



Best Friends

## Understanding and Caring for Rescued Puppy Mill Dogs

By Franklin D. McMillan

January 2014

## About Best Friends Animal Society

Best Friends Animal Society is the only national animal welfare organization dedicated exclusively to ending the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters. When Best Friends began in 1984, some 17 million animals died every year in our nation's shelters, simply for not having homes. Today, that number is down to about four million. That's incredible progress, but it also means that more than 9,000 wonderful dogs and cats are still losing their lives every day. Together, we can change that.

Since the mid-1980s, Best Friends has been running the nation's largest no-kill sanctuary for companion animals and building effective programs all across the country that reduce the number of animals entering shelters and increase the number who find homes. Join us. Together, we can 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)  
No More Homeless Pets Network: [nmhpnetwork.bestfriends.org](http://nmhpnetwork.bestfriends.org)

## About Franklin D. McMillan, DVM

Dr. Frank McMillan, director of well-being studies for Best Friends, is a board-certified specialist in veterinary internal medicine. Before coming to Best Friends, 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>5</b>
<b>Part 1: Psychological and behavioral characteristics of rescued puppy mill dogs .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Fears and phobias.....	7
Other findings from the study.....	10
Results of the follow-up study.....	11
<i>Sociability .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Trust of humans.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Bonding patterns.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Preferences for human males and females .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>House-training abilities.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Making eye contact .....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Desire or ability to play .....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Coping with change .....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Altered mental functioning .....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Sleep disturbances.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Likelihood of improvement graph.....</i>	<i>28</i>
Conclusions for both studies .....	29
<b>Part 2: Rehabilitation and treatment methods for rescued puppy mill dogs.....</b>	<b>30</b>
The most effective methods.....	30
<i>Patience, time, not pushing, go at own pace.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Other/another dog(s).....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Love, affection, TLC .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Speak softly, be calm, move slowly.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Petting, touching, holding .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Regular routine, consistency, repetition .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Socializing .....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Training, behaviorist.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Attention and spending time with.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Acceptance, understanding .....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Walks .....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Safe haven, safe place.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Pushing her beyond her comfort zone .....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Treat like a normal dog, no babying or pity .....</i>	<i>33</i>
Having other dogs in the home.....	33
The effect of medical conditions .....	35
The least effective methods .....	36
<i>Scolding, discipline, raised voices .....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Socializing .....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Pushing/forcing to do something .....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Training-related.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Using a crate .....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Petting, touching, holding .....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Leashing.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Play.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Comforting his fear.....</i>	<i>38</i>

<i>Scary event</i> .....	38
<i>Vacation, attached human away</i> .....	39
<i>Move, change in household</i> .....	39
<i>Medical, surgery</i> .....	39
<i>Loss of companion</i> .....	40
<i>Training-related</i> .....	40
How to know what to do .....	41
<b>Part 3: Outlook for recovery and long-term well-being</b> .....	<b>42</b>
How many dogs are considered well-adjusted .....	43
Percentage of improvement .....	43
Rate of improvement .....	45
Evaluating quality of life, happiness, emotional well-being, enjoyment of life .....	45
<b>Part 4: Adopters' experience</b> .....	<b>48</b>
Most rewarding parts of adopters' experiences .....	49
Least rewarding parts of adopters' experiences.....	50
Adopting another puppy mill dog.....	50
Recommending that others adopt a puppy mill dog.....	51
<b>Part 5: Advice for adopters</b> .....	<b>53</b>
How to help your dog heal .....	53
What to know up front.....	54
The 10 cardinal rules for adopting a puppy mill survivor .....	54
FAQs for which we do not yet have the answers .....	54
<b>Part 6: Comments from adopters</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>Part 7: Resources</b> .....	<b>69</b>
General care and rehabilitation of rescued puppy mill dogs.....	69
House-training puppy mill dogs .....	69
Support groups .....	69
DVD on caring for rescued puppy mill dogs .....	69
Books .....	69



# Introduction

Commercial breeding establishments, or puppy mills, have existed for more than half a century, and in that time tens of thousands of the dogs held in these facilities for breeding purposes have been fortunate enough to escape their confined existence and make their way into adoptive homes. Over the years, it has been abundantly clear that a large proportion of these dogs show evidence of psychological harm in their behaviors and emotional responses to normal life.

At the outset, it's important to clearly define what we're talking about. Here is our definition of "puppy mill": *any profit-centered breeding facility in which the number of dogs has exceeded the owner's ability and/or willingness to meet the physical and emotional needs of all of the animals to a degree that permits the animals to have a decent quality of life.*

Defining what we mean by "puppy mill" is crucial because many in the commercial breeding industry define "puppy mill" in a way that applies only to those facilities with deplorable conditions (i.e., "those things you see on Oprah"). They dismiss talk about the misery of dogs in puppy mills with "That's not us." They are even fond of proclaiming that they don't want puppy mills any more than anyone else does, because puppy mills tarnish the reputation of the "licensed and inspected breeders" — that is, themselves. (For an example of how large-scale breeders try to distinguish themselves from puppy mills, see this article from *The Kennel Spotlight*, the trade journal for commercial breeders: [www.kennelspotlight.com/The\\_Never\\_Ending\\_Battle.pdf](http://www.kennelspotlight.com/The_Never_Ending_Battle.pdf).)

With the extensive personal experience by those who find homes for these dogs as well as the adopters themselves, much anecdotal information has arisen and spread by word of mouth and in some written formats. This information has provided some useful guidance in trying to help these dogs overcome their psychological and emotional challenges. Until recently, however, there was nothing scientific to our understanding of these dogs' psychological issues, the best methods for their rehabilitation and the outlook for their recovery. A science-based manual for the care of these special dogs was also lacking.

In a series of scientific studies undertaken by Best Friends in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, we have made great headway in advancing our knowledge about former puppy-mill breeding dogs. I have compiled all of this information in this publication. Detailed descriptions of many of the specific methods used and difficult issues encountered in the rehabilitation of puppy mill dogs, such as getting the dog to trust you, socializing the dog to other people and house-training the dog, are included in the companion publication entitled *Help for Specific Issues with Adopted Puppy Mill Dogs*.

Because puppy mills involve two different groups of dogs — the adult breeding dogs confined in the facilities and the puppies that come from puppy mills to be sold to consumers — I want to clarify that the puppy mill dogs we are referring to here are the adult breeding dogs. (The puppies are the subject of a different study that was recently published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.) One minor point is that many of the participants in the studies were fostering the dogs, so to avoid the wordy "adopters and fosterers" throughout, I will use "adopters" as shorthand for both.

The information I present is divided into these parts:

**Part 1:** Psychological and behavioral characteristics of rescued puppy mill dogs

**Part 2:** Rehabilitation and treatment methods for rescued puppy mill dogs

**Part 3:** The outlook for the dogs' recovery and long-term well-being

**Part 4:** Adopters' experience

**Part 5:** Advice for adopters

**Part 6:** Comments from adopters

# Part 1: Psychological and behavioral characteristics of rescued puppy mill dogs

To fully understand the psychological make-up and mental health of dogs confined in puppy mills, we asked adopters of these dogs to participate in a study consisting of an extensive online questionnaire about the behavior and psychological traits of the dogs. The full study was published in the journal *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* and may be found at this link: [www.speakingforspot.com/PDF/Mental Health of Dogs from Breeders-2 McMillan.pdf](http://www.speakingforspot.com/PDF/Mental%20Health%20of%20Dogs%20from%20Breeders-2%20McMillan.pdf)

We compared the psychological and behavioral characteristics of these dogs with those of standard pet dogs. There were 1,169 former puppy mill dogs included in the study, made up of 76 different breeds. The sex ratio was 70% females and 30% males, consistent with the greater proportion of breeding females than males in commercial breeding establishments. (All percentages here are rounded to the nearest whole number.) The puppy mill dogs had been living in their adoptive homes for an average of two years, and the average estimated age of the dogs was seven years.

The rate of reported physical health problems was increased by 41% in the puppy mill dogs as compared to normal pet dogs (reported in 24% and 17%, respectively, of the dogs in each group). 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 dental disease; hair, coat and skin disorders; eye and ear infections; internal and external parasites; traumatic injuries; and malnutrition and starvation.

Behavioral concerns were reported in 83% of puppy mill dogs, which is a 48% increase in the number reported for normal pet dogs (56%). The specific results showed a broad range of abnormal behavioral and psychological findings in the former breeding dogs. When compared to normal pet dogs, puppy mill dogs had significantly higher rates of the following:



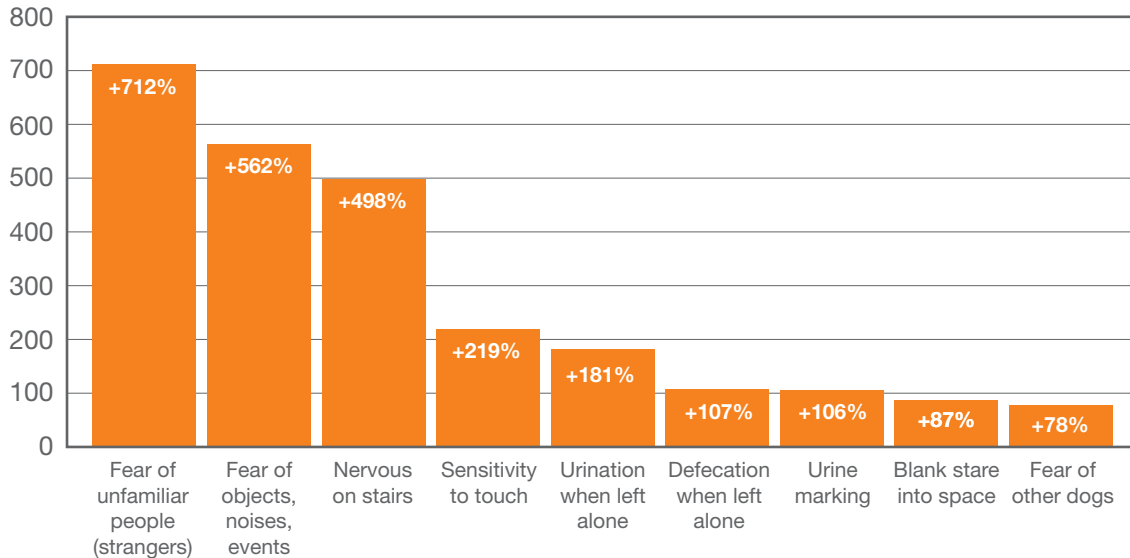
- Fears and phobias toward a wide variety of things, such as unfamiliar people (strangers), other dogs, and general life events such as noises, movements and strange objects
- House-soiling
- Compulsive and repetitive behaviors, including spinning in tight circles, pacing and staring blankly into space
- Not wanting to be touched, picked up or held

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

- Aggression
- Trainability
- Chasing small animals
- Escaping and roaming
- Excitability
- Energy

Graph 1 on the next page shows the characteristics for which puppy mill dogs received higher scores than normal pet dogs and by how much.

**Graph 1: Characteristics for which puppy mill dogs scored higher than normal pet dogs**



One note is needed to put the information in this graph in perspective. An increase of 78% (what we see in the puppy mill dogs' fear of other dogs) is huge. I point this out because with the largest increases so astronomically elevated — such as the fear of strangers — it tends to make the lesser increases seem minor. It's important to understand that they are not.

Another essential point: All of the values on this graph and Graph 2 represent a composite of puppy mill dogs as a group. The increases seen above are an average for that group, as compared to the average for the normal pet dog group. What this means is that for any value (I'll use "sensitivity to touch" as an example), there are some individual dogs who show absolutely no increase in sensitivity to touch compared to what normal pet dogs show, and then there are some dogs who have an increase far greater than the 219% increase that appears on the graph. The same is true for all the others: Some puppy mill dogs have no fear at all of strangers, for example, while others have increases that are much higher than the 712% average increase shown on the graph.

On a similar note, in discussing the findings for puppy mill dogs, when I make a statement like "Puppy mill dogs show fear of virtually everything," I am referring to the dogs as a group. I'm

not saying that every individual puppy mill dog is fearful of everything.

Graph 2 on the next page shows the characteristics for which puppy mill dogs received lower scores than normal pet dogs and by how much.

## Fears and phobias

The most dramatic and important difference we found between puppy mill dogs and normal pet dogs was the level of fear. The range and intensity of fear among the puppy mill dogs is extremely wide. 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. This finding strongly confirmed what had been observed for many years by rescue groups and adopters of these dogs.

**Fear of strangers.** Compared to normal pet dogs, puppy mill dogs were more than eight times as likely to have a high level of fear of unfamiliar people. The most probable reason for this fear is that the dogs never received adequate

socialization to humans in their puppyhood. Early positive interactions are critical for the developing brain to form the neural connections conducive to positive social relationships throughout life. An alternate explanation is that the dogs had unpleasant interactions with humans, such that they came to see humans as a threat. Irrespective of the precise cause of this fear, the level of the fear may range from a mild shyness up to terrifying and debilitating fear.

**Fear of other dogs.** Puppy mill dogs were 78% more likely than typical pet dogs to have a high level of fear of other dogs. This finding was somewhat surprising. The vast majority of puppy mill dogs are housed in groups from the earliest ages; of all dogs anywhere, they would presumably be the most thoroughly socialized with fellow dogs. And this, presumably, would mean they would develop more confidence and compatibility around other dogs than normal pet dogs would.

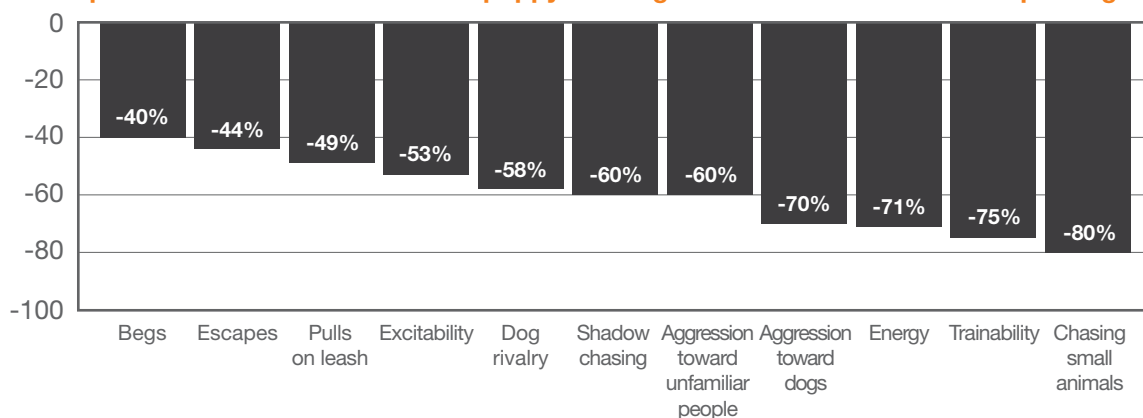
So why would they fear other dogs more than normal pet dogs do? The answer almost certainly can be found in the group housing itself. Consider having three or four dogs in your home. If any tension or conflict develops between any of the dogs, either of the dogs involved — or even an uninvolved third dog who becomes stressed because the other two are in conflict — can run off into another room and defuse the situation. The stress is relieved. But dogs in a puppy mill can't do this. They can never get more than a few feet away from anything that occurs in their enclosure,

so they live with the constant tension that something stressful could develop any minute, and when it does, they have nowhere to go to escape. This could easily promote the development of an increased fear of other dogs, as the mere presence of other dogs has become a threat in and of itself.

**Fear of general life events.** By “fear of general life events” we mean what is called “non-social fear,” which is fear of all things other than living beings — such as noises, movements and strange objects. In the study, puppy mill dogs were more than six times as likely to have a high level of this non-social fear as the normal pet dogs. This large group of fears has a relatively straightforward explanation. The puppy mill environment in which these dogs are raised has almost nothing that is found in the homes the dogs are adopted into: large open spaces, solid floors, furniture, ceilings, stairways, doorways, doorbells, phones ringing, vacuum cleaner noises, a flat surface with moving images and strange sounds (the TV), and perhaps the strangest of all — glass, something that is completely invisible yet solid and impenetrable. In writing about their dogs’ fears, adopters used many similar terms. I made a list of the commonly used terms, in order of most common to least common (with similar terms grouped together):

1. Skittish
2. Startles easily
3. Always on alert, on edge, on guard and hyper-alert

**Graph 2: Characteristics for which puppy mill dogs scored lower than normal pet dogs**





4. Overly reactive, jumpy or easily unnerved; frightened, scared, spooked or panicked
5. Frightened by sudden or quick movements or sounds
6. Frightened of everything or almost everything
7. Frightened all the time, under any circumstances

What we can see here is that by looking only at what the dogs are fearful of and how intense the fear is, we are missing something broader. For many of these dogs, there is a fear that permeates their very being, affecting their perception of life itself. What this psychological state most closely resembles is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which people show after experiencing severely traumatic events such as combat warfare, violent assault, prison camp confinement and natural disasters.

The primary psychological change in PTSD appears to be damage to the stress hormone system, making it unable to function normally. Fear is the key emotion involved in PTSD, and the capability to distinguish between safe and unsafe stimuli — and to correctly identify danger — fails when one has PTSD. To the PTSD-afflicted, the world itself becomes unsafe, dangerous, untrustworthy and unpredictable, resulting in a loss of one's sense of security and a mistrust of others. Rather than having normal levels of relaxation and alertness, individuals with PTSD have a constantly elevated arousal level. The individual suffering from PTSD functions in a "red alert" state of readiness for another stressful event. This causes a visibly exaggerated startle response: the individual is jumpy and edgy and over-reacts to nonthreatening noises and events in his environment.

While this description paints a near-identical picture to what we see in many of the rescued puppy mill dogs in our study, it isn't accurate (at least not yet) to say that these dogs suffer from human-equivalent PTSD. Even though studies in animals have shown that the behavioral disturbances in animals following experimental psychological trauma often match the most prominent and cardinal features of PTSD in humans, certain key symptoms of human PTSD, such as flashbacks and nightmares, can't be confirmed in animals. Thus it is more correct to say that the dogs in this study showing these types of symptoms are afflicted with a "PTSD-like condition."

Because the dogs in our study had lived in their adoptive households for periods of time ranging from a few months up to nearly 17 years, we were able to determine that the fears, as well as most other abnormal findings, often persisted for many years, sometimes for a lifetime. That's the bad news. The good news is that, as I will discuss later, much of the fear and other abnormal behaviors seen in these dogs can be overcome — sometimes simply with time and sometimes with specific rehabilitation efforts.

Another prominent finding that confirmed a longstanding observation of rescued puppy mill dogs was not directly regarded as a fear in our questionnaire, but was somewhere between a fear and a dislike. That finding was the dogs' tendency to not want to be touched, picked up or held. Statistically, rescued puppy mill dogs as a group show a 219% increase in sensitivity to being touched compared to normal pet dogs.

This peculiarity of puppy mill dogs can manifest itself in a variety of ways and for different lengths of time. It can be a refusal to be touched in any way, the dog choosing to make physical contact with his people but not allowing them to make physical contact with him; allowing one person in the household to touch him or pick him up and hold him, but not allowing anyone else in the house to touch him; refusing to be touched or held for months or even years and then, for no clear reason, beginning to allow it; or refusing to be touched, then allowing it, then craving it.

An important observation is necessary in our discussion of the fear levels in rescued puppy mill dogs. The extremely elevated levels of fear — of people, dogs, life events, and being touched and picked up — that we see in puppy mill dogs as a group are likely attributable in large part to removing them from an environment they are familiar with and placing them into a world that is completely alien to them. This level of change is simply incomprehensible; for us, it would be the equivalent of being flown to an entirely different planet where nothing is familiar and every life form that comes near is a threat.

So, if the horrendous fear that rescued puppy mill dogs are experiencing is a result of what we have done (removed them from the only

life they've ever known), then isn't it our fault if they're suffering so much from fear? Isn't this a legitimate argument for us to stop removing these dogs from the confines of puppy mills? This is certainly the view of many defenders of puppy mills. The answer, however, is a resounding "no" — and we have much more than a moral argument to go on. First, there has been abundant research on the harmful psychological effects of confining dogs in small spaces, keeping them socially isolated, and denying them human companionship.

Second, our study, which looked specifically at puppy mill dogs, showed that the psychological harm they suffer as a result of living in the puppy mill involves much more than the fear that becomes evident after their move from the puppy mill to an adoptive human household. I will detail this below, but behaviors such as spinning in tight circles, eating feces, experiencing sleep disturbances, staring blankly into space, being terrified of thunderstorms, and being unwilling or unable to play demonstrate damaging mental changes extending far beyond what we would expect to see with a change in environment.

Third, and by far most important, is the information I will present below on the overall recovery of these dogs after adoption into human society, in particular the changes in their adopters' assessments of the dogs' quality of life, happiness and enjoyment of life, which all show dramatic elevations — far higher than if they were to have stayed in the puppy mill. There is simply no legitimacy to the argument that removal of the dogs from puppy mills causes them more harm than good, since that argument can now be readily dismissed by the scientific evidence.

## Other findings from the study

**House-soiling.** The least surprising finding of our study was that dogs removed from puppy mills show an increased level of house-soiling. This happens because dogs in puppy mills have absolutely no concept of "holding it" and waiting to go outside (or to any designated place) to "do their business." In puppy mills, the dogs go anywhere and anytime they need to. We learned much more

about this in our follow-up study, which I will present in the next section.

