggest misconceptions that people have about hoarder dogs is that with enough spoiling and love, they can be fixed. This may be true for some, but for a lot of them, you have to accept that that dog may only progress to a certain stage and that it can take years. An owner has to be OK with that and accept that dog for that.
- It's hard. It's so very hard and it is so sad, so very sad.
- I think of all the beautiful, wonderful dogs who have been ruined because of lack of socialization and the horrible lives they suffer through without someone to try to understand them. It breaks my heart and I wish there were more facilities where they might be helped.

The vast majority of responses to this question, however, were positive. Here are quite a few, all worthy of reading:

- If a soul-mate relationship can develop between a human and a dog, then Dino and I have it. He is my constant companion and watches over me no matter what I am doing. He is an awesome boy!
- I've enjoyed participating in this study, although Carrie doesn't have many issues with her past, other than wanting to be with me 24/7. I have puppy mill survivors with many more problems. Answering the study questions did make me realize two issues she has: excessive licking and not making eye contact. Interesting.
- Cracker has turned out to be an amazing little guy full of life and fun, and has displayed quite a sense of humor. He initiates play with us and Timmy and is extremely loving. We are so glad that we adopted him, as he has truly been the one that is doing the rescuing.



- Matilda was a puppy at the time of adoption. I often wonder if she developed and adapted so well because she was still young. I don't know if she would still be the happy-go-lucky dog if she grew up in a hoarding situation. She is a joy to be around, as she exudes happiness. The question becomes is that her "blueprint" and would she have been the same joyful dog if she had grown up in the same hoarding environment? I only know she makes me smile and I wish all people would adopt!
- Merlin is such a deserving dog. He is kind, gentle, sweet, intelligent, playful, loving, and physically beautiful. But none of that was evident when he was first liberated from the hoarding/puppy-mill situation in which he was found by the county humane society. He was a "throw-away dog" and no one cared about him. But all he needed was for one person to care about him and to create for him a safe place within which he could learn and grow. He is an inspiration to all who know him. But there are so many more like him still suffering in puppy mills, and they are deserving, too. I wish everyone would understand that it takes no special training or skill to help these dogs ... just the willingness to learn and love and be patient, and the desire to help. If more people would learn this, as I did, more dogs could be saved and have good lives.
- I would also like to mention that we have tried different medications and behavioral classes to try

and benefit Denny. We also take him with us as much as possible in an effort to continue his progress. I hope this helps; there are a lot of things that I wish I had done differently looking back, but we did what we thought was best. I often wonder if I had taken different approaches to things what he might be like. I know that there are some dogs from that case that have received very positive, no-pressure type of therapy and still can't be handled. Denny, whether good or bad, didn't get that type of recovery. We forced a lot, but we have seen a lot of improvement. I often wonder if I had forced him more in the beginning to interact with more people if he would be more adjusted now.

- Curly is the most wonderful dog ever. I wouldn't trade him for 20 "normal" dogs. He is funny and smart and even though he doesn't know how to play with toys, he plays with me. It only took one day to potty-train him, one day to leash-train him. He has never chewed anything, broken anything, or had an "accident" in the house. He has lots of issues, but he is still the best dog ever. Thank you for letting me share his story.
  - He is a wonderful little guy. Shy but loving, scared but protective, silly and playful, generally a mixed-up little project that we are tackling with all we have. Most of all, just love him to bits!
  - I'm not sure who will read this, but I wanted to mention that my husband and I had several people tell us we would regret adopting Beezie. I will not disagree that it took much patience and time and the support of the shelter to help us to treat Beezie in the right way and to "expect her to be normal." We love her and she loves us.
  - Some of the other dogs from the same hoarding situation have had recent health problems and at least one has died. We say a prayer every day that we can have her as long as possible. We feel so blessed to have her. She was the very last dog to be adopted from the shelter. We went looking for a different dog, but saw her and knew we could help her (or, as it turns out, that she could help us).
  - Shep absolutely loves the other dogs in the house and I am glad I have three others for him to play with. I think that is where he gets his happiness from. I don't think he would be happy at all as an only dog in a household and that probably stems from being in a hoarder house.
- I personally am thrilled this research is occurring. It is a wish come true for many of us professional and volunteer rescuers. [Hoarded dogs] are almost a breed unto themselves and there is very, very little information about them available to rehabbers.
  - She's a wonderful dog and I'm so glad I adopted her! I love her with all my heart!
  - If you met Blaze, you'd never know he was rescued from a hoarding situation.
  - I also have a puppy mill dog, Teena, who has many of the same characteristics as Bogie. However, when the two met each other, Teena changed; she showed Bogie the ropes. It is comical to watch sometimes. When Teena is afraid of something, Bogie is too, but yet heroically, he stands in front of her to guard her. Together, they show each other they are not going through this alone, displaying the true meaning of friendship — being at your side whenever you need them.
  - I don't think people should hesitate to adopt a hoarded dog as long as they don't expect miracles. Take each day as it comes and be happy with little changes. Gertie now follows me in the kitchen while I'm cooking, which is huge for her. Expect to make changes. I used to feed my other dog in the back hallway but had to bring the food into the family [room] because Gertie was too scared to walk back there. I could probably move it back there now, but we have a little area set up and it works. We also realized she needed a place to hide when things got too crazy for her. We put her crate here in the family room and prop the door open so she runs in there when she gets scared. The door is never shut but it's her hideaway. She's an awesome dog in her own way and I'm so happy we adopted her!
  - I think it is extremely important for people to know that these dogs have an amazing capacity for forgiveness and love. If you are willing to take the time and have lots of patience, they will reward you a thousand times over. I am Trudy's rock. I know that she loves me and knows that I would never allow anyone to hurt her again. I had to earn that trust, but oh what an amazing experience!
  - When I first got Taylor, in addition to being deaf, she had urinary incontinence issues. But it was nothing that couldn't be cured with a trip to the vet, some trial and error, and eventually two