**Aggression.** The aggression level of puppy mill dogs toward unfamiliar people and toward other dogs was less than half of what is found in typical pet dogs. At first glance, this would seem to be an unconditionally positive finding. But when we look at the totality of changes in the puppy mill dogs, it becomes apparent that this finding, albeit desirable in and of itself, is likely due to the paralyzing and intensely elevated levels of fear that these dogs experience. In other words, unlike the typical animal who will use aggression to ward off something threatening, these dogs are often petrified with fear and incapable of striking out. Overall, then, while decreased aggression is a good thing, in these dogs this good thing is caused by a terrible thing.

**Blank stare.** Many people exposed to former puppy mill dogs have noted that they often have a blank or vacant stare, simply gazing into space in what people have referred to as being "spaced out" or "in a daze." In our study we found confirmation for this observation, with puppy mill dogs showing an 87% increase in the likelihood of scoring high in this behavior. We will look again at this behavior as an aspect of overall mental functioning below.

**Trainability.** It wasn't unexpected to find that the puppy mill dogs' ability to be trained was reduced by 75%. The explanation that would seem most obvious is that these dogs have no experience with training. However, that likely is not the reason, since the ability to learn is not something that atrophies from disuse. In fact, learning occurs almost constantly, whether life is a joy or a misery. For example, if a dog confined in a puppy mill cage with three other dogs starts to bully another dog to steal his food, and that dog reacts aggressively and bites the bully, the bully dog learns that this behavior is met with punishment, so he shouldn't do it again.

The most likely explanation for puppy mill dogs' decreased trainability is that fear levels are accompanied by a rise in stress levels, and elevated stress impairs the information-processing centers of the brain, interfering with concentration, attention and memory. 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. As we will see below, adopters' comments referring to their dogs' inability to stay focused add support to this explanation.

The crucial importance of this explanation is that for any animal (or person, 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 harmful to the animal. A typical adopter's comment illustrates this: "Trying to train him as you would a normal dog ... only scares him and makes him nervous." Fear-induced impairment of learning is not the fault of the animal, nor is it misbehavior or stubbornness; it's not even within the animal's power to control. Punishment or more forceful attempts to train will only heighten the unfortunate animal's fear, leading to suffering and an even greater inability to learn.

**Other dogs in the household.** One final overall finding of this study is that the presence of other dogs in the household has a significant effect on a number of behaviors. The adopted puppy mill dogs who live in households with other dogs scored more favorably than those dogs living in households with no other dogs in almost every behavior category we looked at. We will come back to this important finding later when we look



at the most successful methods of rehabilitation for adopted puppy mill dogs.

## Results of the follow-up study

The results above came from the first part of the study, which was what was published in the paper in *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*. Many of the participants in that study contacted me to comment that the questionnaire did not ask about some of the things their puppy mill dog was doing. In response, I developed a second questionnaire that focused on many aspects of rescued puppy mill dogs that weren't adequately covered in the original study. I emailed all of the participants from the first study and invited them to fill out this questionnaire. The number of dogs entered into the second questionnaire was 886. 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 dogs' names have been changed in order to preserve confidentiality.

One important point: This follow-up study was conducted only on the puppy mill dogs enrolled in the first study: No control group of "normal" dogs was used. Therefore, while the results of this second study give us a very good characterization of rescued puppy mill dogs, we can't determine whether the results differ from the normal dog population, where they differ or by how much.

### Sociability

Many people commented in the first questionnaire that their puppy mill dogs might be sociable with dogs but not people, or vice versa. 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 non-fearful and non-aggressive toward humans, but one could be extremely interactive and friendly with people and the other might have no particular interest in being with people. The two dogs couldn't be more different in terms of sociability, yet they score identically on the fear and aggression levels. Therefore, to

find out more about the dogs' sociability, I asked them this:

***Dogs, like people, have different desires and abilities to socialize with others. Please check the choice that comes closest to describing your dog's sociability when he/she arrived in your household (after the first couple of weeks of adjustment).***

The choices offered and the percentage of dogs in each category are on Graph 3.

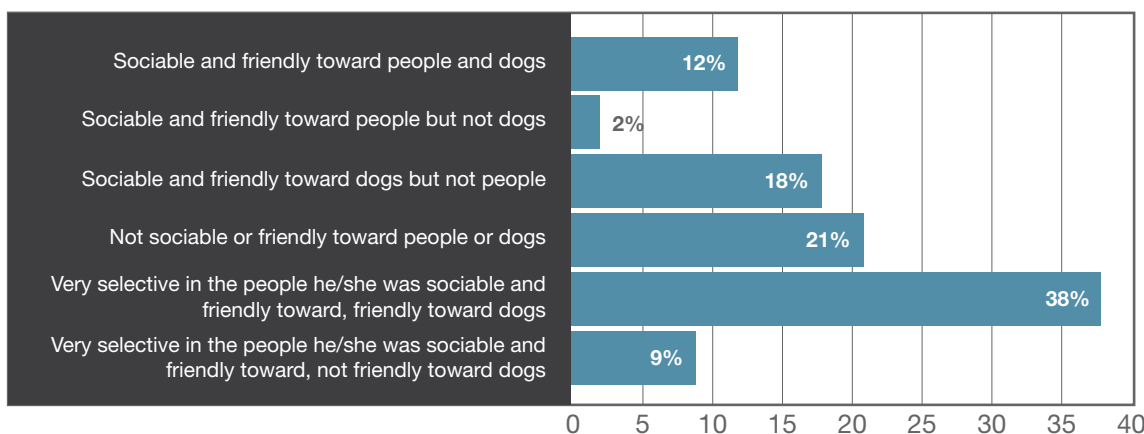
These results tell us a number of things about the sociability of puppy mill dogs after a few weeks of adjustment in their new adoptive homes. First, the largest number of dogs (38%) are friendly toward other dogs but selective about which people they are comfortable and friendly with. Second, only 12% of the dogs are comfortable and friendly with everyone — people and other dogs. Third, almost seven out of 10 (68%) puppy mill dogs are sociable and friendly with other dogs when first joining a household.

Note that these answers pertain to the dogs shortly after adoption. For this and many of the other characteristics, I also asked whether there had been any change — either an improvement or a worsening — in this characteristic in the time the dog had been in the adoptive home. For sociability, 74% reported an improvement since adoption. No change was reported in 26% of the dogs, and fewer than 1% showed any negative changes in sociability.

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

- She is still shy around other humans, but not terrified. She interacts with us and our other dogs now. She seeks attention and affection. She will let my husband pet her and hold her, and she seems to be trusting and affectionate toward him. This took about five years.
- She has come a long way but is still shy of people and startles easily.
- She is so much more affectionate now. Before, she would sit at our feet; now she cuddles up!
- Mickey is sociable and friendly toward other dogs. He is more sociable and friendly toward people, but mainly only women. He is still shy around men.
- Greta has come a million miles. She greets guests when they come to our home — greets people on our walks. She loves her dog bed — loves her toys — is a happy little girl. Still has some “mill girl” traits but she is an amazing girl.
- Much, much more sociable with people (strangers included). Was extremely scared of people he didn't know when we first got him, but now he's comfortable with people he doesn't really know.
- She no longer hides upstairs and shakes; she barks at company in a more friendly way and seems to adjust to them quicker. If company ignores her, she'll walk around them. She allows me to pet her and rub her belly (this took about five years — no kidding), but when my husband and I try to pick her up to hug her, she is still frightened.

**Graph 3: Sociability**





- Tillie continually improves her social skills and gains more confidence. She’s still not “normal” but has come a long way and does something new every week.
- She continues to improve daily!

### Trust of humans

The fear of humans that showed up extremely elevated in the first questionnaire was often described by adopters in terms of trust, which is often regarded as the inverse of fear (one rises as the other falls). While this may seem to be true, it actually is not, since a dog could easily have a low trust level and low fear level of a person at the same time. This would just mean that the lack of trust isn’t related to anything threatening, like being punished, but rather with things like unpredictable feeding times or absences from the house.

Trust appears to be one of the most important aspects of any dog’s feelings and perceptions toward humans, and because trust is not accurately represented by measuring fear levels, I specifically addressed it in the follow-up study with the following question.

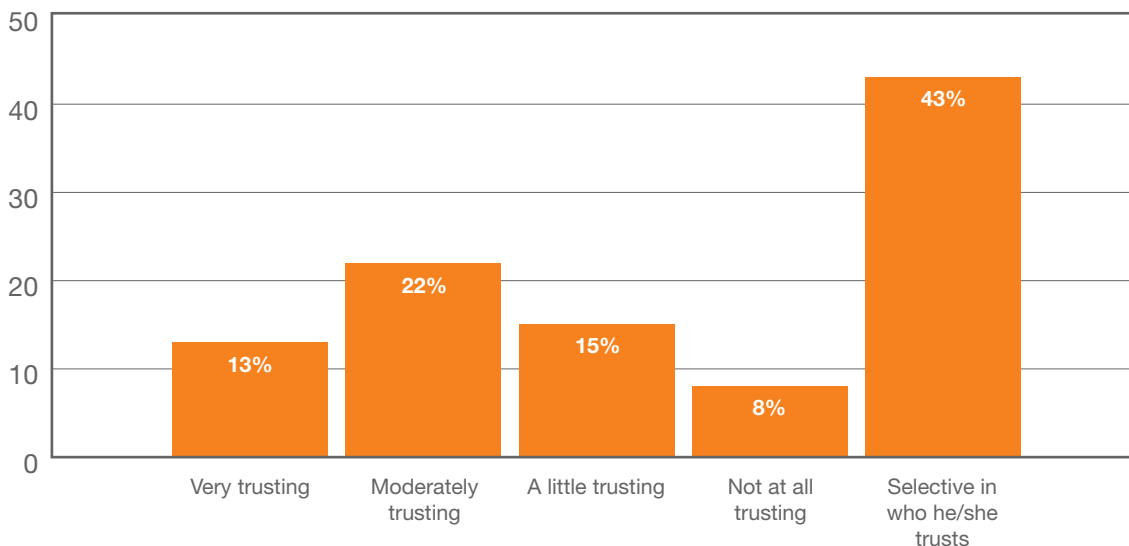
***Dogs show a wide range in their level of trust of humans. How would you rate your dog’s trust of humans?***

Graph 4 shows the results. Unlike the sociability question that specified “when he/she arrived in your household,” this question asked the participant to score the dog’s trust level now (again, on average, two years after adoption).

This selectivity of trust showed up repeatedly in our studies, demonstrating that it’s an extremely prominent feature of puppy mill dogs as a group. Many involved with the rescue of these dogs had already seen this, but through our studies we learned that it is so extensive as to be considered a part of the nature of these dogs. This is one of the many valuable findings that we can provide to adopters and prospective adopters to properly guide their expectations and thereby avert disappointment after adoption.

The trust and fear issues of rescued puppy mill dogs often manifest themselves in a complex behavior that the dogs commonly display. What seems to be part of the psychological make-up of many, if not most, of these dogs is a conflict between the emotions of fear and trust, or, more likely, between the desire for human contact and the fear of human contact. It appears as an approach and retreat behavior: The dog comes near a person (or does something, like bark, to get a person’s attention and bring her closer), but when the distance between the dog and the human nar-

**Graph 4: Trust of humans**



rows, the dog retreats. Then the process repeats itself. Outwardly it looks like the dog can't make up his mind about whether he does or doesn't want human contact. Here are some of the adopters' comments that describe this conflict in different ways:

- While he seeks the attention of all humans, if it isn't someone he knows and trusts, he then runs away. He seems to want attention but is afraid.
- It takes some time, but if not approached and cornered, Bella tries hard to overcome her fears. She does a little circle, stretches and sort of yawns, then approaches closer and circles, stretches and yawns. This will continue until she feels secure enough to come to the person.
- She will now approach strangers, although she then runs away. She will also approach us for affection but then still somewhat runs away.
- He is more confident of himself now, but it depends on the circumstances. His personality is a dichotomy between apprehension and a desire to investigate. It is interesting to see how the healthy part refuses to be overwhelmed by the momentary, reactionary part.
- He now approaches people, even strangers, with a wagging tail, wanting to meet them, even though he is still skittish about their reaching toward him.

This psychological conflict can be seen in the dogs while they are still in the puppy mill. When the dogs see a human walking by their enclosure, they will often be at the front of their cage barking as loudly as they can at the person, in the same way that dogs in animal shelters do when they see a person walk by their cage or run. But the dramatic difference is what happens when the human then approaches the dogs. In the shelter, the dogs will most often stay right there at the front of their enclosures, even wagging their tails more vigorously.

The dogs in the puppy mill, however, will make a beeline to the backs of their cages — unmistakably frightened of that person. When their fear level isn't so intense, this emotional conflict breaks in favor of receiving human contact. In these cases, the dogs will often try to push their cage mates out of the way in order to simply receive the touch of a human finger reaching

through the cage wires. These types of puppy mill dogs are likely to continue expressing their desire for human contact when placed in their adoptive homes. On the other hand, for many dogs this conflict between the desire for and fear of human contact breaks in favor of the fear — and this then shows up as the elevated fear level we found in our study.

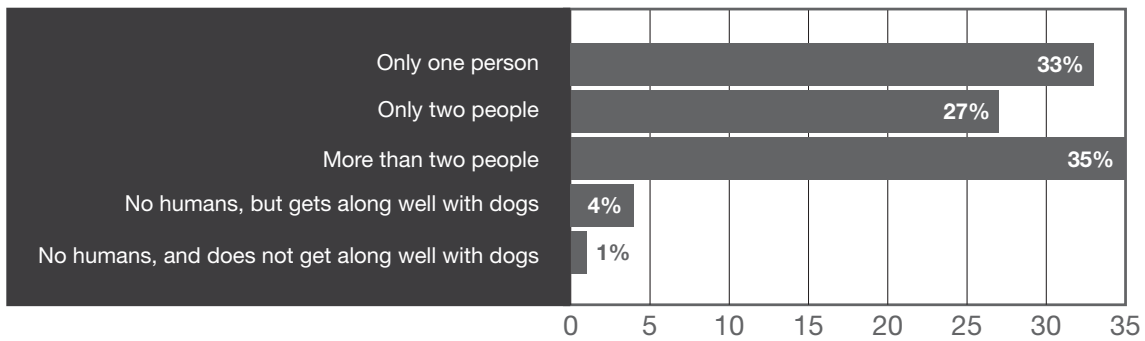
These comments demonstrate how when the fear subsides enough, the desire for human contact becomes abundantly evident:

- Lilly wanted nothing to do with anyone when she first came to us. She started to follow me around the house after a few months, then she wouldn't leave my side. Now she still follows me around but will leave to do other things. For example, when my husband gets the treat container, she will take off for a treat, then come back after she gets one.
- She was too timid when she first came to seek my attention; now she wants it constantly.
- When Herbie first arrived, he wasn't interested in attention. Now he doesn't know when to stop insisting he get attention. He will growl and chase other dogs off if he is getting attention.

When asked whether their dog's trust of humans had changed in any way since he/she first joined the adoptive household, the response was overwhelmingly positive. While 16% did not show any changes, a remarkable 84% showed an improvement. Zero percent worsened in any way. Some of the comments on trust in humans and how it changed:

- He trusted no humans when he came in. Now he trusts me, and when I am not here, he will occasionally go by my daughter.
- It took him three years to trust most people. After the first year, he trusted my family. After the second, small-structured guys and women. After three years, larger-structured guys.
- Does not freak out every time he sees a person or children when out on a walk. He has made a massive amount of changes in trust, and it has been truly heartwarming to watch Barney's development.
- I was the first and only person she trusted for a long time. Now she will trust my boyfriend also.

**Graph 5: Bonding patterns**



- A little [improvement]. She won't let strangers approach her, but she's usually OK with going up and sniffing them, but only when we're around.
- She does trust more. I think she has come as far as she ever could after spending two years in a puppy mill that had 700 dogs.
- At first she did not trust anyone but has now built that trust in anyone who comes to visit. She knows they will not hurt her.
- It took almost three years for Cookie to trust me and come to me and let me pet her.
- She is far more trusting of humans now and doesn't feel the need to run or hide anymore. She will come when called and follows most of the basic commands every time. She takes treats from my hand and makes eye contact very well.
- Finnegan was scared of everyone initially, but he quickly decided I was OK. In the one and a half years since, he has developed a bond with my daughter (grown) and has slowly started to trust others ... with a watchful eye.
- Every day she becomes more trusting of humans.
- I say [improved] ... but very little.
- Emmy is much more trustful of me since I am her primary caregiver. After two years, she now responds to me when called.
- At the start, she trusted me about 90% and my husband 0%, and now after five years she trusts us both 100%. Still 0% for anyone else.
- Very, very slightly [improved]. It's a very slow

process. But she is trying. After about three or four months, she started sleeping at my feet with my husband in the same bed. But I have noticed it's only after she KNOWS he's sleeping.

- She feared everyone but me for several years, approximately five and a half years. She now will go to my husband for a treat. She is always "on guard" with others.
- When we first brought her home, she would lie flat on the floor and had to be picked up to be taken into the room with the family. In the last few years, she's become extremely brave and will nudge under our arms and hands with her nose for us to pet her.

### **Bonding patterns**

Many people wrote comments on the first questionnaire that described how their dog bonded only to one person or to just two people. To learn more, I asked them about it:

***Please describe the bonding (emotional attachment) your dog has made with people. He/she has bonded with:***

Graph 5 shows the options they were given to choose from and the percentage of dogs showing each bonding pattern.

Here we see some great news. Note that the last two choices are the only ones in which the dog has bonded with no humans, and together they add up to only 5% of the dogs.

Here are some typical comments:

- She has bonded with my husband and myself and with the other dogs in the house, but not with my adult children or strangers.
- She has not bonded in the sense of a normal pet. In her own way she accepts me as her caregiver but does not show ANY form of feelings for me. I have no doubt that she loves me, but in her own abnormal way. She does not come to me, and when I approach her to pick her up, she backs up and cowers down like I am going to hit or hurt her.
- I am the only person on earth in her eyes. She's definitely dependent on me and shows her appreciation of me. I am her world.
- He isn't bonded to either of us, but he will now lie on the couch next to us and allow us to stroke or scratch him.
- It took me two months to be able to touch Zoey, and now, after almost eight years, I am still the only one who can touch her. She screams when anyone else tries to approach her or pick her up. She poops when they try to pick her up, too.

There is one note of caution in interpreting the above results. When writing this question, I failed to include anything about the person's living arrangement. When I was reading the responses, I noticed that a number of people wrote comments of this type: "There is only one person in the household" or "It's only me and my husband living here." Of course, when a person living alone answers that the dog has bonded to only one person, this tells us little about the dog's bonding pattern since he/she might readily bond to more people if more people were present. Therefore, the categories of bonding with only one person or only two people may have received higher scores because human exposure for some dogs was limited. Note, though, that this doesn't change the gratifying statistic that 95% of these dogs will bond to at least one person.

The results of the three questions above — regarding sociability, trust and bonding with humans — show a common psychological feature of puppy mill dogs: As a group, they are extremely selective about the particular humans with whom they choose to interact. This selectivity likely has more than one cause. One possible reason is that, for many of the dogs, the aspect of their personality guiding the formation of social

attachments restricts the number of attachments that can be made, resulting in bonding (and diminished fear) with only one or two humans. (We didn't ask about selective bonding to other dogs, although in some of the comments it was clear that this can occur.) The other reason likely involves what I looked at more closely in the next question: preferences for male or female humans.

### **Preferences for human males and females**

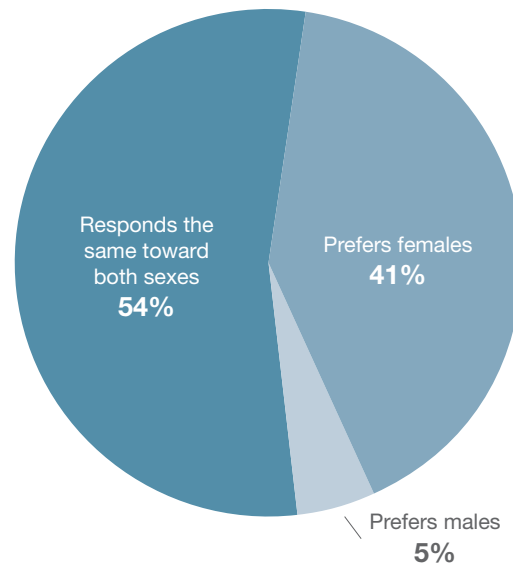
We received a large number of comments on the first questionnaire from people who wanted us to know that their dog disliked all men or preferred women to men. This was something the first questionnaire didn't ask about, so I asked participants the following question on the second questionnaire:

***In their interactions with people, some 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.

**Graph 6: Preferences for human males and females**





Graph 6 shows the results. What we had been presuming from all the personal reports is confirmed here, with some precise percentages. There is a less than 50% chance that a puppy mill dog will have any preference based on a person's sex. And we can now tell adopters of puppy mill dogs that there is a 41% chance he/she will prefer females to males.

Here are some typical comments about the more common preference — for females:

- She is scared to death of men. She only trusts my husband, and that is only 50% of the time.
- She will growl at new men she encounters. The groomer has reported that she doesn't like when men come into the shop.
- Isn't really fond of men. When Dad comes home from work or even is out of the room awhile and comes back in, Buffy will growl and bark at him. It's like starting over every time.
- Dandelion will rarely enter a room if my husband or son is in it.
- Lets Dad pet but still won't let him pick him up and won't follow him around the house like he does mom.
- She wouldn't let my husband touch her for four years. She barks and runs away from any males coming in the house still. We have one male friend who is quiet and unassuming that she seems to have accepted as OK, but she always keeps her eye on him.
- This year was the first time Sheena let mom's visiting brother pet her, a major accomplishment. She remains terrified of men in general.
- Tiny is still shy. Dad wants to hold her so badly, but she is still scared of men. She loves her mom and follows her around all day.

And some comments about the less common preference — for males:

- I know the puppy mill was run by a woman. Apricot will show less fear toward a male in the house and will calm down quicker if it is a male coming into the house.
- She is more afraid of women. She will approach men who come into the house. We had a house sitter who brought her boyfriend with her — Libby was sociable with him. When the house sitter

comes without him, she will not come into the room and stays by the back door alone.

We don't yet have a full understanding of the origins of this sex preference. First, without a comparison to the normal dog population, we don't know what "normal" is for sex preferences in the general dog population. We don't know what percentage of dogs show any human sex preference (or fear), and of those that do, we don't know the male to female ratio of the preferences. Anecdotally, most people knowledgeable about dogs would agree that among dogs that show a preference for humans of one sex or the other, most respond less favorably to males than to females. However, to those of us who work with dogs, it would seem extremely unlikely that the general dog population would exhibit anything close to the 46% of puppy mill dogs who show a sex preference in their interactions with humans.

It is always tempting, in any pet animal whose full history is not known, to attribute fear of something (e.g., men or men with beards or men wearing hats) to the pet having been abused at some point by a man or a man with those features. It is possible that the puppy mill dogs were mishandled or abused by male humans much more than females, but there is no way to determine this since we can't track down the specific facilities all of the dogs in the study came from and find out the exact nature of who handled the dogs and how. But because many puppy mills employ females to care for the dogs, the explanation of being abused by males more than females is likely not the explanation for the dogs' sex preferences, or at least not the sole cause. A more likely explanation is actually the opposite, that is, very little contact with males during the critical socialization phase of early puppyhood. This would lead to more fear responses toward males later and, in many cases, throughout the dog's life.

### **House-training abilities**

As we know well from experience over the years and confirmed by our study in the first questionnaire, rescued puppy mill dogs are essentially never house-trained. However, neither experience nor our first questionnaire told us exactly how many of the dogs became successfully house-trained after being adopted. In this follow-up questionnaire, I asked

how well the dogs were house-trained now, meaning at the time they filled out this questionnaire:

**Please check the level of house-training (going outside to urinate and have bowel movements – to “do his/her business”) your dog is now showing.**

As a reminder, the average time the dogs as a group had been in their adoptive households was two years, so in the response to this question the picture we’re seeing is the house-training abilities of a group of 837 rescued puppy mill dogs after spending two years in their adoptive households.

The choices were:

- A. Fully house-trained: does all of his/her business outside
- B. Mostly house-trained: has a few urinations or bowel movements inside; does approximately three-quarters of his/her business outside
- C. Somewhat house-trained: does approximately half of his/her business outside
- D. Poorly house-trained: does approximately one-quarter of his/her business outside
- E. Not at all house-trained: does his/her business inside with no recognition, regard or understanding of any rules about doing it outside

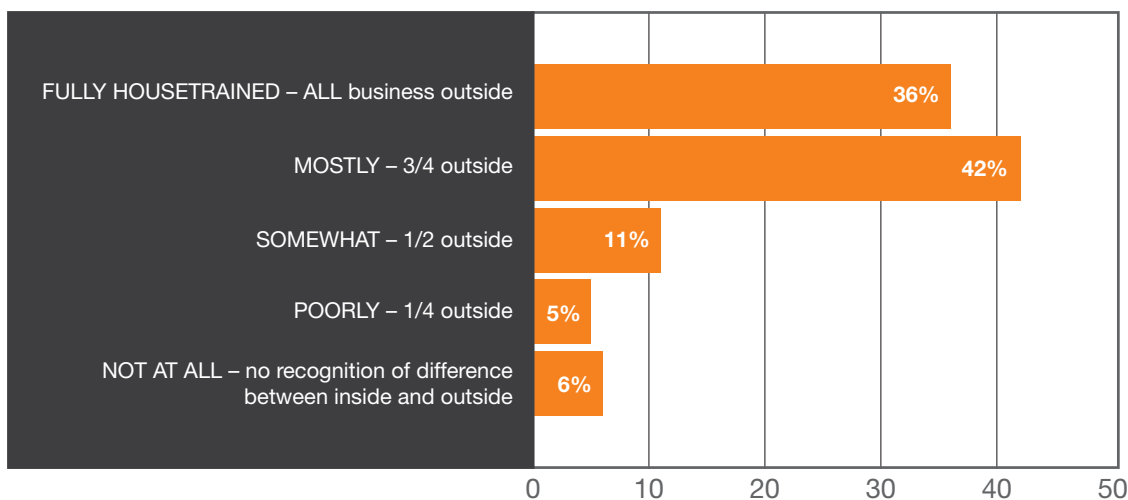
A note of clarification: “Outside” was intended to mean “the correct place,” which would include inside areas if the dogs were being trained to use piddle pads. In retrospect, I should have worded it this way in the question, but fortunately it appears that those filling out the questionnaire correctly interpreted what I meant, as came across in their written comments.

As you can see in Graph 7, the largest group is the mostly house-trained one, followed by those fully house-trained. If I regroup these answers into the two most important categories – fully house-trained and not fully house-trained – then we get the numbers shown in Graph 8.

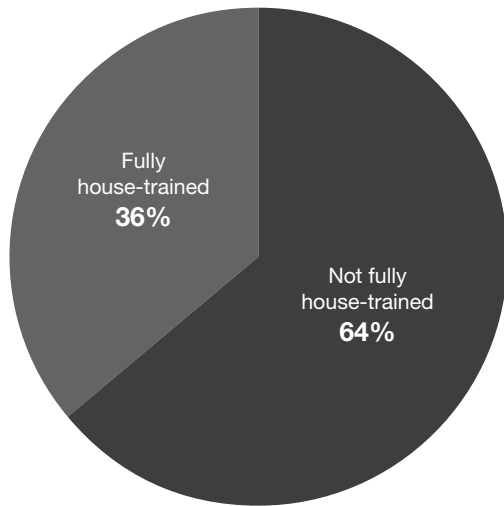
So, after an average of two years in their adoptive homes, 36% – a little over one-third – have full control to do their business in the appropriate place. That means, of course, that the rest – nearly two-thirds – are still having some accidents in the wrong places. Fortunately, as we saw in the first graph, the vast majority of the not-fully-house-trained dogs have nearly full control, with only the occasional accident inside.

The level of improvement in house-training after a puppy mill dog is adopted is good. Over two-thirds of dogs (68%) improve in their house-training, while one-third show no change. A tiny few (3%) show a worsening, but this number includes

**Graph 7: House-training abilities**



**Graph 8: Fully house-trained vs. not fully house-trained**



the aging effects that we see even in non-puppy-mill dogs as they grow older and lose some bladder and bowel control. Remember, however, that the above two graphs are what is reported after the improvements and changes occur.

The issue of house-training is a bit more complex than a dog simply learning the right location to “go” and being able to “hold it” until he/she is in that location. There are multiple reasons beyond simple house-training for a puppy mill dog to have urinations and bowel movements in the wrong place. The first is fear, and the dog can be fearful of several different things. Fear of the outdoors and fear of grass can both cause the puppy mill dog to do his/her business inside. Fear of certain weather conditions (likely those associated with fearful episodes in the puppy mill, such as cold, rain, snow, thunder, lightning and strong winds) can cause severe trepidation about going outside.

Another fear is the fear of stairs or steps, which our first questionnaire showed was increased by a sky-high 498% in puppy mill dogs as compared to normal pet dogs. The significance with relation to urinating and defecating inside is that, in many households, the only access to the outside is via steps or stairs, which the dog may be too frightened to want to use.

As should be obvious, for all of these fear-based

reasons for dogs doing their business inside, the answer is not simply house-training the dog. The barrier for the dog is fear, and sometimes extreme and debilitating terror. Until that is recognized and efforts are made to specifically address it, the dog’s elimination skills may not improve.

Submissive urination is another reason that these dogs eliminate indoors, and this is also related to fear. A dog who perceives a person or other animal as socially dominant or threatening (and the threatening aspect is particularly relevant to puppy mill dogs’ increased level of fear toward humans) may pass urine to express submission to the dominant or threatening individual. This type of “going in the wrong place” is fairly readily recognized, since it occurs when a person approaches, stands over, reaches toward, speaks harshly to or punishes the dog. Here are some adopters’ comments on this issue:

- While it only took a couple of times to house-train him, he then started to submissively pee, and that has gotten worse with time.
- While I mention that he is fully house-trained, he has become a submissive pee-er, mainly to me and not to my husband. I try to speak softly to him and have never yelled at him at all.

Another reason that puppy mill dogs may not do their business outside is that the dog has been unable to learn how to signal that he/she needs to go outside. For dogs to be fully house-trained to go outdoors, they have to learn (1) that they should do their business outside, (2) how to get outside, and (3) how to communicate to their people that they need to go outside. And in addition to learning these things, they have to develop the ability to control their urinations and bowel movements (to “hold it”). If the dog has mastered every one of these things except how to communicate the need to go outside, the accidents inside may continue. (The dog can only hold it so long.) This adopter’s comment illustrates this issue, as well as one solution (keeping the dog on a schedule) for the dog who isn’t communicating his/her needs:

- [The house-training] had improved since we first brought Doogie home, but he continues to have accidents if we don’t get him outside on a schedule. He has never let us know when he needs to go out.

Another reason that puppy mill dogs will eliminate inside regardless of whether or not they have grasped the concept of house-training is when the dog has certain emotional reactions to certain people in the house. In these cases, if the person who is trying to take the dog outside is the source of a negative emotional reaction from the dog, then the dog may simply refuse to go outside to do his/her business. Alternatively, the dog may go outside but refuse to do his/her business once there. Here are some adopters' comments to illustrate these situations:

- He used to go outside for only me and would do his business by the door before I got home. Now he goes outside for daddy, too.
- It's gotten better, but she'll still have accidents. It's more due to not wanting to go outside for people other than myself. [Sometimes if] I'm not home, or my husband is letting the dogs out, she'll go out and not relieve herself for some reason.

Marking is another reason that dogs urinate in the wrong place. Primarily male dogs, but sometimes females, may leave urine on or around certain objects or locations in response to a territorial stimulus or a stressful situation. For example, the presence of other dogs in or around the house can cause the puppy mill dog to attempt to stake out a particular space. Even more important for rescued puppy mill dogs is that anything able to cause the dog to become anxious, fearful or frustrated may also trigger marking behavior.

Here is how the marking behavior was described by adopters:

- Gabby only did her bowel movements [but not urinations] outside when she first arrived. She now is fully trained, but does very rarely mark her territory if another dog is in the house.
- Marking is the biggest issue during times that include stress with the others becoming too excited over dogs being walked outside our home.
- He was perfect, then we got another dog added to our pack, and he started urine marking.
- She is now fully house-trained. However, if one of the other dogs marks in the house, she will mark on it.
- Only issue with having three of our four dogs being male is that they sometimes have marking parties.

- Most of her accidents now involve marking things, such as toys and bowls, that she wants other dogs to know are hers.
- At first, he was not house-trained at all. Peed and marked excessively. Now he still marks when we have a new male foster in the house, but otherwise does his business outside. Good boy!
- Still marks everything new that comes into the house.
- Charlie has fewer accidents in the house. He'll still try to mark in other people's houses.

Another thing to consider: Even if dogs are house-trained, certain medical conditions can cause them to relieve themselves in the wrong places. Urinary tract infections, bladder stones, incontinence problems and intestinal disorders can contribute to a dog passing urine or having bowel movements indoors. Finally, related to medical reasons, there are the normal effects of aging. Urinary and bowel incontinence, as well as senility changes, can cause a reliably house-trained dog to have urinations and/or bowel movements in the wrong place.

It's important to point out that while the numbers seem discouraging for the long-term outlook for successful house-training of rescued puppy mill dogs (Who would want to adopt a dog with a two-thirds chance of not becoming fully house-trained?), the comments that adopters provide tell a different story than the cold, stark statistics. Below, I've grouped the adopters' comments into distinct categories and included several comments for each to convey the full sense of the profound forgiveness adopters have for their puppy mill survivors.

### **Compassion, understanding and empathy for their dog's past hard life**

- She had no clue at first — caged for seven years — [but] now is getting it and does try to go outside.
- He is a puppy mill rescue, and anywhere was his bathroom.
- She was not house-trained when I got her, as she had lived in a cage her entire life. She now is completely house-trained.
- Tulip relieved herself daily in the house because



that was what she was used to doing in the puppy mill.

- Was not trained at all; [was] kept in a crate in the basement for five years.
- He does not seem to grasp the understanding of holding it, and after five years in a cage, I will not crate him for training. He probably pooped in his cage anyhow all those years.

#### **Appreciation for how hard their dog tries**

- She is only potty-trained if I take her out every time at the same time. If not, she will just go on the floor ... uses potty pads one-quarter of the time. Never asks to go out. Been very frustrating. But when I take her out, she goes on a potty pad on the deck. Refuses to go up and down the stairs on our deck. But she will try her hardest to please you and even urinate a little.
- She was terrible when I got her, and she has improved so much. I know she really tries.
- She does understand what we want and does try very hard not to make us unhappy. She does have accidents now and then.

#### **Taking any blame off their dog**

- It's our fault she doesn't go outside. She weighs 4.5 pounds, and we are gone at least eight hours during the day, so we have her trained to washable pee pads, which we love. When we do take her outside, she is good about doing her business, and we will work more with her on that now that the weather is warmer. She is good about going potty on the pee pads.
- She is doing much better, and it is really only an issue if she is left inside without a regular outside break. More my fault than hers, I think.
- In the beginning, she really had no regard for where she did her business. Now she [goes] outside three-quarters of the time, but will also pee six inches inside of the doggie door. She will go out and pee on command most of the time, but I also think she needs to hear it as well, and that might be my fault with her training.
- Maggie was not house-trained when she came to us. She will occasionally have an accident, but I think most of these are human error — not getting her out when she needs to go.

#### **Laughing it off**

- At first, Lulu did her business anytime, anywhere that was a concrete or tile surface. After six months of leash training, walking and scheduled "out" times, she seemed to improve, but didn't quite "get it." She then began peeing on the floor and coming to me barking and would show me what she did. So, she had some idea this peeing was a good thing and something I wanted to see (LOL!) but wasn't getting the outside part. After a year, and a week-long visit from a very balanced dog, she began to emulate him and actually tell me when she had to go out by barking (or, in the morning, standing on my face, LOL!).
- Hahahahaahahahaaa: poop eater, too!

This is gratifying information, but I don't want to portray it as something that adopters are perfectly happy with. In a later question, I asked, "What still-needed improvement do you feel is most important for your dog's well-being?" and the number one answer was "house-training." Here are some representative comments:

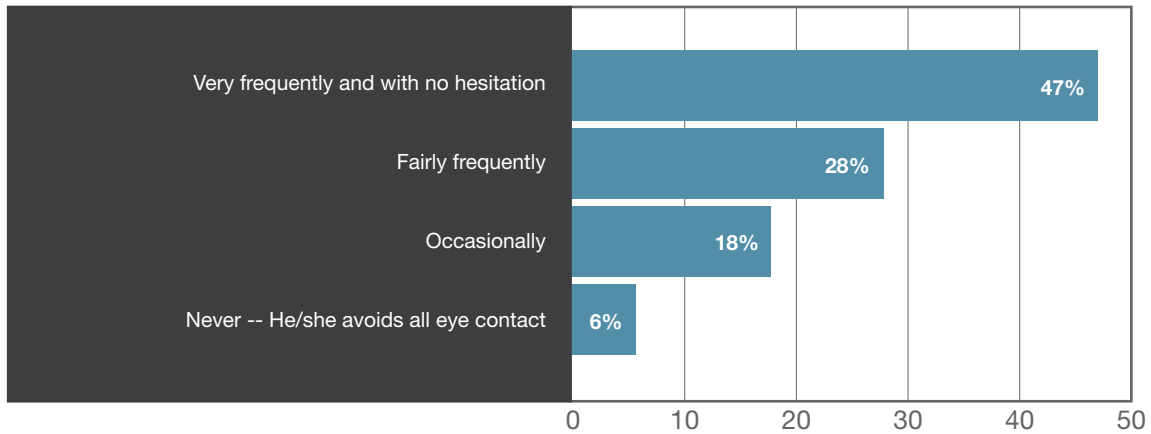
- I love Jasmine — but it would be nice if she would stop peeing in the house. That, and eating our son's toys. Other than that, she's pretty perfect for us.
- Her accidents in the house are trying, but she appears so happy to be here that we're satisfied that she's satisfied.
- I would give anything to have Tippy enjoy being cuddled and not show as much fear as she does. A greater level of house-training would also be wonderful.

Thus, while we see incredible forgiveness in adopters toward their dogs' lack of perfection in their bladder and bowel habits, it is clear that they would certainly be more pleased if the dog had full control.

#### **Making eye contact**

An issue that was not included in any question on the first questionnaire, but has been observed by rescuers and adopters of puppy mill dogs for many years, is the fact that the dogs will often refuse to make eye contact. I'll explain the importance of this characteristic next, but first here

**Graph 9: Eye contact**



is the question and the percentage of responses from the follow-up study (Graph 9).

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

The numbers on Graph 9, as in the house-training question, represent what is occurring now, after two years in the adoptive home. We can say, therefore, that when you adopt a puppy mill dog, there is an approximately 6% chance that after two years with you, he/she will still avoid all eye contact.

The results of the question on changes since adoption showed that among the dogs who initially show any unwillingness to make eye contact, the eye contact improves in 70% of the dogs, doesn't change in 30%, and doesn't worsen in any dogs.

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 — humans included — view direct eye contact as a positive social message (with one exception: the aggressive confrontation, but that is accompanied by abundant other signs, such as growling, certain ear and body postures, and haircoat erection). The refusal to make eye contact is perceived, consciously or subconsciously, by another social animal as a social rejection. And what this readily translates into is

a perception on the adopters' part that the dog who is unwilling to make eye contact is rejecting the adopters (dislikes them, if you will), which can be interpreted as a failed adoption and a possible return of the dog to the rescue group.

So, adopters need to understand that their puppy mill dog may not make eye contact, and they shouldn't consider it a rejection in any way. This is one of the characteristics that shows 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 puppy mill dogs. The only expectation that adopters can have when adopting these dogs (and I'll come back to this later) is that they will be taking into their care a special one-of-a-kind member of the canine species. All the "normal dog stuff" the dog may do is an added bonus.

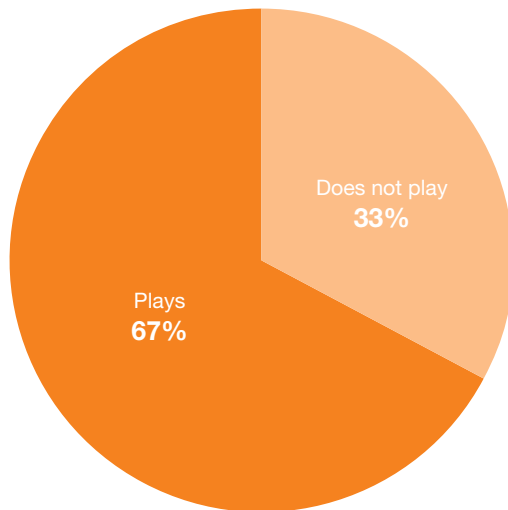
***Desire or ability to play***

Another well-known characteristic of puppy mill dogs that we didn't inquire about on the first questionnaire is the dogs' desire or ability to play. So, this simple yes or no question was on the follow-up study:

***Some dogs from puppy mills don't seem to play or know how to play. Does your dog play?***

Graph 10 shows the results. The written-in comments showed the diversity of level and types of play among puppy mill dogs. Some examples:

**Graph 10: Plays vs. does not play**



- Absolutely not. Ever. Sad.
- She will run and play with other dogs, but no interest in toys.
- Loves to play! Loves her toys! She will scamper with joy. She'll have a happy outburst while playing with her toys.
- Initiates play with our other dog, but never with humans.
- Tabitha only plays alone. She loves stuffed toys and will drag them all over. Sometimes she throws them in the air. She doesn't seem to know what to do when you throw toys for her to catch.
- [It was very rewarding] seeing her finally play with a toy. That took over two years.

- She tries to play, but is unsure how to do it.
- For the first three years she was here, Cleo did not know how to play. Now she loves little squeaky toys and will toss them up and try to keep them away from the other dogs.
- She has since passed away, but she gradually improved over the years; still always quiet and timid, but she actually learned to play a little just before she died — after about 12 years.

What is interesting here is that for the puppy mill dogs who play, the play involves a great diversity in type and in their choice of playmates. We do know that puppy mill dogs are typically denied toys of any kind, but aside from that, it isn't clear why there would be such a wide array of ways that puppy mill dogs choose to play.

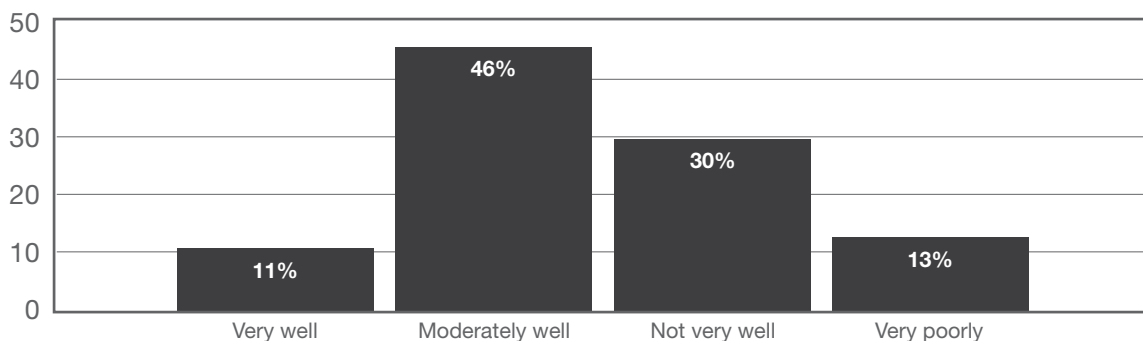
### **Coping with change**

One comment that showed up frequently on the first questionnaire is that many of these dogs are 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 find out more, I asked this question:

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

Graph 11 shows the results. These numbers are consistent with what we had expected, based on both long-term experience of puppy mill adopters and rescuers, as well as how effectively psychologically traumatized people cope with change.