medications. Some people tell me that would be a “deal breaker” for them, and I am sorry that they feel that way, because it hasn’t been a problem for us at all. Thank you for listening to Taylor’s ordeal, and for undertaking your research. I am sure your study results will be a huge help to canines and humans everywhere.

- Darla is a very special girl. But all dogs are special in their own way. They just need the opportunity to shine. I think the biggest thing for any potential adopter to keep in mind with rescued dogs, especially dogs from abuse or hoarders, is that they need to keep an open mind and throw any preconceived notions or wishes out the window. Having a picture of an “ideal” dog and placing those expectations on their rescued dog is unfair. Each dog is unique and will need the opportunity to develop and blossom at his own rate. I embrace whatever personality my fur babies have, whether it’s shy, nosy, friendly, outgoing, introverted, or just plain different. Instead of expecting the perfect dog, I just expect them to show me who they are. I don’t believe I have ever had a “perfect” dog, but all of them have loved me perfectly and unconditionally. And all have made me a better person.
- Unfortunately, a lot of dogs from hoarding situations are never given a second chance because they are deemed too scared or unsocialized. Our shelter got several dogs from the same case that Boomer came from, all terrified of people. Although Boomer came to us terrified of everyone, once in a home and given time, patience and love, he soon settled in and his wonderful personality showed through. He is a very sweet and affectionate dog, loves to get attention and give kisses. He plays rough and tumble with my other younger dog but is very gentle when playing with my older dog and cats. He was a perfect addition to my home. It’s so sad that some animals are subjected to such deplorable conditions at puppy mills or as hoarded dogs, but just as tragic that so many that are removed from those conditions are never able to find a loving forever home.
- Two things: (1) When I first got Baron as a temporary foster dog, he was an absolute nightmare. He had no concept of indoors — broke through sliding doors, stood on top of the dining room table, etc. The most striking thing, though, was that when I spoke to him, it didn’t seem to register that I was trying to communicate with him.

He’d look at me curiously, as if he was thinking, “This odd creature is making strange noises. I wonder what it will do next.” I might as well have been a bird or an elephant sharing space with him. I had a senior collie at the time, and I really think Chase helped Baron learn what to do about me. (2) If someone asked me to describe the characteristics of my perfect dog, Baron would definitely NOT be a match. Boisterous, ADHD ... not my thing. However, his genuine joie de vivre is so darned charming, it’s impossible not to fall in love with him.