**Graph 11: Coping with change**



As we'll see below, this information is important in the rehabilitation for these dogs.

With regard to changes over time, we found that 56% of the dogs show improvement in their ability to adapt or cope, one-half of 1% show a decrease in this ability, and 43% show neither improvement nor worsening.

### Altered mental functioning

Our first questionnaire asked a lot about the psychological make-up of the dogs, but focused on distinct emotional states such as fear, generalized anxiety and separation anxiety. In the comment section, we received many descriptions of impairments of mental functioning that aren't necessarily emotion-based. The purpose of this question in the follow-up study was to see if some of the most common emotional and non-emotional cognitive impairments experienced by humans also appeared in rescued puppy mill dogs.

**Some rescued dogs show signs of altered mental functioning. Please check any of the following that you observed in your dog more than one time (check all that apply).**

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could select more than one item for their dog.

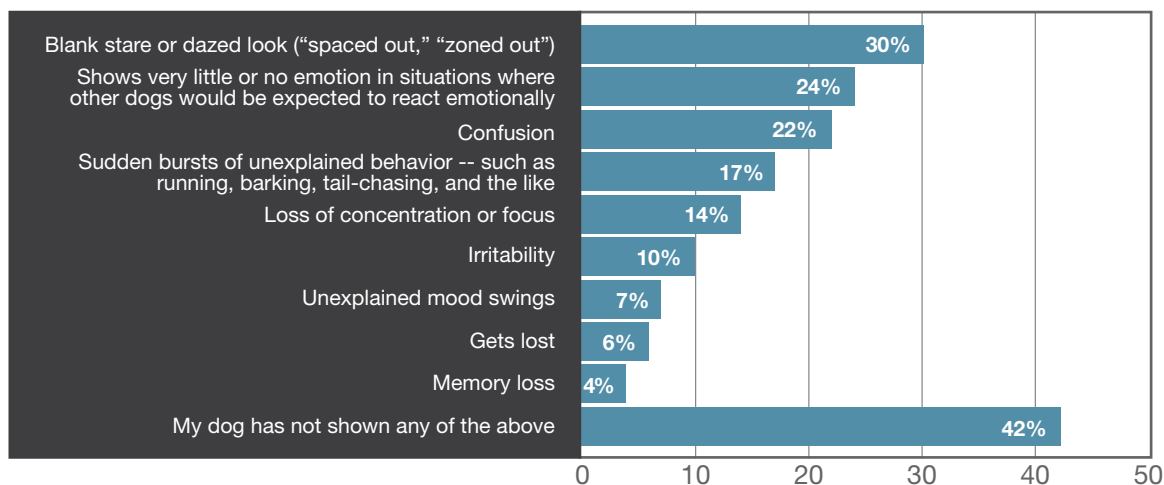
The responses (Graph 12) clearly show the broad

extent of mental changes experienced by dogs confined in puppy mills. The most commonly seen — the blank stare — was reported in 30% of the dogs and confirms the finding on our first questionnaire that showed an 87% increase in this characteristic in puppy mill dogs as compared to normal pet dogs. In the comment section for this question, many adopters wrote that I forgot to include the most important mental function alteration: fear. This was not an oversight, however. The type of altered mental function addressed in the question was not the emotional factors (except for the condition where they seem absent), but rather the functioning related to thought processes. The emotions, and specifically fear, were measured extensively in the first questionnaire.

Some comments about the impaired mental functioning that people observed:

- Always seems like she is in another world.
- At night she will go to one corner of the room and scratch at the wall — sometimes barking at it.
- Attention span of a flea.
- Cannot grasp commands.
- Not aggressive — not friendly — just there.
- At times she seems to regress into unknown fears.
- She has doggie dementia — gets disoriented.
- Seldom shows any emotions at all — she is very stoic.

Graph 12: Altered mental functioning





- You did not have his condition as an option. When I first adopted him, he would not lie down to sleep. He would position himself in a corner so he would be sitting up sleeping. It has improved to where he will sleep in our bed and next to me on the couch.
- Has unprovoked and unexplained temper tantrums.
- If he were human, he would be autistic.

Recall that on the first questionnaire, we found that the ability of rescued puppy mill dogs to respond to training was much lower than that for normal pet dogs. This is where we can see how the dogs' lack of ability to maintain mental focus is likely a major contributor for this diminished trainability. One adopter commented: "We took her to obedience classes, but she really never picked up or retained much; she can't focus and is kind of high strung." The high fear levels are also a contributing factor, as seen in these adopter comments for two different dogs:

- She was too scared to respond in obedience classes.
- She was completely overwhelmed and traumatized by [obedience classes], and we quit going after five weeks.

On the other hand, as we'll see below, obedience and training were found to be beneficial in the rehabilitation of some puppy mill dogs.

In asking about changes in the mental function impairments, we received the first results showing that less than a majority of the dogs improve over time. For this set of signs, 54% of the dogs showed no change, good or bad, while 41% showed an improvement. Only 5% showed a worsening, and, as was the case with the decline in house-training, this 5% included those dogs showing mental decline in their elderly years. Although it is not possible to tell, the effect of aging may also be a part of the reason for the high number (54%) of dogs who showed no change at all. It may be that the dogs' psychological and behavioral improvements were offset, or cancelled out, by the aging changes in the brain.

The term "autism" showed up relatively frequently in the comments about altered mental function.



This does not mean that I or any of the study participants are equating an animal's mental differences to human autism, but rather that many of the signs that these dogs show resemble some of the signs seen in children with autism. When I asked specifically whether they had ever considered their dog's behavior over time to resemble human conditions such as autism and other options (for example, Alzheimer's disease and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), we learned that nearly 11% of the adopters of puppy mill dogs felt their dog showed signs that made them think of autism. Here are some specific comments to that question:

- I work with autistic children, and his pacing in circles, avoidance of human contact, and avoidance of eye contact have seemed autistic-like.
- She seems like a catatonic schizophrenic turning her back on people. She's afraid of open space (agoraphobic).
- If I had to make an analogy, I would say she most resembles someone with PTSD: sudden and severe startle response; need to isolate to diminish outside stimulation; staring at walls; great fear of new situations.
- Sometimes she just seems like an empty shell with no emotion. Other times, she can seem happy and seem to enjoy life to the best of her ability.
- We call her our little autistic girl. She doesn't take in the world in the way a "normal" happy-go-

lucky dog does. Everything is totally new to her, and every experience is a first, so she is sort of in a world of her own.

### Obsessive behaviors

The final question on our first questionnaire asked if the dog showed any “bizarre, strange or repetitive behaviors.” We received many descriptions of different types of behavior. I then took the most commonly mentioned and formulated the following question to see exactly what percentage of dogs show these specific behaviors.

**Some rescued dogs show behavior that seems obsessive, that is, behavior that they show an unusually high degree of interest in performing. Please check below any behavior that your dog performs that you regard as obsessive (check all that apply).**

Graph 13 shows the results. These are interesting numbers. First, since approximately 37% of the dogs show no obsessive behaviors, that means about 63% do show such behaviors. Regarding the particular behaviors listed for adopters to choose from, there were specific reasons I included the choices I did. Self-licking is a frequent behavior seen in rescued puppy mill dogs and is often a sign of stress or

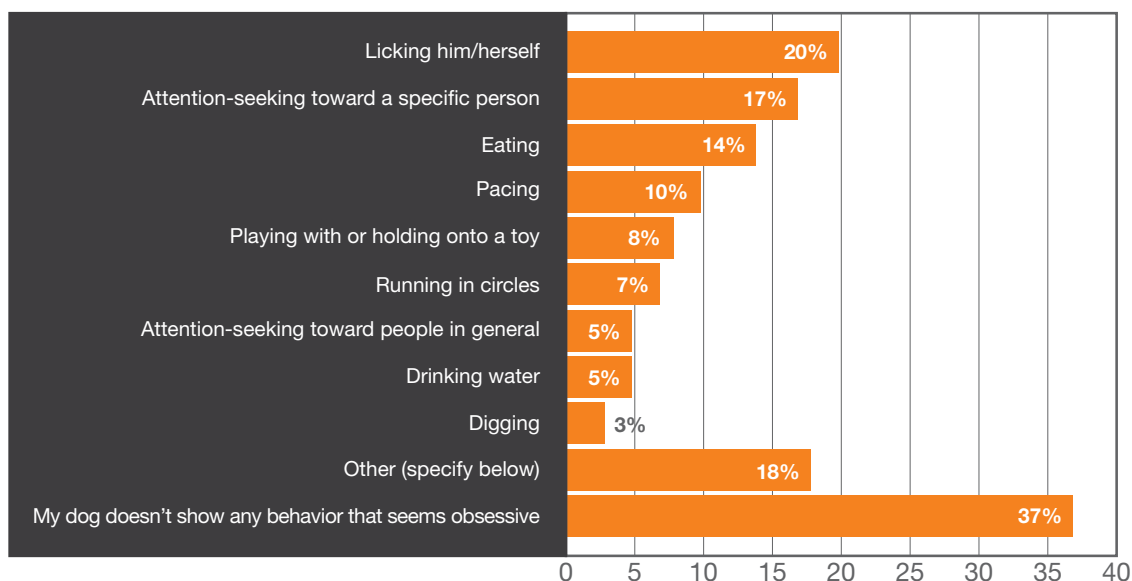
emotional difficulties. However, because many puppy mill dogs have skin diseases that make them lick themselves, it is not yet possible for us to distinguish self-licking associated with psychological issues from self-licking attributable to skin allergies and such.

The obsession with eating was commonly described as something like this: “He still wolfs down his food after five years. He acts like he needs to eat it before anyone else gets it — even though he should know by now that he gets all the food he wants, and he doesn’t have to compete for it (like he probably did in the puppy mill).” It turns out that a fairly high percentage of the dogs, 14%, do show this type of behavior.

I included playing or holding onto a toy because on the first questionnaire, a number of people described how their puppy mill dog seemed to care for toys as if they were puppies. For example:

- She thinks toys are her babies, and she will fight for them.
- Protects her toys as if they were her puppies.
- Nibbles at blankets, pillows, toys like she would clean puppies.
- BooBoo growls at other dogs if they try to take her babies (toys).

Graph 13: Obsessive behaviors



Pacing was mentioned a number of times in the comments on the first questionnaire. But the behavior I was most interested in is the one many puppy mill rescuers believe is the most common: the circling behavior that many of these dogs continue after removal from the puppy mill. It turns out, though, that it is not the most common obsessive-type behavior, as it was reported in only 7% of the dogs.

Why does this behavior seem much more common than it actually is? I believe it's because this behavior is disturbing to the adopters. Circling causes people to think that the dog is mentally suffering from something, or the behavior reminds us of the tiny enclosure this dog was confined in for years. Because of the distress the behavior evokes in people observing it, circling stands out more than the other behaviors, and we incorrectly believe it is the most common. In other words, it's similar to the entertainer who reads the reviews of her act the next day, and even though there are 10 good reviews for every bad one, she only focuses on and remembers the bad ones.

Some of the additional obsessive-like behaviors that adopters wrote in for the "Other" category included persistent barking, shredding paper and fabric, eating feces (coprophagia), licking objects and surfaces, and hoarding objects.

Circling and other repetitive and obsessive-compulsive behaviors are abnormal, of course, and have some important potential causes that puppy mill dog rescuers should know about. Research has shown that the reasons animals begin performing these behaviors are diverse, but the two most relevant ones for puppy mill dogs are (1) a way to exercise and burn off energy, and (2) as a coping mechanism for the emotional distress associated with fear, anxiety, boredom, loneliness, social deprivation and frustration.

Performing repetitive behaviors appears to trigger the release of endorphins — the feel-good chemicals — in the brain, which counteracts the unpleasant negative feelings. But the tricky part of this is that research is also now suggesting that once the repetitive behaviors are established, when the emotional distress is relieved, such as removing the animal from the disturbing environment, the repetitive behaviors may continue even when they are no longer needed as a coping mechanism.

The best explanation, then, is that the behavior simply becomes a habit. Therefore, when puppy mill dogs perform repetitive, obsessive-compulsive-type behaviors, it most likely means that the dog was suffering at some time, but may not mean there is any current suffering. If we're correct in this reasoning, puppy mill adopters may not need to worry as much when their dog spins in circles, as it may simply be a habit.

Looking at the tendency for obsessive behaviors to change, we found that 63% of the dogs show no change in the behaviors, for good or bad. Twelve percent show a worsening of the behavior, which, as with some of the other factors, is likely at least partially due to aging changes. One-quarter (25%) of the dogs showing these behaviors improve over time, and the written comments offered some interesting details about the improvement of certain obsessive behaviors. For example, the course that resolution takes for dogs who run in small circles is that the size of the circles slowly becomes larger and larger — even so large that the circles may reach the outermost boundaries of a fenced-in yard — and then the circling slowly becomes less and less frequent until it no longer occurs.

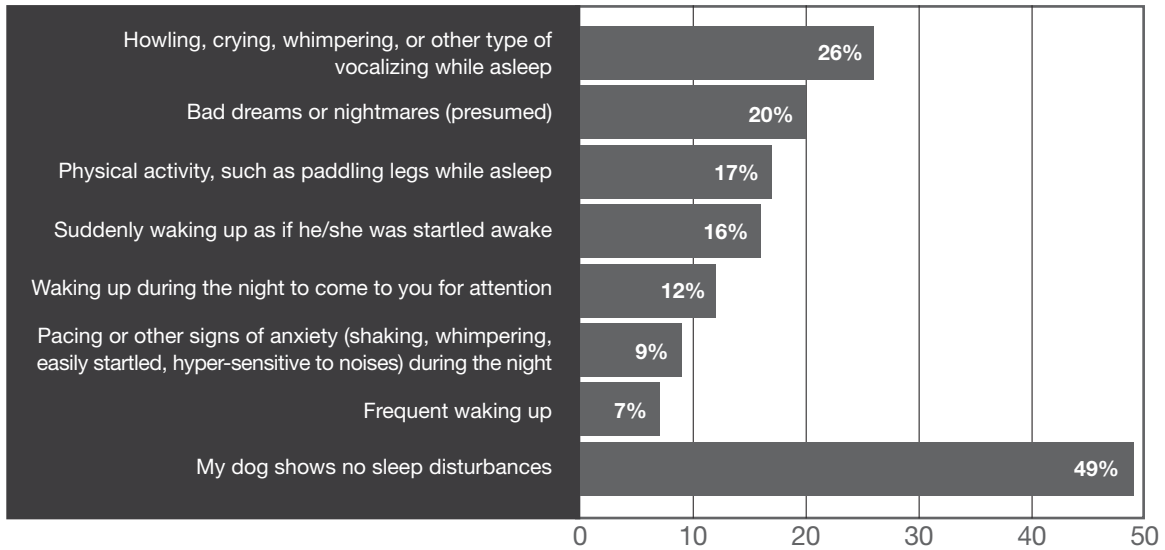
### **Sleep disturbances**

One aspect of psychological trauma that is well known in people, especially in the particular case of PTSD, but has not been examined in dogs is disturbances of one's sleep. The individual's sleep may be disturbed in many ways, and I wanted to know how many of them might be occurring in rescued puppy mill 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.)***

We are hampered in interpreting the results (shown in Graph 14), as we have no idea what is the "normal" occurrence of each of these factors in the general dog population. Also, the scoring of bad dreams or nightmares is based on our presumptions and cannot be confirmed. It is relatively reassuring that 49% 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 51% of puppy mill dogs — a slight majority — do experience

**Graph 14: Sleep disturbances**



disturbances of one type or another. When asked about changes in sleep disturbances since adoption, we found that a large majority (72%) of the dogs showing the problems didn't improve or worsen, while 24% showed an improvement and 4% showed a worsening.

**Likelihood of improvement graph**

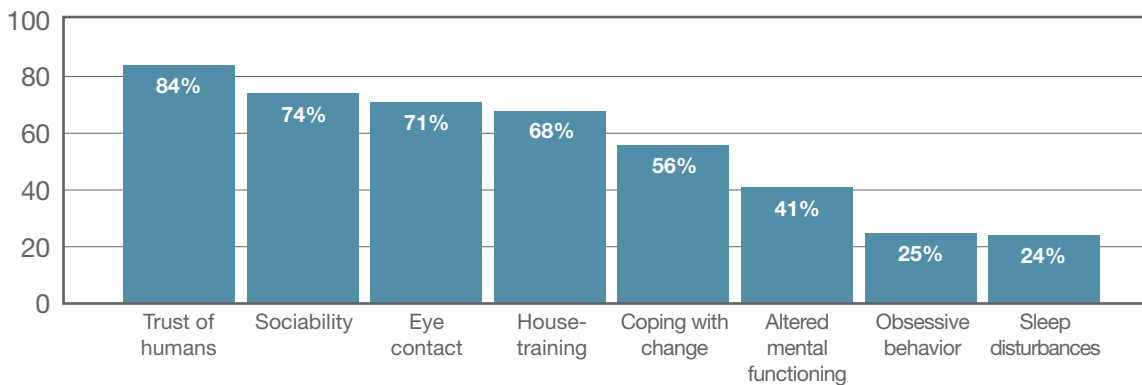
In order to see at a glance the likelihood of improvement in the characteristics we evaluated, I constructed Graph 15.

When we compare these percentages for improvement with those for people who have

experienced psychological trauma, they compare quite favorably. This is encouraging, as we are at the earliest phases of developing therapeutic and rehabilitation programs for helping these dogs regain their full abilities to live happily in human society and to enjoy life. This means that we will only get better at steadily raising these statistics for improvement as time goes on.

The chances of improvement for the individual psychological issues that I have presented above show a piecemeal view of the outlook for recovery of puppy mill dogs. Later I will present the overall view of the dogs' improvement, not just "parts" of the dogs.

**Graph 15: Percentage of dogs who improve after adoption for the different psychological issues**





just existed. I never knew if she enjoyed being with us, or if it was a blessing when she passed away — either way, her last years were at least lived with people who cared for her.”

## Conclusions for both studies

We have had anecdotal evidence for many years that the welfare of dogs in puppy mills is poor, but no scientific evidence supported these observations. We now have scientific evidence. By demonstrating that dogs maintained in these environments were reported to have developed long-term fears and phobias, compulsive behaviors such as circling and pacing, and possible learning deficits, and are often unable to cope fully with normal existence, these studies provide the first clear quantitative evidence that dogs confined in commercial breeding establishments for breeding purposes demonstrate impaired mental health and, as a result, diminished welfare.

In addition, these studies provide strong evidence that the dogs kept in these large-scale breeding facilities don't just suffer during their period of confinement, but carry the emotional scars for years, even when they're placed in loving homes. Finally, these studies establish that current laws are failing miserably to protect dogs in puppy mills from harm.

One of the adopter's comments about her own dog provides a poignant look at the harm of puppy mills: “She improved somewhat over the years, but she was never going to be normal — she really



## Part 2: Rehabilitation and treatment methods for rescued puppy mill dogs

When puppy mill dogs were first being adopted into homes, little was known about their psychological make-up, and no specific techniques were known to be particularly effective in helping them adjust to their new lives. People tried many different methods — some helped and some did not. When I decided to put together a guide for caring for puppy mill 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 specific questions for the follow-up questionnaire in order to maximally benefit from the wealth of knowledge held by the people who had worked most closely with these dogs.

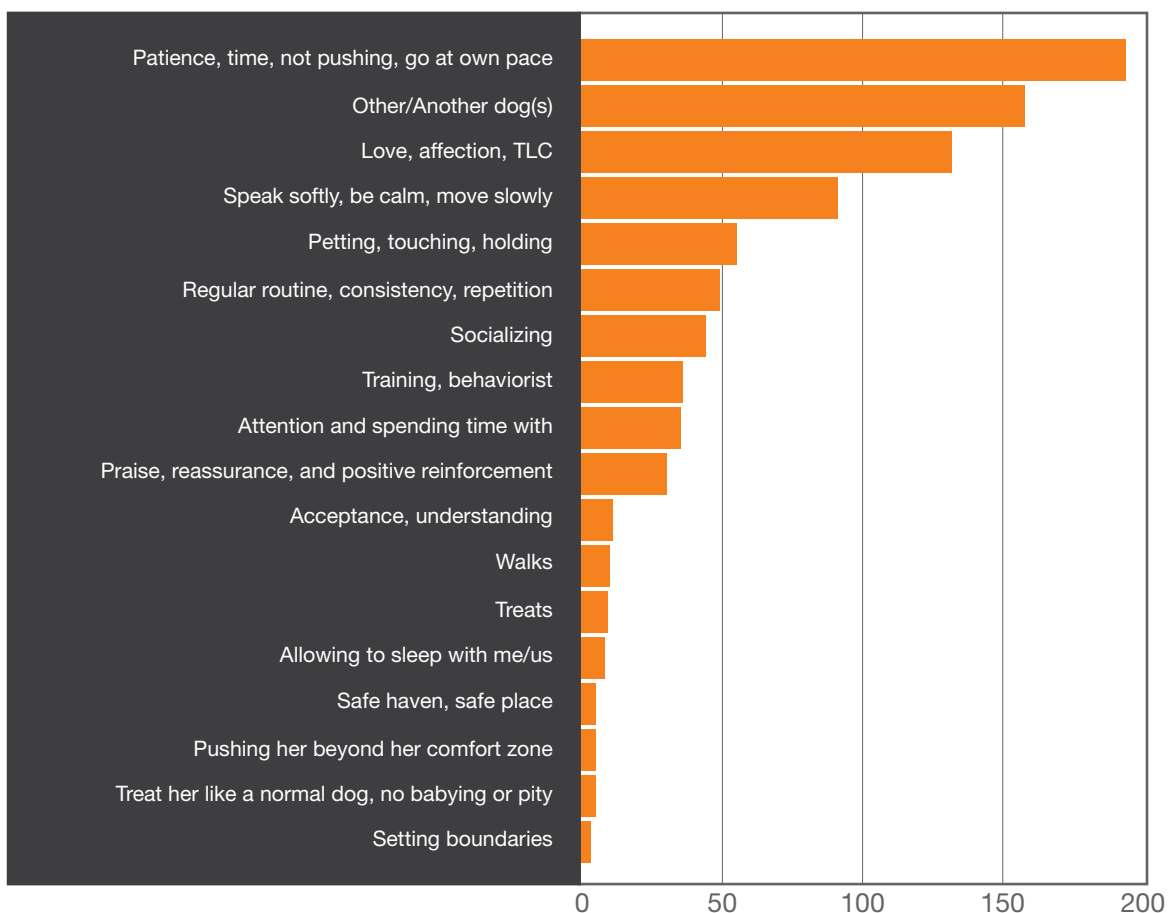
### The most effective methods

One of the questions I asked was this:

***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?***

Graph 16 shows the results for what worked best with puppy mill dogs, ranked 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 heal emotionally.

Graph 16: Most effective methods



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

### ***Patience, time, not pushing, go at own pace***

- Lots and lots of patience: allowing her to progress at her own pace.
- We don't push her to do anything she does not want to do.
- Give her as much time as it takes.
- Nothing has helped her except patience and time.
- No pressure.
- The most important thing my husband and I did was to let Bandit come to us on his own terms. We desperately wanted to hug and kiss and hold Bandit as soon as we picked him up from the airport. But we saw that that would have scared him senseless. The only way Bandit could ever learn to trust us, and any other humans, was to take his time and come to us when he was ready.
- Being patient but encouraging him to participate in the family.

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

(More discussion about this topic follows in the next section.)

- Having other dogs in the house. They helped her more than we ever could.
- The BEST thing I did was to get another dog.
- Having our first dog show Teddy the ropes.
- Having our other dogs to show her we were OK.
- My dogs showed her how to be a dog.
- He watches the other dogs intently and has learned many behaviors from them.
- Other dogs that make her feel comfortable.
- Bringing in a puppy.... We had had Rusty for years ... before Penny the puppy came home. Once Penny was there ... from eight weeks onward, boy, did Rusty come out of his shell.

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

- Unconditional love.

- Constant, effusive love from both of us.
- Loving her, telling her I love her and I will never hurt her and will never let anyone ever hurt her again.
- Giving her affection when she asked for it, rather than when I wanted to.

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

- Quiet, soft-spoken approach.
- Soothing talk.
- I also would read aloud the book I was reading at the time while sitting on the floor near her so she would get used to the sound of my voice.
- I talk to her in a happy, cheerful tone.
- Keep a calm demeanor.
- Provide a relatively quiet, calm and stable environment.
- We moved in a confident, predictable manner at all times around him, somewhat slower than normal.

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

- Holding him helped him more than anything else.
- Constant petting, rubbing, kissing, hugging.
- Touching — pick up gently and hold on lap, petting, etc. Lots of touching.
- TTouch.
- We practiced “hug therapy” every day. I would wrap her in a towel and hold her for a long time while sitting quietly.
- Many, many hours of holding, cuddling and walking the house with her in my arms just to see that I would never, ever hurt her. Because of all that holding and squeezing, she now just loves being held tight.

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

- Being on a very set schedule that Melody can depend upon.
- Being VERY consistent — food bowl in exactly the same place, consistent meal times, bed-times, routines.

- Having a regular routine.... She learned what to expect, and I think that helped her get over her fears.

### **Socializing**

- Take her with me shopping, errands, meetings, etc., to expose her to as many nice people as I can.
- Go to the dog park.
- Taking her for walks with other humans and introducing her to new sounds and smells.
- Exposed her to a lot of new situations and activities — we went to the dog park, local dog events and pet stores together. Also took long walks exploring the neighborhood and meeting the neighbors and their dogs.
- Carrying him around in a pouch to help him get used to humans.
- Letting strangers hold him.

### **Training, behaviorist**

- Classroom-style dog obedience training.
- Obedience classes and agility.
- Positive reinforcement training.
- Counter-conditioning/desensitization.
- Home training with a professional.
- Behavior specialist.

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

- Regular personal attention time.
- One-on-one attention.
- Paying attention in a loving way.
- Giving the dog attention, both physical and mental.
- When she comes for attention, we always give it to her.

### **Praise, reassurance, and positive reinforcement**

- Lots of verbal praise.
- Frequent soft praise.
- We constantly praised any little thing she did and encouraged her to “be brave” in the scary world.

### **Acceptance, understanding**

- Unconditional acceptance.
- You have to put yourself in their shoes and try to understand how terrified and confused they must be.

### **Walks**

- Taking her for walks was beneficial.
- Walking and hiking.
- Forcing her to go for walks.... Even though she didn't like it at first, she now LOVES her walks.

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

- Allowing her to select a safe place, which was a crate with the door open, and never allowing her to be disturbed while in her safe place.
- Has a bed that is hidden in each room so she has a safe spot.

**BUT:** Allowing the fearful dog to always be able to retreat and hide can hamper recovery. Any fearful individual — animal or human — who can always avoid difficulties will never develop the ability to master and overcome them. (See below, “Pushing her beyond her comfort zone.”)

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

- I could not let her hide from her fears. If I had let her hide and not face the world, we couldn't have come this far.
- Pushing her just a tad beyond her comfort zone to show her scary can lead to good things.
- Slowly pushing her outside of her comfort zone — for example, putting a leash on her and making her stay in the living room when we turned on the TV.
- Sometimes I would force myself on him, would pick him up and whisper in his ear while caressing him, but as soon as I'd put him back down, he'd run. Little by little, his fear of me subsided.
- To get Ollie to come out of the bathroom, I tied him to the coffee table in my living room to force him to interact with us. This worked like a charm, and he never went back to the bathroom.

**Note:** This method is a near opposite of the number one method — *not* pushing.

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

- The best thing I ever did for Gizzy was to treat him as if he was already normal.
- I treated her just like my other dogs.
- I did not pity her or overindulge her.
- Act as normal as possible around her. Even though certain things scared or startled her. Did not “baby” her.

### **Having other dogs in the home**

The recommendation to have another dog or dogs in the puppy mill dog’s adoptive household is so important that I want to look at it in some depth here. First, because item number one (having patience) on the above list of most effective rehabilitation methods is not really doing something as much as it is simply maintaining a particular attitude (and, in fact, not doing something), I regard this second item on the list as the most appropriate answer to the question, “What is the best thing to do to help puppy mill dogs get better?” The answer: “Have or get another dog as a companion and role model for the puppy mill dog.”

This method has come to be known as so



beneficial to the emotional recovery of puppy mill dogs that some rescue groups involved with the adoption of these dogs have made it their policy that puppy mill dogs will only be adopted into homes with other dogs. This questionnaire actually collected even more detailed information about the other dogs, as many adopters who reported this as a most effective rehabilitation measure provided additional specifics about the other dogs. In order of most frequently mentioned to least, the other dog(s) should be:

1. Socialized, outgoing, friendly, happy, gentle, calm, well-behaved (grouped together because of the similarities)
2. Well-adjusted
3. “Normal”
4. Rescued
5. A specific sex
6. Older
7. A puppy
8. A puppy mill dog
9. A non-puppy mill dog
10. House-trained

The single most important characteristic of the other dogs in the household — compatibility — was almost entirely omitted from adopters’ comments, most likely because it is considered so obvious that it is merely assumed. “Friendly” comes close to “compatibility” but indicates a slightly higher level of relationship and, while certainly beneficial, is not as essential as compatibility. In other words, the absolutely necessary feature of the other dog(s) in the house is that they are compatible — or get along — with the puppy mill dog. If they are out-and-out friendly toward the puppy mill dog, that is certainly an added bonus.

How does the presence of other dogs help the puppy mill dog? There are at least four ways that puppy mill dogs may benefit by having another dog around. The first is the one people think of most often: that the puppy mill dog learns from and models his/her behavior on the normal-acting pet dog. The canine species is imitative in some of its behavior and hence would be, if not severely inhibited by negative emotions like fear,

receptive to following the lead of the behavior of the other dogs in the house. Here are some adopters' comments in which this appears to be happening:

- She learned how to play by watching our two other dogs. Then she learned by interacting with them. She now plays with other dogs and with toys.
- She is more willing to go along with things as she follows my other bichon; however, Roxie needs to have her main caretaker with her as well. Seeing her sister (normal bichon) and being with her helps Roxie a great deal! She has learned so much from being with a naturally socialized dog.
- He will seem to get overstimulated in large open areas like the off-leash dog parks, where there are lots of people, lots of dogs, lots of action, and then tends to get confused. He very much looks to my other dog(s) for direction.
- She was always watching [the other dogs] and doing what they did.

The second way that the presence of other dogs may help the emotionally struggling puppy mill dog is through a psychological phenomenon termed "social buffering." Social buffering is an effect whereby the presence of companions can reduce the intensity of — or buffer — the emotional reaction to something frightening or stressful. For example, one study showed that monkeys who are fearful of snakes when they are alone 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 about social buffering that may be helpful to puppy mill 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 puppy mill dogs is that the presence of confident and calm companion dogs would offer the greatest

benefit to the puppy mill dogs' emotional state in situations when they are fearful.

In a more anthropomorphic view, when the dog 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: "No one else is troubled by this thing that I see as such a threat — so why am I the only one?" The dog's thinking is obviously unlikely to be this analytical, but the emotional message is clear: "Nothing to worry about here." Here are some adopters' comments that appear to describe precisely this effect:

- Dakota was frightened of everything on her arrival here: new sounds, new people, dogs we met on walks, any movement we made here at home she felt was directed at her, even if all we did was cross legs or turn a page in a book. Now, she looks to her pack, and sometimes even to me, when in a new situation. She checks how the other dogs are reacting; she looks to me for a command (touch, with me, go home, etc.).
- He still doesn't like a quick change, but he's so much more secure with my husband, myself and the other dogs, so he looks to us and them to make sure things are OK.
- Gracie was terrified of everything when she first arrived. She slowly learned the routine, but if anything was different, she would run back to her crate for safety. Now, she will observe how the other dogs handle something new and take her cue from that. She is no longer terrified; she is willing to investigate and be in new situations as long as she feels safe with a person she knows.

The third way the puppy mill dog benefits from having other dogs around is that it takes the one-on-one intensity, or pressure, off. When the puppy mill dog is the only dog in the house, all of the human-dog interaction involves the puppy mill dog, which can be too intense for a shy or fearful dog. A rough analogy is 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 only one of the students comes to school one day, it's a whole different story.



Everything this student does or says, every move he makes, the teacher watches. This student would be unable to relax the entire time he's in the classroom. The puppy mill 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.

The fourth way that puppy mill dogs benefit is more indirect than the other three ways. When adopters have only 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 difficult and frustrating for even the strongest, most loving and most patient of humans. And because we now know that puppy mill dogs can show these reactions and behaviors for months and even years before improving, the patience this requires when the puppy mill dog is a person's only dog would need to be almost superhuman.

However, contrast that to the adopter who has a couple of other pet dogs who 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 "normal" pet dogs, making it much, much easier for her to give the puppy mill dog all the time he needs to emotionally recover from the mill experience. And this is exactly what the puppy mill dog needs: patience and time. So, the fourth benefit of having other dogs around is that those dogs give adopters all the "dog love" they need while the puppy mill dogs heal at whatever pace they need.

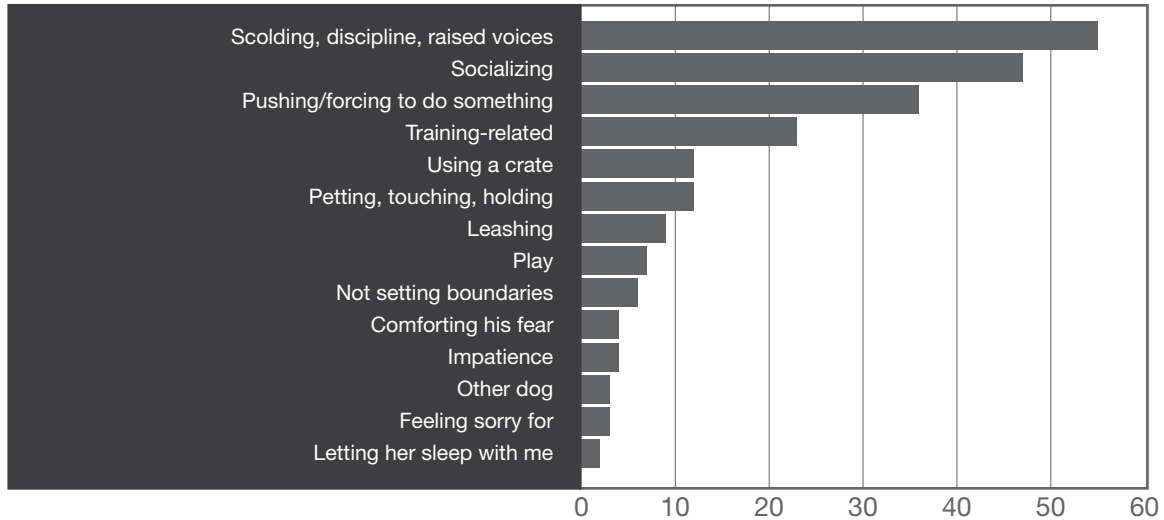
We see, then, that the presence of other dogs is an enormous benefit for the adopted puppy mill dog. However, as with virtually all psychological issues, there are a few minor possible negative effects of having other dogs around. One is that because dogs learn by imitation, they can just as easily learn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

## The effect of medical conditions

Spread throughout the comments to different questions, I found something that showed up a number of times. While I think it is worth mentioning here, I don't yet know what value, if any, it carries for the way we care for puppy mill dogs. Several adopters noted breakthroughs that seemed to be linked to their puppy mill dog having and/or recovering from illness or injury. Here are some of those comments:

- Sadie suffered fractured legs after we got her. This resulted in care to be provided that enhanced her socialization. Sadie was "forced" into becoming more social and trusting.
- I tried so hard to be patient with Sheeba to get her to trust me. Nothing worked. Sheeba was at one point very sick and almost died. During this time, she had to be hand-fed and given water by hand to drink. When she got better and back on her feet, she "remembered" this was the human who helped her, and as a result she became more trusting and affectionate.
- The change was noticed after her accident.
- She became more sociable after her leg broke.
- She had surgery for a torn cruciate ligament. I had close contact with her for her recovery period, which helped with trust.
- Heidi had an accident in May 2009. She was buried under a blanket, and I stepped on the blanket, stepping on her neck. She was not breathing, but her heart was beating. I gave her mouth-to-nose breaths until we got to the vet emergency clinic. There her prognosis was poor. She spent two days and nights in an oxygen box and received fluids. We brought her home after the third day. She could barely walk. We had to feed and give her water with a syringe and keep her in a padded playpen. She recovered in a month after physical therapy at home. She is now a sociable and bossy dog and likes to be around people, especially her human mommy. The accident unlocked something in her brain that helped her forget she was a puppy mill survivor. Today she is now a happy and friendly dog.

Graph 17: Least effective methods



## The least effective methods

After I asked adopters what was the most effective thing they tried, the next logical question was to ask about the least effective. This information is invaluable in helping to prevent adopters from repeating what others' experiences have shown to not be helpful. Here's the question I asked:

***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?***

Graph 17 shows the results. I didn't include this in the graph or the table below, but the number one answer was "Nothing." Some examples of adopters' comments:

- I can't think of anything that was not helpful. Any acknowledgement of him, no matter how small, seemed to help, even when we had to give him his own space.
- I don't think I did anything that did not help.
- I think everything she has experienced has helped her take baby steps forward.

In some cases, the answers to this question were the opposite of the answers to the previous question. For example, if having patience was the number one answer for most effective things,

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 — not opposites — showed up on both lists. In other words, something that some people found to be the most effective thing to help their dog was the thing 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.

Here are some examples of adopters' comments about least effective methods.

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

- Stern discipline.
- Yelling or raising your voice.
- Punishment of any sort.
- Any negativity toward her.
- Once she was bringing in poo from the outside, and I told her "no" in a firm but calm voice and gently shook my index finger at her. It frightened her. She ran up the stairs to the bed and curled up in a little ball.
- Initially I did give him "time out" for going to the bathroom in the house; the look on his little face haunts me; it wasn't his fault that he couldn't get it right away. I might have yelled at him in frustration. I don't think I did this more than once or twice, but I regret it because he did backslide.

- Absolutely cannot be yelled at or have any physical punishment. Yelling at her just sets her back and upsets her. The couple of times I have raised my voice, I've immediately regretted it because it is so devastating to her.
- He was completely un[house]trained. Now he does his business outside sometimes. He wears a diaper in the house. He is too emotionally frail to fuss at if he makes a mistake. I just can't fuss at him. It breaks his heart.

### **Socializing**

- Bringing Tanzee out in public to try to desensitize her to strangers and new places really doesn't seem to have helped her.
- Trying to socialize her too soon with people.
- I have taken her to PetSmart or the dog park or to friends' houses to socialize her, but she still is afraid of other people and dogs.
- I would constantly try to socialize her, taking her on walks in crowded areas; it did not help her fear. I felt it would show her no harm would come to her, but it just made her anxious.
- Trying to get her to accept other people by handing her to them so she would see they wouldn't hurt her. It did not help and even made her more fearful and paranoid.
- Upon the advice of an animal behaviorist ... sitting at Walmart on a bench with her on a Saturday afternoon for an hour to get her used to new noises and people coming up to her to pet her. STUPIDEST THING I HAVE DONE!!
- He has become my travel partner in the car on long road trips, and it has helped him adjust to new situations but not to new people.

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

- Least helpful was forcing him to do things he was just not ready to do, like going to the dog park and expecting him to behave. How scary that must have been, and how stupid of me to keep trying it.
- Forcing her to do something that was beyond her comfort zone.
- Trying to force a certain behavior on them doesn't work at all.
- Was told by rescue to flood him with attention ...

that was a mistake. By allowing him to "just be himself" gave him the opportunity to just watch the world around him and have him come to us in his own time, when he was ready.

- Trying to get her to "face her fears."

### **Training-related**

- Traditional reward-based training initially was not useful, as she just wanted to pretend we didn't exist.
- Obedience training, she has a hard time learning. She tries really hard; she just can't pick up on it.
- Trying traditional potty training methods. I had to throw out the book on dog behavior when he came to our home.
- Taking her to obedience classes. She was completely overwhelmed and traumatized by them, and we quit going after five weeks.
- Having a dog trainer come who insisted she mind ... believe me, that was not going to happen. She did NOT want to "down" ... he came twice and never again.
- Normal clicker training didn't work, as the clicker sound was too startling, even when we dampened the sound.

### **Using a crate**

- Trying to crate train her. The first night we put her in her new crate with the pretty pink blanket, gave her water and shut the door. She proceeded to ram her head into the door repeatedly and wouldn't stop. She didn't bark or make a noise, just kept ramming her head.
- Trying to put her in a crate for her own safety. She flipped out.
- Crating her was a disaster.

### **BUT:**

- [Least effective was] allowing her to be free range in the house when I went out, not crating her.
- I think giving her full run of the house when I first got her was very confusing for her. She chewed up a lot of stuff and marked everywhere. I got a large wire crate with blankets that I keep her in, in the living room when I am at work. She totally calmed down after that.

## **Petting, touching, holding**

- Tried petting him every day to help him get used to it, but it seemed to have no effect, positive or negative.
- I tried holding her frequently at the beginning, but that just made her hide better.
- Trying to desensitize her to noises, being handled and touched. We worked with a professional trainer, and it was awful for her.
- Was told by rescue to pick him up multiple times a day, try to pet him, shower with affection, etc. Wrong, wrong, wrong.
- We were advised to hold her until she relaxed, as therapy for her. Every time I did it, I felt like I was torturing her, so I stopped. We've had to realize that loving her is not enough.... She needs a lot of time to learn she can trust us.
- Baby-talk or trying to soothe him when he's scared absolutely does not help. He cannot be comforted by humans. Many potential adopters have been certain that all Milo needed was someone to love him, thinking that if he saw how quiet and warm they could be, he would come around. But he doesn't see people as a source of safety, so that only backfired on them. If he was scared of strangers, his eyes would be on me, to see how I would intervene and protect him, but even then he didn't want me to touch him.

## **Leashing**

- I have tried to train him to walk on a leash, but he is absolutely terrified of leashes.
- We were told to keep her on a leash to catch her, and we realized quickly that she was traumatized by that and stopped it after a month. Teaching her hand commands patiently instead worked just fine.