- It is my understanding that Shiner’s behavior is “normal” for a dog who was not appropriately socialized to people and novelty when he needed to be. This has not affected his ability to learn new skills or find joy in his life.
- They are stronger and braver than humans could ever be, I believe. Probably because their nature is trusting, and as we all know, sometimes to a fault. I love her and she returns that love 100-fold.
- Visitors simply cannot believe how fragile Tinsel is. When we talk of the progress she has made, it is in the tiniest increments. However, to us, she has come so far. She is an amazing girl. We are so very proud of her. And as much as she has changed, she has helped transform her humans and her two brothers. We are all much better for having known and loved Tinsel these past two years. We have all learned a good deal of patience, gentleness and safety from her. When we first adopted Tinsel, I felt that there was very little information about how to handle a dog from a hoarding situation. We are so grateful that this research is being done and that more information will be available to help everyone coming out of a hoarding situation.
- In November of 2012, I woke up thinking that my husband was having a nightmare because of the sound he made. What I found was that he was unconscious and not breathing. Waiting for paramedics, I started CPR. Haylie sat beside us on the floor and as I was doing the chest compressions, she put her paw on my husband’s chest, close to my hands. When I did rescue breathing, she put her snout right next to our mouths. As I repeated the chest compressions, she put her paw back on his chest. She’s awesome and he’s alive today because of the moral



support she gave me! The paramedics did have to shock him and his heart started, but he never started breathing on his own again or regained consciousness until days later in the hospital. She was my CPR helper!

- Earning the love of a frightened, unsocialized dog is a tremendous, humbling gift.
- This is the sweetest, gentlest, dearest dog in the universe. It breaks my heart to think what he might have been had he not been starved and brutalized, been kept in filthy and insanely crowded conditions, and had his big heart broken over and over again.
- As a volunteer dog trainer at the county humane society, I see lots of fearful dogs come in and they hide in the back of the runs. They are the last to get adopted, if at all. I wish people knew how great these dogs can be. Martie is so gentle. She's the one I use for introductions when I have a client come to the house. She "tells" the new dog everything will be OK. I would be lost without her.
- One thing I've noticed about Elsa, and maybe it's just because I'm more attuned to it than others would be. She is always looking over her shoulder to make sure I'm still there. She continues to amaze me in the things that she does that she hasn't done before. I think more than anything, she's learning from Humphrey and in her own time will do as he does. She is one of my greatest joys.

- Just that the "princess" is lying on the couch across from me, with our other dog, half asleep watching me right now, head just went on the stack of pillows. All of her fur has grown back, something they said would never happen. She's doubled her weight. What a difference from three years ago, when she was living with 70 other dogs in her own filth, fending for themselves in cages outside. They numbered the dogs by the severity of the conditions they were found in, from 1 to 70, 70 being the worst. She was dog number 53. Oh, and they said not to let her near our cats because she'd try to eat them. Not by far. They are her "catsicles"; she licks them, sits by them, tries to play with them, loves them, and cries when she can't get to them. She is home now.
- Anti-anxiety medication helped Gretel tremendously. Lots of love, patience and the presence of a well-adjusted dog also helped. We recently added a young (two-plus years) minidachund to our family. He's a very outgoing, happy-go-lucky little guy who loves to play with her and has really helped to boost Gretel's confidence.
- He's pure love.
- He is an adorable (if needy) clown and love bug.
- She is really the most loving dog and I'm so happy to have her. I never regretted getting her for one second. She is so funny and brings such joy to my life, and she is extremely smart. She can learn a trick so fast. I love her.

## Online resources

### Support groups for rescued puppy mill and hoarded dogs

<https://facebook.com/pupppymill/?fref=nf>  
[meetup.com/Pupppymill-rescue-dogs](https://meetup.com/Pupppymill-rescue-dogs)

Shy-k9s group (restricted group: membership requires approval):  
<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/shy-k9s/info>

### Fearful dog websites

[fearfuldogs.com](https://fearfuldogs.com)  
[nicolewilde.com/how-to-help-shy-anxious-or-fearful-dogs](https://nicolewilde.com/how-to-help-shy-anxious-or-fearful-dogs)

### General care and rehabilitation of puppy mill dogs

[nowisconsinpupppymills.com/mill-survivors.html](https://nowisconsinpupppymills.com/mill-survivors.html)  
[aspca.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-articles/adopting-a-puppy-mill-dog](https://aspca.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-articles/adopting-a-puppy-mill-dog)  
[smartlivingnetwork.com/dog-health/b/caring-for-a-puppy-mill-rescue](https://smartlivingnetwork.com/dog-health/b/caring-for-a-puppy-mill-rescue)

### From Best Friends

The following resources are available at [bestfriends.org/resources/puppy-mills](https://bestfriends.org/resources/puppy-mills):

- [Puppy Mill Rescue Dogs: Getting Help with a Dog from a Puppy Mill](#)
- [Rehabilitating a Dog Rescued from a Puppy Mill or Hoarding Situation Using Positive Techniques](#)
- [Understanding and Caring for Dogs Rescued from Puppy Mills](#)