## **Play**

- Trying to teach Blaze how to play has not worked.
- We tried to play with her — never going to happen. She doesn't know what toys are.
- Trying to get her to play with toys ... she just doesn't understand the "throw and fetch a toy" concept, and I don't think she ever will.

## **Comforting his fear**

- Coddling her fear.
- Soothing her when she was scared.
- Rewarding their fear.
- Reinforcing her scared behavior by petting her and comforting her when she was freezing up.

Important note here: This concept of not wanting to "reward their fear" is no longer considered valid. (It's not clear why it ever was.) 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 the animal's fear by punishing their fear response, which is preposterous. As for not wanting to "reward the fear," simply ask yourself what you would do if you were traveling on an airplane with your five-year-old daughter, and because of some rocky turbulence, she became extremely frightened. Would you refrain from saying anything comforting because you wouldn't want to reward her fear?

## **Causes of setbacks**

In an effort to tap into the wealth of information about rehabilitation successes and failures that adopters had to offer, I posed this final question about what was actually detrimental to the puppy mill dog's progress:

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

Graph 18 shows the results. The answers covered a little more ground than the question inquired about, but that actually worked out for the best, as we learned more than expected. For example, while I asked for things that the adopters themselves did, when answering the question, the adopters included events that happened in addition to things they themselves did. In fact, the number one answer for this question ended up being more about events that happened rather than specific things the adopters did.

Here are some examples of adopters' comments.

### ***Scary event***

- Typically it is an incident that scared her. Some-

**Graph 18: Causes of setbacks**



times the setback lasts only a couple hours; sometimes it lasts for several days. Sooner or later, we get past it and start moving forward again.

- There was a three-year-old boy with a hose who squirted Stella right in the face. At this point, she regressed quite a bit, and it took her about a month to move forward.
- If something scares her, like the ramp to the couch falling ... she doesn't forget or get over it.
- I took Teddy to the groomer and left him and my other pup there most of the day until they were done — WRONG THING TO DO! He was very upset when I picked him up, wouldn't eat, was shaking, and had stomach problems too. The groomers come to the house now, and it's fine.
- On vacation we stopped in Daytona during bike week. The noise of the motorcycles terrified Rudy. We left immediately, but I'm afraid it was a setback.
- One trainer pinned him to cut his nails. He flailed, cried and just kept full eye contact with me. After this, it took him a few days to trust again.
- She accidentally ran into the sliding glass door and was then even more afraid of loud noises.

### ***Vacation, attached human away***

- When we first boarded him. He was distant toward us for a period of time.

- I had him a year and a half when I went on vacation for a week and left him with his foster family. He regressed a lot from what they described. I am his lead dog, and he is lost without me.
- I was away for an extended time, and her progress took a few steps back without my consistent work with her.

### ***Move, change in household***

- I was forced to sell my house and move. The stress of moving was very difficult on her as well as the other mill dogs. It set us back on house-breaking, and I saw much more anxiety.
- All of Max's setbacks were a result of his being moved around. Each placement set him back to square one.
- Letting her get adjusted at my house, then shipping her off to another foster home. Big mistake.

### ***Medical, surgery***

- His crate confinement after surgery really set him back. He was just getting used to being a real dog and then had to be put back in a crate for his recovery. He has made great strides since then.
- Cleaning her ears twice a day because of an ear infection. Her reaction was to hide more and for a longer time.



### Loss of companion

- Death of her “leader dog” — regressed, seemed clinically depressed.
- There was a definite setback when we lost Ruby. Annie was devastated.
- When the [dogs we are fostering] are adopted, she does not understand what happens to them. They suddenly go in the car and never come back.

### Training-related

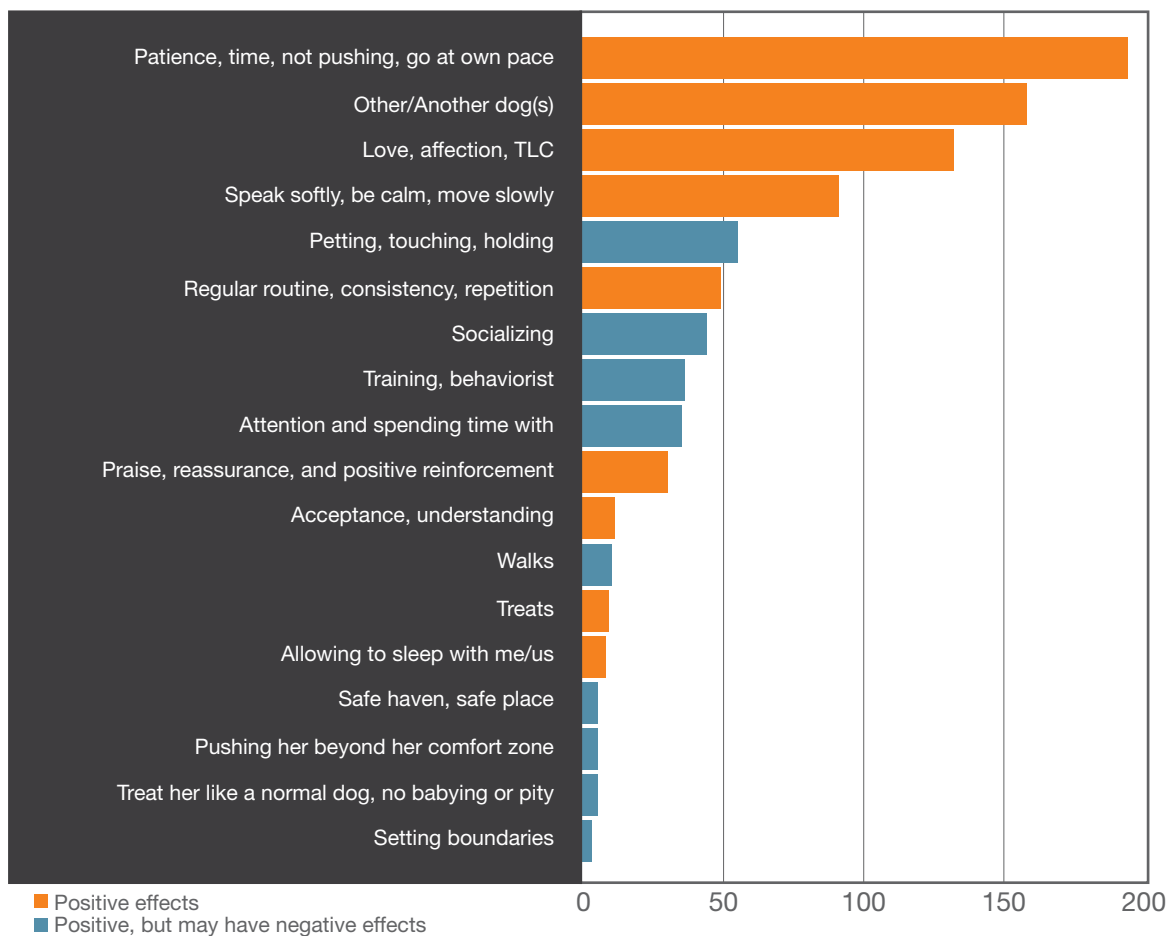
- Having [a famous trainer with his own TV show] work with her for 30 minutes on a walk with me.... Her previous owner was a man who wore a ball cap. To this day, she fears ball caps on a

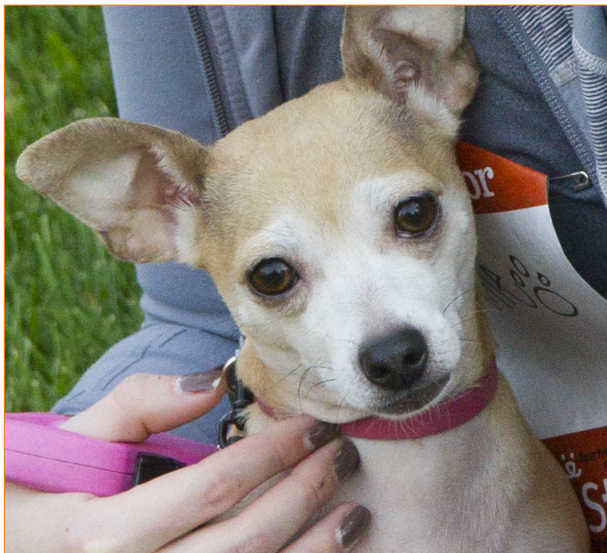
man. That will never go away in my opinion. This was a setback for her.

- I paid an experienced dog trainer to come to the house in the month after I adopted Molly to give me some tips for how to establish our alpha-beta relationship. She told me to pick Molly up, flip her over on her back, and hold her in my lap like a baby until she stopped squirming and relaxed. She hated it, and it seemed to make her more afraid of me.

It’s important to keep in mind that setbacks may occur without any identifiable reason. Here one adopter describes this: “Nothing we can figure [out] happens; she will sometimes just go back to being more timid and shaking.”

Graph 19: Rehabilitation and treatment methods





## How to know what to do

The information offered by adopters gives us a vast amount of guidance in how to best care for puppy mill dogs, but it also creates some 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 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 puppy mill dog? What methods should adopters be advised to use?

First, we should not be surprised by this apparent confusion. Individual dogs, like individual humans, respond to adversity in different ways. Some are unharmed, some are harmed a little, and some are severely affected. And individuals respond favorably to different methods of rehabilitation and therapy. The individuality we see in puppy mill dogs in terms of how they are psychologically affected and how they respond to various treatment methods is exactly what we should expect.

As perplexing as this all may seem, it really is not a challenge we aren't up to. Therapists for human trauma victims have dealt with it for years; it is well-known, for example, that there is no one method of preferred treatment for post-traumatic

stress disorder. Therapy is individualized for each patient. In our care of puppy mill dogs, we know that there are some methods that have positive effects in virtually all dogs, and some methods that succeed in some dogs but fail in others. I have presented this information in Graph 19 for easy reference. I have taken the most effective methods cited by adopters and color-coded them orange to indicate those methods that are always (with only rare exceptions) positive. The methods that are positive for some dogs but ineffective or negative for others are color-coded blue. I will discuss the way to use this information in a later section on advice for adopters.

There is one last word on rehabilitation of puppy mill dogs, and it is well stated in this adopter's comment:

“It has all been trial and error. One of our friends, who loves animals as much as we do, said getting Maddie has been somewhat of an experiment. You just have to keep trying new things.”

We have learned quite a bit about how best to help these dogs overcome their past, but we are nowhere near having figured it all out. It often takes some imagination and creativity to come up with something that works best with any one individual dog. Also, with many websites, blogs and online discussion and support groups now devoted to caring for rescued puppy mill dogs (some of which are listed in the appendix), many new ideas are being exchanged all the time. They won't all work, and some of them may even be harmful — like the persistent-but-wrong method of “not rewarding their fear” — so everyone must be careful, of course. But new techniques will be coming along for as long as dogs continue to come out of these commercial breeding facilities.

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

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

Knowledge about the long-term outcomes, or prognoses, of these dogs is crucial for the work we do with them. Take, for example, this comment by an adopter: “I feel like I’m failing her somewhat since I can’t seem to get her to trust me, even after four years.” With adequate knowledge of how the dogs do over time, we should never hear this kind of comment from an adopter. I don’t mean that the adopter is wrong in saying what she said; I mean that if we are able to fully inform adopters, they should be prepared for what to expect and, especially, not feel they are failing. Regarding this example specifically, we now have good information about how long recovery — for individual problems as well as the dog as a whole — can take, and with that knowledge there is no reason that, even after four years, anyone should be thinking they have failed. Many dogs continue to improve at four years, and quite a few don’t even start to progress on certain issues until after a good deal of time has passed.

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 puppy mill dogs is no exception. First, we are obviously able to study only 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 puppy mills make it through this entire process. In some cases when poorly kept puppy mills are closed down, many dogs may be euthanized because of 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, as the people who are unhappy with the adoption may be less inclined to participate in the study (for reasons such as lack of interest or worry that they will be criticized for things they did or didn’t do, or for giving up on the dog). So the results may end up looking more positive than they truly are.

One adopter who participated in both of our questionnaires had the dog when completing the first questionnaire, but no longer had him when the second questionnaire was conducted. This person wrote this on the second questionnaire: “I surrendered Benny after two months because of several incidents in which he bit or attempted to bite my children.” In this case, the adopter completed the questionnaire, but that is the exception. Most people who return an adopted dog like this would not fill out the questionnaire, and thus the questions on the questionnaire about adopters’ satisfaction may miss some of the more negative situations. With that said, however, the news is still overwhelmingly positive.

We obtained some information about the dogs’ prognosis for recovery in our first questionnaire, but it was limited because the focus of that study was on the dogs’ current psychological state and behavior. We did find that the duration of time in the household also had a number of effects on the dogs’ behavior, with increased time in the home associated with improvements in the abnormal behaviors, except self-grooming. In that first study, we determined that many of the dogs continue to struggle emotionally for the rest of their lives — just trying to gain comfort in a world we all take for granted. To them, the world and all the people in it just can’t be trusted; it is something that always holds some kind of threat for which they must be on guard. However, the majority of the dogs improve over time, and many of them go on to lead happy lives.

Because I wanted to know much more about the long-term outcomes of rescued puppy mill dogs, I included many questions on that subject in the second questionnaire. The questions were designed to evaluate the long-term outcomes of

the individual psychological and behavioral issues and the outcomes of each dog as a whole being. I presented the information about the outcomes for the individual issues in Part 1. Here I will present the overall picture of how these dogs do over time.

## How many dogs are considered well-adjusted

The first thing I wanted to know is how many of the dogs were considered well-adjusted (“normal,” although there really isn’t a true normal for dogs any more than there is for people) by their adopters. What I mean is this: If there was an adopted puppy mill dog in your house, and you had a friend come over to visit once or twice a week for several months, but you never told your friend about the dog’s background, would your friend ever suspect the dog came from a puppy mill or any other background of hardship and adversity? If your friend would never suspect any such background, then the dog could be considered normal and well-adjusted.

I wanted to determine how many adopted puppy mill dogs were considered by their adopters to be well-adjusted at the time of adoption and also how many were considered well-adjusted at the time they responded to the questionnaire, which averaged for the group two years after adoption. To get this information, I asked the following two questions in succession.

***Many, but not all, puppy mill 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)?***

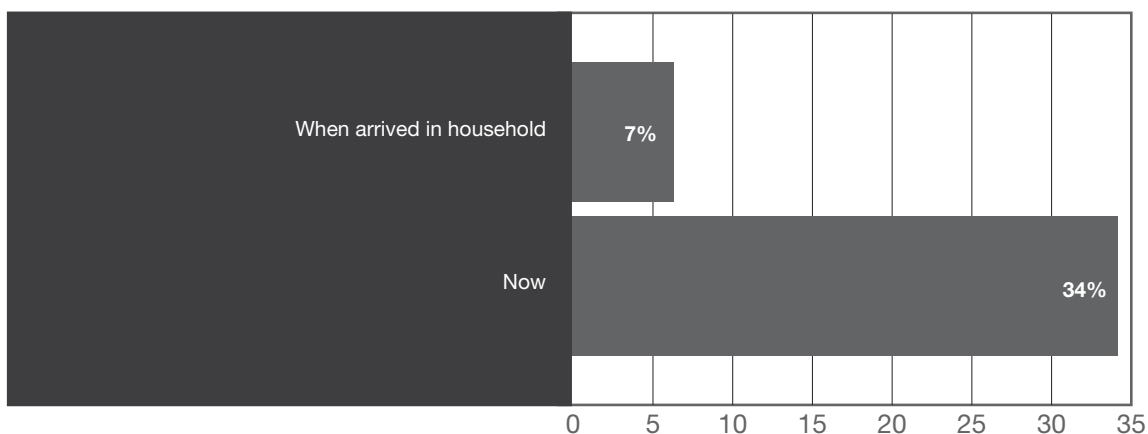
***Would you consider your dog to be a normal, well-adjusted dog now?***

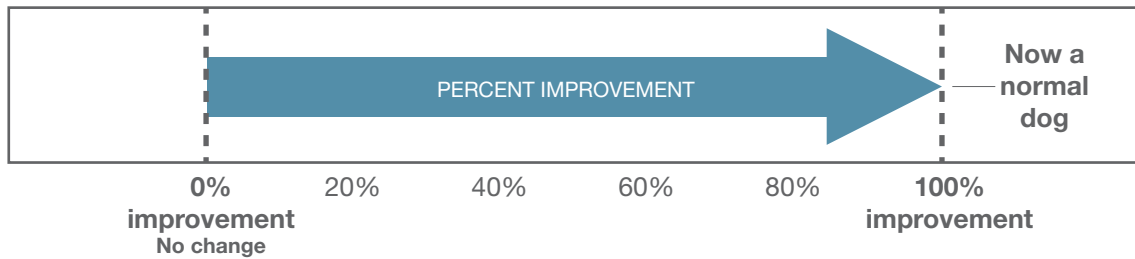
Graph 20 shows the results. Fewer than one in 10 adopted puppy mill dogs were considered to be normal, well-adjusted dogs at the time of adoption (after a few weeks to adapt to the household). Then, two years later, nearly five times that number were judged to be normal dogs. This is very good news. However, it still means that 66%, or about two-thirds, of the dogs still differ from normal, well-adjusted dogs two years after adoption.

## Percentage of improvement

The next question I asked was to see how much of an improvement the dogs made in overcoming their psychological troubles. For this question, it didn’t matter how mild or severe the dog’s problem was; I just wanted to know how far the dog had come from whatever level of deficiency he/she had at first. The scale on the next page describes this visually.

**Graph 20: Puppy mill dogs considered by their adopters to be a normal, well-adjusted dog**





Here is the question:

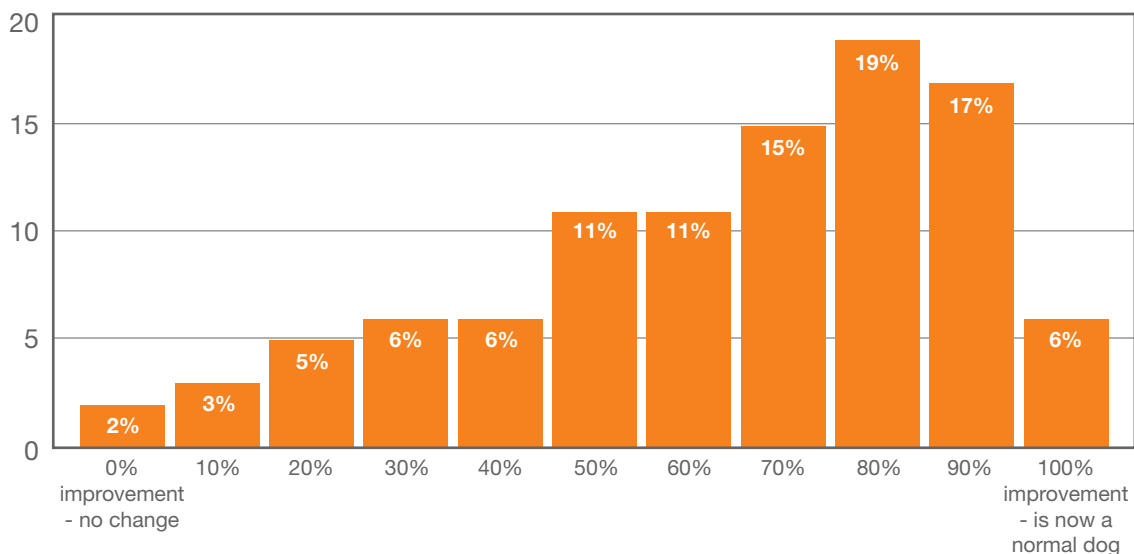
***The characteristics that make a puppy mill dog different than “normal” dogs often, but not always, resolve with time. They may also resolve partially but not completely. If you believe that your dog was not a typical, normal dog when he/she arrived in your household, what degree of overall improvement 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%.***

Graph 21 shows the results. What we were hop-

ing to see here is a heavy concentration of scores toward the right end of the scale, which would indicate the greatest degree of improvement. And that is exactly what the results show. The major grouping of dogs is in the region of 70% to 90% improvement, which is outstanding. With this information in hand, adopters can be informed rather precisely about the likelihood of their dog improving, and by how much. For example, their dog would have a 15% chance of improving 70% in two years, a 19% chance of improving 80%, and a 17% chance of improving 90%. These results can even be combined, so that the chance of an adopted puppy mill dog improving 70% to 90% would be 51%.

For the record, in the answer section of this question, I also offered the choice of “Changed for the worse.” Fewer than one-third of 1% (1 in 300) selected that choice.

**Graph 21: Percentage of improvement**





## Rate of improvement

It is also important to better understand whether improvement in puppy mill dogs is always gradual and steady, or whether it can progress to a point, level off and stay there for some time, and then start to further improve. This kind of information is critical when counseling adopters about the progress in their dogs. If we know that change is always steady — even if slow and steady — then we would know that when the dog's progress levels off, it signals the end point of progress on that particular issue. But if we know that it's relatively common that progress will plateau and then additional progress may happen later on, we can assure adopters that even though the dog seems to have stopped improving, he/she might progress again after a few weeks or months. Here's the question I asked:

***Was your dog showing any difficulties (emotional or physical) since arriving in your household that remained unchanged for an extended period of time (more than six months) and then suddenly improved?***

Let me point out here that the intent of my question was misconstrued, possibly because of my choice of wording. Almost everyone answering the question seemed to interpret it as me asking whether there was any delay after adopting the dog before any progress at all began. But this misunderstanding ended up providing us with some excellent information that is also of enormous value when counseling adopters. Here are some selected answers:

- It was almost a full year before I noticed a change in her. And it happened almost overnight. That is when she became happy to see me and gave me kisses.
- After four full years of being with me, last spring, Roscoe walked down the ramp off the deck and into the yard. He walked the fence line, sniffing the air, letting his feet touch the grass. It was a day I will never, ever forget. I stood inside and watched him and was indescribably moved — what huge progress!
- I would say the day she finally gave us true eye contact was a big deal. It took about two years.
- Being outgoing and greeting people on walks. Change occurred after about two years.

- She was so afraid of my husband for three and a half years. It seemed to happen overnight. One day she wouldn't go near him, the next day she was in his lap giving him kisses.
- She was fearful of being touched at all.... It was probably at least a year before she would let me pick her up without cornering her. It took four years before she would willingly let my husband touch her. It was five to six years before she would willingly sit next to me on the couch without being held there. We have had her for eight years now, and just within the last six months, she has actually half-crawled into my lap.

## Evaluating quality of life, happiness, emotional well-being, enjoyment of life

When we care for animals, our foremost concern is how they view their own lives. There are several related psychological concepts that reflect this view, the main ones being quality of life, happiness, emotional well-being, and enjoyment of life. Without question, our most important obligation to rescued puppy mill dogs is to try to maximize all of these happiness-related concepts. Unfortunately, we have not yet developed scientific tools to measure these concepts accurately in animals (the same problems of measurement exist for human infants), so we currently rely on the judgments of the people who know the animal best. With this question I wanted to learn as much as possible about how each puppy mill dog was viewing his or her own life — both at the time of joining the household and now, approximately two years later. Here is how I posed the question:

***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. Rate each for when the dog first arrived in the household (after brief adjustment period) and now.**

Graph 22 shows the breakdown for all four factors when the dog arrived in the adoptive home. In the graph, I have used these abbreviations:

- QOL** = Quality of life
- H** = Happiness
- EWB** = Emotional well-being
- EOL** = Enjoyment of life

The rows labeled “then” mean “when first adopted.” On the right side of the graph is the choice of scores, 0 through 10, with the lowest scores toward the front of the graph and the highest scores toward the back.

We can see that for all of the evaluated factors, the dogs scored overwhelmingly in the 0-3 region — the lowest scores possible.

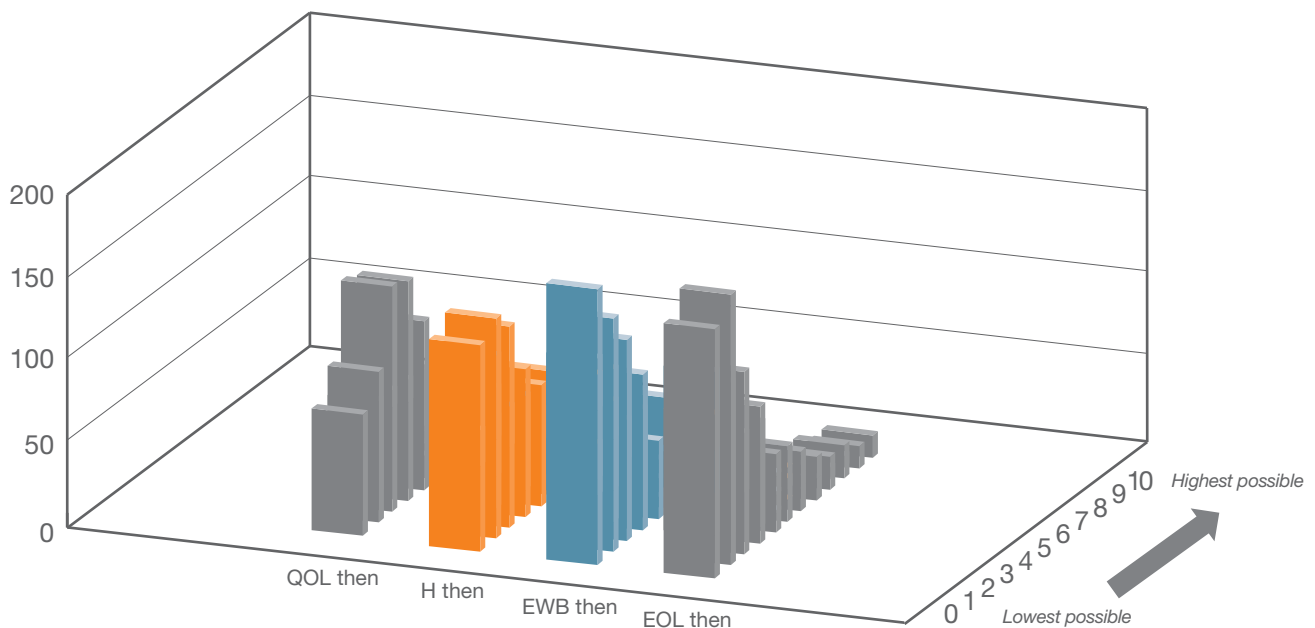
Graph 23 shows what the scores were for the dogs after they had been in their homes for an average of two years.

Look at what happened: There has been a massive shift of scores for all four happiness-related factors from the lowest values to the highest. The dogs now fall overwhelmingly into the 8-10 region — the highest scores possible.

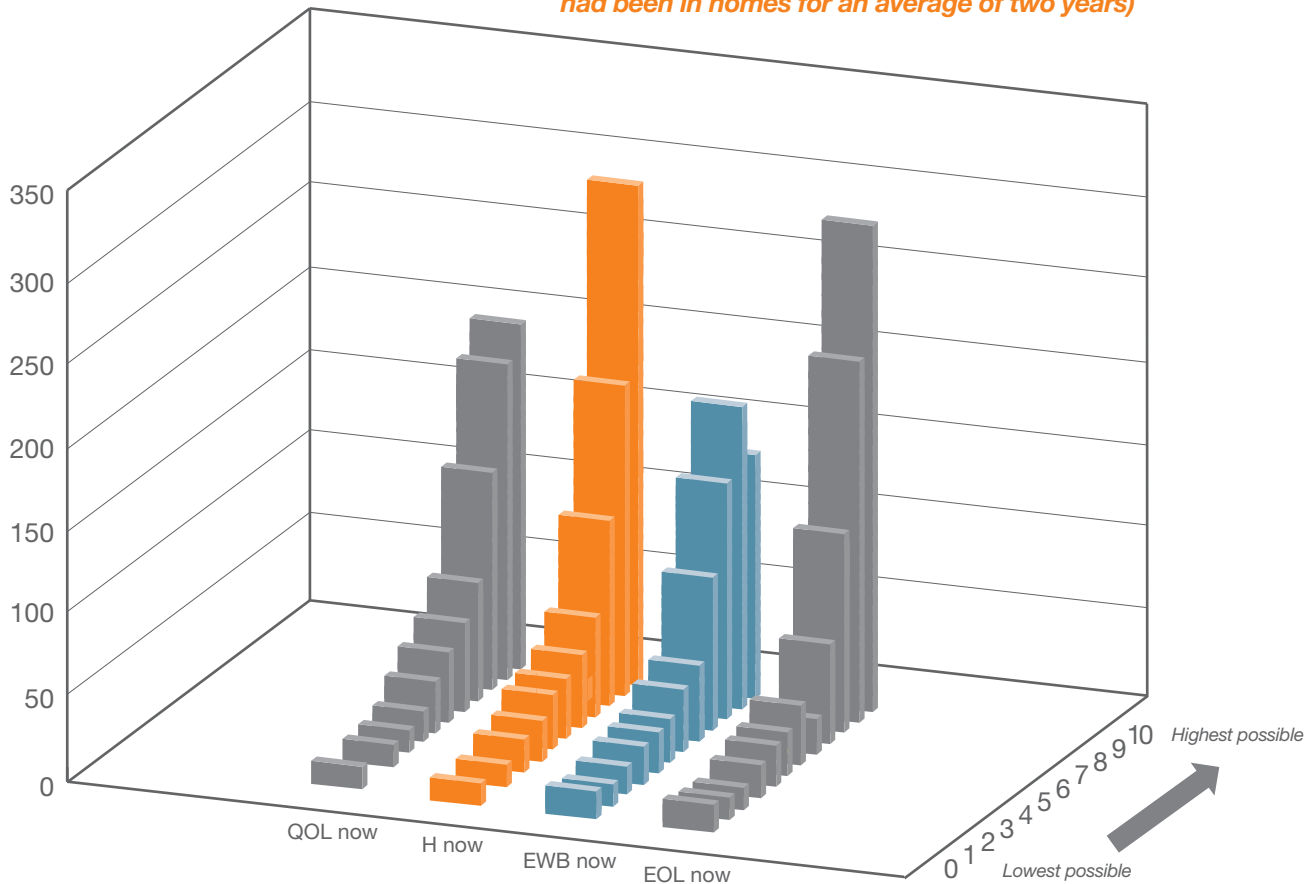
This is incredible news because it shows that the outcomes for rescued puppy mill dogs as a group are incredibly positive. It doesn't mean the dogs have overcome all of their problems (something we know clearly from the other questions in our studies), but it does mean that despite these challenges, they have managed to adapt and live enjoyable lives.

Take a moment to think back to an issue I raised earlier. Recall the argument from the puppy mill defenders that the psychological harm these dogs experience is because we are removing them from the only home they've known and putting them in an alien, and scary, environment. The implication is that the dogs would be better off if left where they are. It can be seen quite clearly in the above graphs how empty this argument is. To believe that the dogs would be better off if they remained in the puppy mills would require that dogs left in puppy mills would have scores at least equal

**Graph 22: Quality of life, happiness, emotional well-being, enjoyment of life (after dogs' arrival in adoptive homes)**



**Graph 23: Quality of life, happiness, emotional well-being, enjoyment of life (after the dogs had been in homes for an average of two years)**



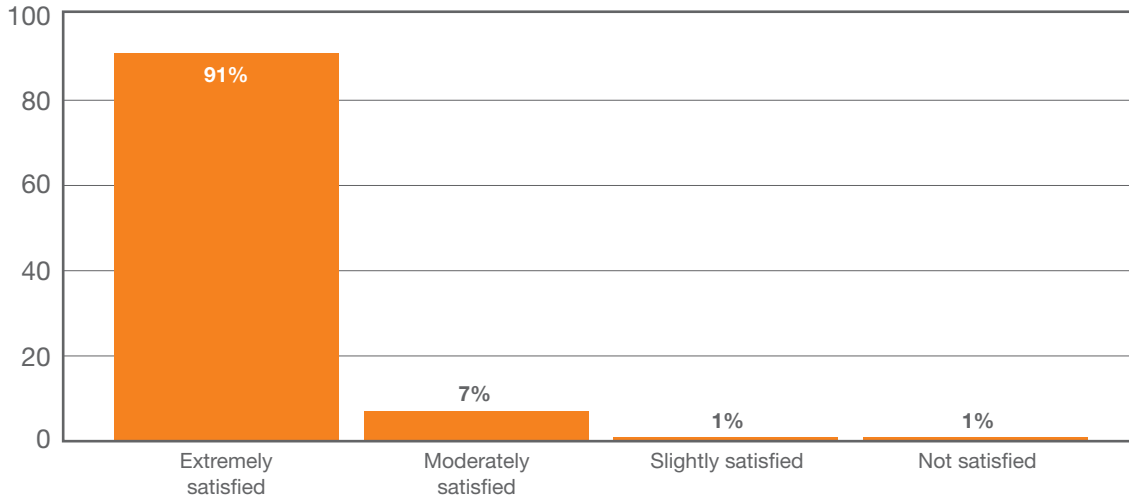
to the dogs who left the mills — equal scores in happiness, quality of life, emotional well-being and enjoyment of life. In other words, arguing that the dogs shouldn't be removed from the mills would mean that the second graph above would be the scores that dogs still in the mills would receive. To say that this is absurd is an extreme understatement.

In spite of these overwhelmingly positive findings about how the puppy mill dogs as a group gain a tremendous increase in their happiness and enjoyment of life, however, we still need massive improvements in helping these dogs. For when you look at this graph, those little boxes in the front of the graph represent those dogs scoring 0, 1, 2 for their happiness, quality of life, emotional well-being and enjoyment of life — after two years with adoptive families who are doing everything possible to help them. These are the dogs who

continue to struggle, who have extreme problems escaping the psychological harm they've suffered. As we saw in an earlier question, however, many dogs still improve after two years, so these dogs are not without hope for recovery.

## Part 4: Adopters' experience

Graph 24: Level of satisfaction among adopters

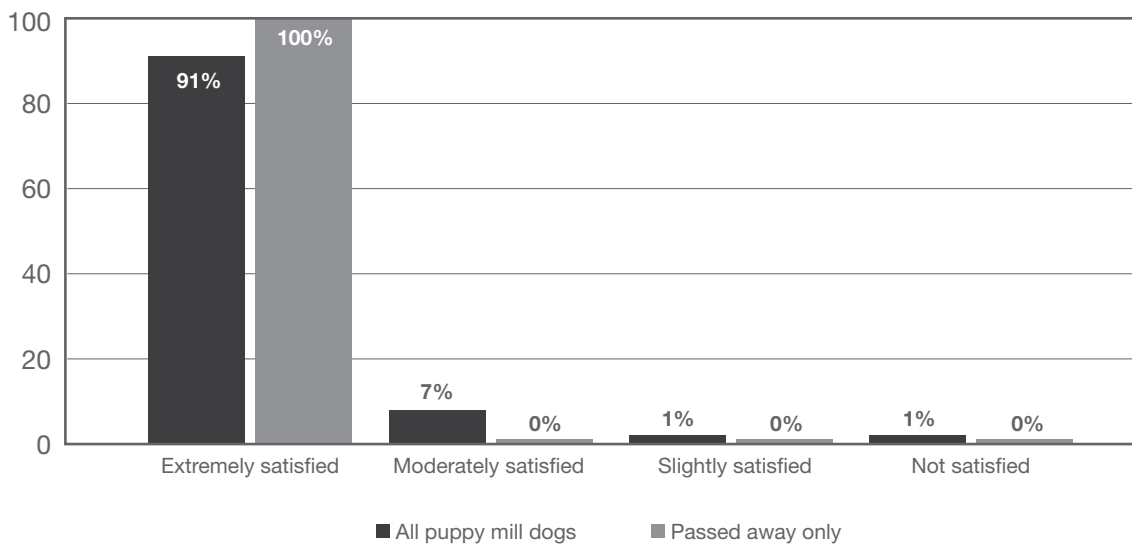


No issue carries more weight in our understanding of the adoption success of rescued puppy mill dogs than the level of satisfaction that the adopters report about their experience. No information is more important to be able to convey to prospective adopters of puppy mill dogs. The next few questions were designed to elicit this critical information. First, I asked this:

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

As you can see, the results (Graph 24) are simply astounding. I then broke the question down into two categories: (1) all puppy mill dogs in the study and (2) only those puppy mill dogs who had passed away. The results are shown in Graph 25.

Graph 25: Level of satisfaction (all puppy mill dogs vs. those passed away)



The size of the group of puppy mill dogs who had passed away was much smaller, just 23 dogs, but what is abundantly clear is that the astronomically high satisfaction level for all of the adopters was even higher among the adopters who had lost their dog companions. I believe this can be attributed at least partially to the fact that we often hold positive memories more strongly in our recollections about, as well as our feelings toward, those loved ones. But although this biased influence on our memories would skew the results even more toward reporting greater satisfaction on this question, this would just mean more good news for how strongly adopters feel about their experience of having adopted their puppy mill dog.

And keep in mind that these reports of satisfaction are in spite of all the challenges the dog has presented to the adopters. What this means is that when we see any discouraging numbers for the various behavioral issues (such as two-thirds of the dogs not being fully house-trained two years after adoption), those results are all trumped by the satisfaction level because this is the adopters' satisfaction with all those problems counted in.

Think about how important this information is for rescued puppy mill dogs. When we can tell prospective adopters that in a survey of nearly 800 people who had adopted puppy mill dogs, 91% rated their adoption experience as "extremely satisfied," the chances for puppy mill dogs to be adopted are greatly enhanced.

An important additional comment is needed here about this astoundingly high satisfaction level of the adopters of these dogs. I knew from talking with many adopters that the satisfaction levels would come back high, but these results are even higher than I had anticipated. I was a little worried that some people would see this and say, "Wow! I've got to get myself one of those dogs." What's important to keep in mind here, however, is that the adopters answering this questionnaire were overwhelmingly people who have the heart and mind to take on special-needs dogs and help them work through their problems. These are special people adopting special dogs. Just like adopting a special-needs child, adopting a puppy mill dog is not something just anyone can, or should, do. We are seeing the satisfaction levels of people ready and willing to adopt a little animal

who has had a hard life and will need lots of extra attention and work.

## Most rewarding parts of adopters' experiences

The obvious follow-up to the question about level of satisfaction was to inquire about the reasons for the adopters' satisfaction. Below is the question and some sample responses.

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

- She brings us happiness every day. Her personality is so unique that if she is not around, we miss her (if we are on vacation). Our family would not be the same without our adorable Pookie!! We love her so much!!!
- I wasn't looking for an abused or problem animal to adopt and was concerned at the beginning about how she would settle down, but it has been an amazing transformation and rewarding experience.
- If I had known before bringing her home how emotionally damaged she was, I may not have adopted her. I was looking for a cuddle partner. She has been a labor of love and has added so much to my life. I can't imagine a time when she will not be here; my heart breaks just thinking about it.
- Watching his progress has been awe-inspiring. When I think of the condition he was in when he came to me, physically and emotionally, I cannot believe his resilience, his willingness to trust and love. He looks at me like I'm the most incredible creature in the world, but he is.
- He is such a sweet little guy, and despite the \$3,200 for surgery, I would not trade him for the world!
- Seeing the love in her eyes, how she walks with her head up and her tail up. When we first got her, her tail was scraggly and between her legs. Now when she walks on her leash, she walks like a show dog in the ring. Seeing the shivering, peeing, frightened, scruffy little creature come to life and beauty — I tear up every time I think about it.
- He has impacted my special-needs daughter. They bonded instantly. He seemed to understand



her issues and disabilities. He is now her psychiatric service dog.

- The most rewarding experience was seeing Rocky start to trust me. The first day he actually came to me for attention, I cried. He was so frightened of me at first; I had never seen a dog be so scared of people before. I really feel like I have made a big difference in his life, and that is the best feeling in the world.
- Seeing her transformation from a frightened, cowering animal to a smiling little friend that she has become today. Experiencing the transformative power of love and observing the almost magical ability of these formerly abused animals to somehow find the forgiveness to give another human being a chance to be trusted and loved. She's not perfect, but then, neither am I!
- Truthfully in the first six to eight months there were times I was disappointed in the adoption of Callie, mainly because I was afraid that she would always be dependent only on me, and that was not what I wanted; it seemed overwhelming to be her "the one." BUT ... she has been such a rewarding being to have in our home. She has taught us patience and strength. I can't imagine my life without her and am 100% thrilled we decided to adopt her!!!!
- Watching him grow and become "a dog" has been one of the best parts of my life. I truly admire what he has become. Don't tell my other dogs, but he is my favorite.

It's hard to not be deeply moved by these stories. And this is only a tiny fraction of the comments this question elicited.

## Least rewarding parts of adopters' experiences

It's also important to learn all we can about the converse of the previous question, so here's the question I asked next, along with some sample responses.

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

- Absolutely nothing.
- It's all been good.

- Knowing how much damage the mill did to him mentally that can never be fixed.
- Only that we cannot rescue a hundred more.

This question was the one that elicited most of the less-positive responses:

- Nothing has really helped her. She is just too damaged.
- She refused to respond to anything I tried.
- Not much of anything [was rewarding]. She was one of the toughest nuts to crack as far as helping her be somewhat normal and enjoy life. Unsuccessful in my book, so not rewarding at all.
- I don't feel Beanie will ever adjust to humans, me included. She will always be afraid. I've done everything I can think of, but she still covers when approached. I just try to make her life a little easier and happy.
- He will never be fully integrated into our lives.
- I am happy that Maxine had a safe, warm, comfortable, quiet home to retire to until her time comes, but she is no joy to me.
- We had to surrender the dog because of biting.
- I feel good that she has a better life, but I don't know that I would do this again.
- I have had so little success with Brandi that I regret adopting her.

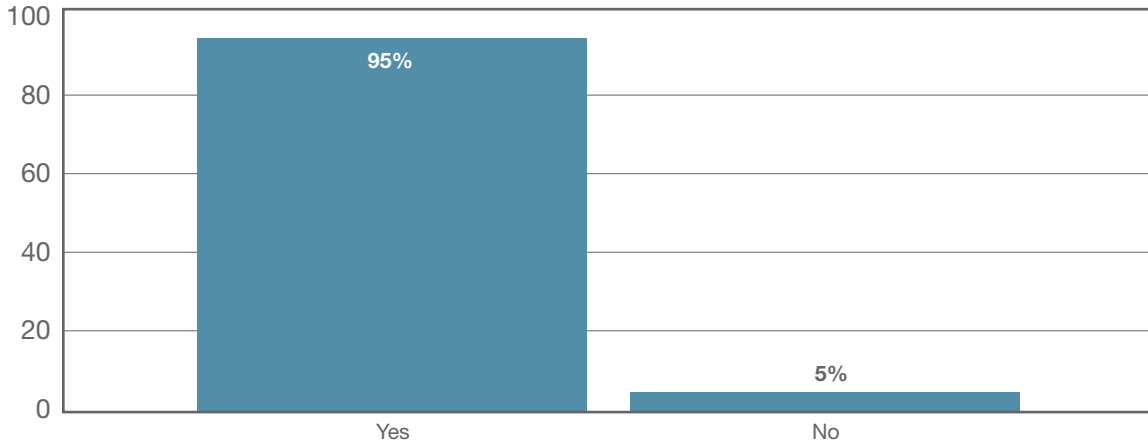
I include these comments to show the reality of rescued puppy mill dogs. However, do not let these negative comments discourage you or detract from the larger picture, which is immensely uplifting. The positive responses vastly outnumber the negative comments. We will now return to those gratifying results in the responses to the next question.

## Adopting another puppy mill dog

As another way to look at the adoption experience through the adopter's eyes, I asked the following question:

### ***Assuming your circumstances could accommodate it, would you adopt another puppy mill dog?***

**Graph 26: Whether adopters would adopt another puppy mill dog**

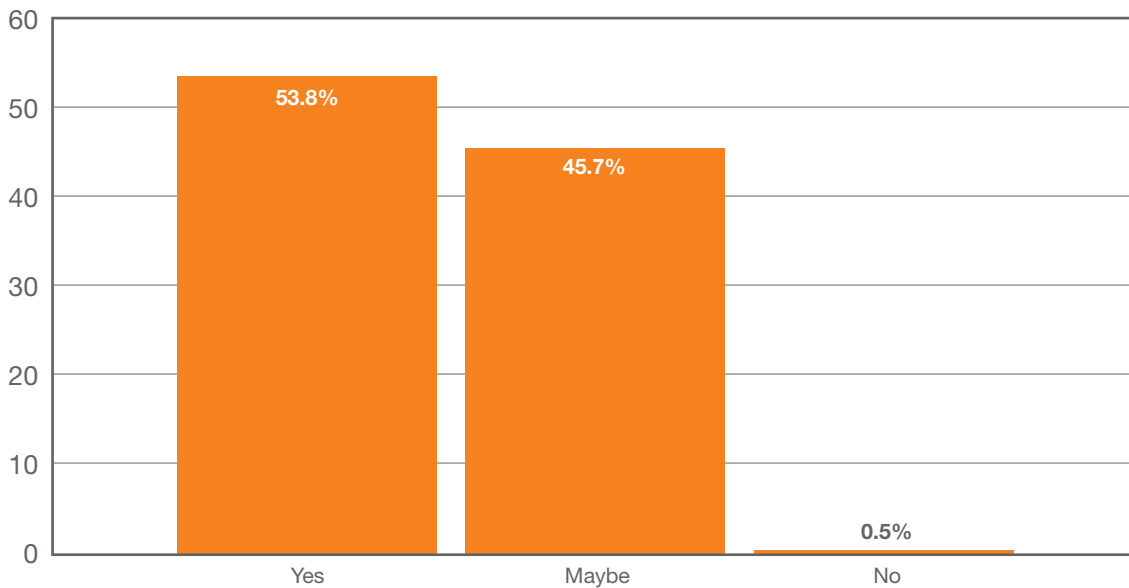


Graph 26 shows the results. The extremely high percentage of “yes” responses trumps all of the questions showing that puppy mill dogs present difficult challenges to the adoptive families. In essence, what I was asking was this: “Considering all of the challenges, difficulties and frustrations you have encountered in your experience with this dog, would you do it all again?” As with the numbers for level of satisfaction, it is enormously valuable to be able to tell prospective adopters who might have hesitations that 95% of adopters would adopt another puppy mill dog.

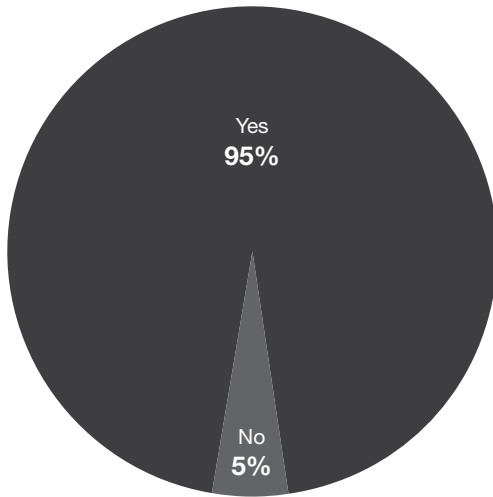
### Recommending that others adopt a puppy mill dog

One more way I wanted to see how adopters perceived their adoption experience was to ask whether, based on what they had experienced, they would recommend this venture to someone else. This is different than asking them if they themselves would do it again, since they have seen what happens firsthand and they know their own skills as well as limitations in working through any problems.

**Graph 27: Whether adopters would recommend adoption of a puppy mill dog**



**Graph 28: Whether adopters of puppy mill dogs need special qualifications**



Here's the question I asked:

***Would you recommend to another person to adopt a puppy mill dog?***

Graph 27 shows the incredible results. Of 775 adopters of puppy mill dogs, only one half of 1%, or just 1 in every 200 adopters, said they would not recommend this experience to someone else. This is one more very valuable piece of information to share with prospective adopters to help them

decide whether or not to have one of these special dogs join their family.

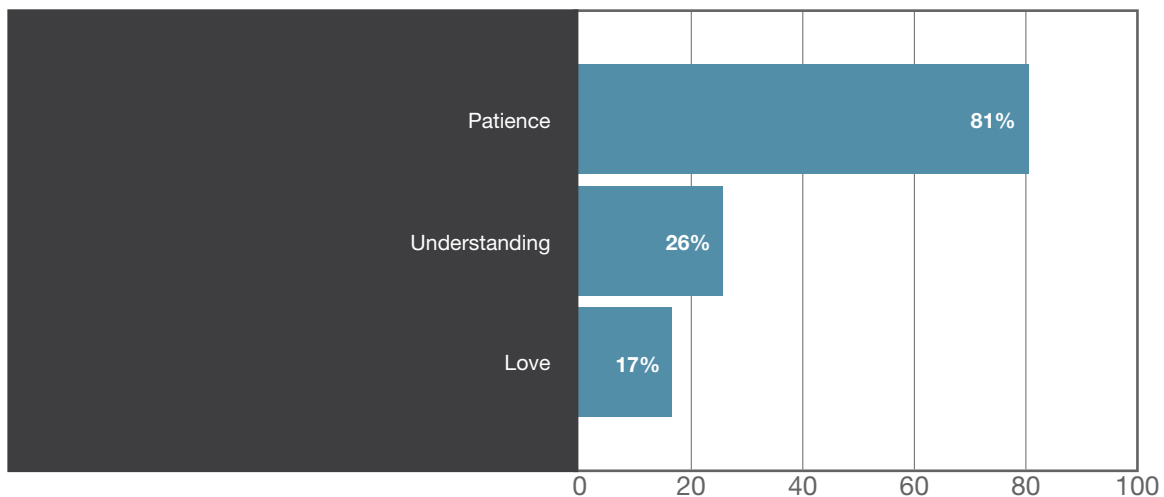
I included the “maybe” choice because I knew that there would be — and in fact should be — some reservations in simply responding “yes” to this question. And therefore I wrote this follow-up question:

***If your answer was Yes or Maybe, would the person to whom you would potentially recommend adopting a puppy mill dog need to have any special qualities, skills or qualifications?***

At first glance, one might be tempted to respond to the results (Graph 28) with “No surprises here.” But there actually is a surprise, which is that 5% of adopters felt that people who adopt puppy mill dogs need no special skills — in essence, saying that anyone can adopt a puppy mill dog. I have to believe that these adopters were those whose puppy mill dog never showed the slightest problem from day one.

For those who answered yes, I next asked them what these needed qualities, skills or qualifications would be. In Graph 29 are the top three answers from 626 adopters and the percentage of adopters who included them. Regarding this graph, we can truthfully say, “No surprises here.”

**Graph 29: Needed qualities, skills or qualifications for adopters of puppy mill dogs**



## Part 5: Advice for adopters

As we saw, the methods for treatment and rehabilitation of puppy mill dogs vary quite dramatically from one dog to another. A method that works for one dog may do nothing for another dog, and may even harm a third dog.

How can we know which methods will work best for each dog and especially which methods won't harm a particular dog? We can't. At least we can't know before we start. The key is to begin our efforts at rehabilitating knowing which methods have a good track record of helping puppy mill dogs and which methods often help but may have negative effects.

Earlier I presented a graph that color-coded the individual rehabilitation methods according to likelihood of outcomes. Orange indicated those methods that are positive for all dogs (recognizing that there are always rare exceptions to every rule) and blue indicated methods that are effective in helping some dogs but may impair or set back recovery in other dogs.

The way to use this information is for anyone involved in the rehabilitation of puppy mill dogs to start with the methods at the top of the list and then work down the list, adding those methods that are most feasible for their own individual situations. For example, hiring a behaviorist may be within the financial means of some adopters but not others, and even taking walks may be more applicable in some situations than others.

If a method doesn't appear to be working, that doesn't mean it should be discontinued. Because we know that progress for puppy mill dogs may take months and even years, a method that may seem to be ineffective may in fact be helping — and just need more time before noticeable improvement is observed. But for all of the blue-coded methods, the adopter should discontinue using a method immediately if it appears that the method is causing any problems for the dog. Below are the color-coded rehabilitation methods on the graph converted into text that can be given to puppy mill dog adopters.

### How to help your dog heal

The following is a list of rehabilitation methods for dogs rescued from puppy mills. All these methods have been reported to be highly effective in helping puppy mill dogs overcome their emotional challenges. The methods that have positive effects in virtually all puppy mill dogs are colored orange. Some of the methods found helpful in some dogs have been reported to cause distress and even recovery setbacks in other dogs. These are colored blue.

All of the methods are safe to try, but the important rule is that for any of the blue methods, if you notice any negative effects in your dog's progress, then stop using that method immediately. Be aware that seeing no recognizable effect does not mean a method is not working, as improvements in puppy mill dogs can take a long time.

1. **Patience, time, not pushing, allow the dog to go at his/her own pace**
2. **Being with other well-adjusted dog(s)**
3. **Love, affection, TLC**
4. **Speak softly, be calm, move slowly**
5. **Petting, touching, holding**
6. **Regular routine, consistency, repetition**
7. **Socializing with other people and dogs**
8. **Training, obedience, using a behaviorist**
9. **Giving attention to and spending time with the dog**
10. **Praise, reassurance and positive reinforcement**
11. **Acceptance and understanding**
12. **Walks**
13. **Treats**
14. **Allowing the dog to sleep with you**
15. **Providing a safe haven, safe place for the dog**
16. **Pushing the dog beyond his/her comfort zone**
17. **Treating him/her like a normal dog, no babying or pity**
18. **Setting boundaries**

## What to know up front

- Progress can be fast, slow or very, very slow.
- There may be backsliding during the slow improvement.
- For individual issues and for the dog as a whole, there are often limits to the degree of improvement that fall short of normal. House-training is example number one.
- Fear is the overriding psychological state of most rescued puppy mill dogs. The fear may be to specific things or generalized, as if life itself is a threat.
- Bonding to one or two persons is very common.
- Puppy mill dogs are often unhappy about being touched, picked up and held.
- Puppy mill dogs often avoid direct eye contact. Do not interpret this as your dog disliking or rejecting you.

## The 10 cardinal rules for adopting a puppy mill survivor

1. Have no expectations or timetable for change.
2. Use PATIENCE, PATIENCE, PATIENCE and more PATIENCE. And then be REALLY PATIENT.
3. Puppy mill survivors have an absolute requirement for UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE. If you are not prepared or able to provide this, do not adopt one of these special dogs.
4. Being with, being comforted by and learning from other dogs is the single best way to emotionally heal for all but a few puppy mill survivors.
5. Tiny improvements are monumental conquests. The smallest baby step is cause for joyous (but calm and quiet!) celebration.
6. Never punish, scold, discipline or raise your voice with your puppy mill survivor.
7. Two clichés do not apply to puppy mill survivors: “Time heals all wounds” and “Love conquers all.” However, time and love remain essential parts of the healing process.
8. Emotional healing is an up-and-down journey on the way up. Two steps forward and one step back is a normal part of emotional recovery for

puppy mill dogs. Expect to see the one step back many times and even occasionally two or even three steps back. This is all normal.

9. Never forget that no matter what your puppy mill survivor does, he still needs you to keep trying to help him heal.
10. Remember, you are doing something that only a few special people are capable of and can be entrusted with. No matter what happens, it's all but assured that you will gain a sense of satisfaction and reward that you have never known before.

## FAQs for which we do not yet have the answers

- Why do some dogs come out of puppy mills acting like happy, loveable, normal dogs, while others come out with severe, debilitating psychological scars?
- Is the degree of psychological harm in puppy mill dogs related to the length of time the dog spends in the puppy mill?
- Is the degree of psychological harm worse in dogs from the puppy mills with the poorest physical conditions?
- Why do more than eight times as many puppy mill dogs fear male humans as compared to female humans?
- Why do some puppy mill dogs develop a hyper-dependency on their human companions, wanting to be by their human's side constantly?
- Why do some dogs respond well to rehabilitation efforts and others do not?
- Why are dogs so different in their responses to individual rehabilitation methods?
- How do we strike the necessary balance between conflicting rehabilitation methods, such as not pushing the dogs but still encouraging them out of their comfort zone in order to overcome their fear of something?
- Is it possible for a commercial (profit-centered) breeding operation to function without harming dogs?



## Part 6: Comments from adopters

To finish, I am going to include many of the comments from the questions asking about how satisfied the adopters are with their adoption and what has been the most rewarding aspect of their adoption experience. I've included so many (and yet only a small fraction of the comments we received) because they all say something important and just plain warm your heart to read. Feel free to read as few or as many as you would like, although I suspect that there will be few people who choose not to read them all.

1. We love her and accept her for who she is and know when the bad wiring days happen, it is just part of her terrible past coming back to [remind her of] the terrible treatment she had before we got her.
2. Punkin is a sweetheart. She may not be "people friendly," but she is loved. She is cute, and I believe that she knows that no one will ever hurt her again.
3. Nellie has brought so much laughter and joy just having her in our home. She truly exemplifies what having a dog should mean to everyone.
4. We had fostered him and ended up adopting him without any expectation that he would end up normal; his differences have been entertaining.
5. She is the sweetest, most loving dog I have ever adopted. When you look in her eyes, you just see sweetness. I wish I could explain this more clearly.
6. Nothing has been more satisfying than to see how far she has come since I first got her. She will always be a mill dog, but she is happy.
7. Probably one of the most gratifying things my husband or I have ever done in our lives.
8. It has been much tougher than I imagined. Before making the decision to adopt a puppy mill dog, I did a lot of reading and research, and thought I had a decent idea of what to expect. Nothing could prepare me for the fear I saw in those little brown eyes.
9. She has changed our lives for the better. I named her Daisy because watching her blossom into a happy dog was like watching a flower unfold its petals. It was so fulfilling to nurture her through all of her trials and tribulations and watch her become the loving, happy dog that she is.
10. Even with the hurdles she has yet to overcome, we wouldn't trade her for anything.
11. Perry's happiness level is amazing to me. He endured a lot of physical abuse and neglect at two puppy mills, and yet he still loves humans. He can teach us all a lesson about forgiveness of past events and living for the moment.

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

- How many pages am I allowed? :) This has been the BEST experience of my life! Watching her slowly adapt to life and become a normal, happy, thriving dog. Watching her learning to trust me and my family and friends, just watching her at the park sniffing and socializing with other dogs. Going for car rides and looking out the window as opposed to cowering on the floor boards. She now INSISTS on cookies and no longer cowers in the corner under a table.
- This question is making me cry .... Very easy to answer .... Pookie's happiness! Simply put, she shows me how much she appreciates me absolutely every day of our lives. She is so very loving. She pushes her cheek against my cheek, and I just hold onto her head and enjoy every minute of it!

12. Didn't have a clue about puppy mills and their lasting effects on these poor dogs. Wouldn't trade him for a million bucks now.
13. She was so shy and scared I thought we might never bond — I am so happy that neither one of us gave up. She is a blessing!
14. This is the most rewarding thing my husband and I have ever done. It has been remarkable watching her become a dog. Almost daily we want to just pick her up and hug and kiss her. We restrain ourselves because it would scare her, but we do pet her and sit next to her when we feel she will be receptive. We can't imagine not having her.
15. Never knew how much adopting a puppy mill dog would enrich our lives.
16. To watch an innocent, abused dog blossom into their own being is just one of the greatest feelings.
17. The most worthwhile experience of my life.
18. Never thought I could love a dog this much.
19. We love PeeJay dearly and would never give her up; however, her issues are definitely a challenge.
20. He has been a real challenge, but I love him and am happy to have given him a second chance for love and happiness. He is a beautiful little creature of God.
21. She is my heart.
22. Snickers has been in our foster care since her release from the mill. She is not adoptable and will stay with us as a forever foster. I love her with all my heart, and I understand her.
23. I think it's one of the most gratifying experiences of my life. I can see that I provided safety and love for this poor dog who didn't know what those words meant. My promise to her was that no one would ever hurt or neglect her again.
24. We believe that this precious boy rescued us as much as we rescued him.
25. I love her. She is unique. I am so glad that I could help her and show her life can be good for her. I was able to give love — something that she didn't have a clue about. It makes me feel good to know that I was able to adopt her and give tons of love.
26. We love her, and she is our little princess. I often remind my husband he didn't especially want a second dog, and he now has his "dog of a lifetime." We'd never give her up.
27. I love her with ALL my heart. She is special, and I feel extremely blessed to have her share a part of my life with me!
28. I would really like to have a more normal-acting dog, but knowing what she has gone through, I can understand her reaction to humans. It has been wonderful to see any little step she has made to act like a normal dog. To play with the other dogs, play with toys, roll around on her back in her safe chair, follow me around the house. Her improvements are slow, but I'm happy to see them.
29. Having Sparkie in my life is the single most rewarding thing I have ever experienced.
30. I enjoy rescuing puppy mill dogs and love working with them, helping them adjust to real life. The rewards of each little improvement, whether it's a wag of the tail or accepting a treat from my hand or going for a walk with me when I never thought that was possible, warms my heart and gives me pride in my work. A dog's (or any animal's, for that matter) willingness to trust another human again after what he/she has gone through constantly amazes me.
31. My other Chihuahua (Sophie) was about 12 months old when I decided she needed a companion. Sophie is very controlling and demanding — a classic alpha Chihuahua. I thought that I needed a more submissive, calm Chihuahua to complement Sophie's personality. When I first saw Tabitha (at an adoption drive, about one week after she had been rescued from three years in a puppy mill), she was extremely submissive (actually, she was scared and withdrawn and cringing and shaking). I would NEVER have selected such a (seemingly) damaged animal, but of all the other dogs there, Tabitha was the only dog Sophie didn't try to attack. I brought Tabitha home a few days later, and Sophie was completely unthreatened by her. Had it not been for Sophie's "issues," I would never have chosen Tabitha, but I am so fortunate that I did. What I thought was going to be a sad, pathetic dog turned into a goofy, happy,

- funny, extremely joyful and energetic little thing, and I'm absolutely in love with her.
32. Squiggy is the most precious Bichon in my house, and it brings tears to my eyes to look at him and think of all the torture he went through in the mill.
  33. The joy of watching these dogs turn the corner, so to speak, when they accept affection and start to play with toys is hard to explain.
  34. Tootsie is truly my hero. She is just an amazing girl and has come so far; I consider it an honor to share my life with her.
  35. I love Winnie. I cannot imagine my life without her. And it is because of Winnie that I am now heavily involved in the fight against puppy mills in the state of Indiana.
  36. Truman has been my work in progress. Adopting him has been one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. Watching and helping him grow and blossom has been an absolute joy. He is truly the love of my life!
  37. It has been a total joy to see the improvements that Zelda has made over the last year. She still has a ways to go, but she is a very sweet dog, and she is well worth every minute of time, patience and love we give her.
  38. She has taught me so much, and I'm a better person for having her in my life.
  39. Adopting a puppy mill dog is amazing; their unconditional love is amazing. They know you saved them; they are so thankful for you taking them home with you. It is an experience I will always remember and treasure and will do again someday.
  40. She is just such a precious addition to our life. She has given us so much more in love, affection, laughter and companionship than we could ever give to her.
  41. A very difficult process and not for the faint of heart. A long, difficult journey, but the rewards are great at the end.
  42. While she is a challenge, and it saddens us that she had a terrible start to life, we would not trade her for anything. She is an amazing creature, and we spend every day showing her how much we love her.
  43. Nutmeg is a once-in-a-lifetime dog. She couldn't be more perfect.
  44. I am satisfied that I saved a dog from a terrible life. We love our Peaches to pieces.
  45. I would never have imagined in my dreams of putting up with the problem of potty training over the last six years, with both my Maltese from same puppy mill. But I have never loved a dog like this.
  46. While we were unsure how to best help Mocha in the beginning, we never once regretted adopting her. We love her immensely and can't imagine life without her.
  47. She has blessed my life and all those she touches through her work as a therapy dog.
  48. Nacho was a very, very unsocialized dog when he arrived, not aggressive, just no ability whatsoever to trust people. Now, his full personality has come out, and it is a good personality. We, Nacho and our family, have benefitted greatly from his rescue.
  49. On top of being a puppy mill dog, Moose has arthritis (gets acupuncture), hypothyroidism (on pills, regular blood tests), and early dilated cardiomyopathy (pills, regular tests). He is one of the best decisions I ever made. I would not trade him for all the money in the world.
  50. She is like my child. I love her, and I shudder to think of what it would be like without her.
  51. She has come so far in four years. She will never be normal, but that's OK. She is loving and carefree in her own way. She's our first rescue, and I did not understand the mill momma mentality. I thought love would cure her but now know the level of cruelty she survived for her first five years in the mill.
  52. I love this dog!!
  53. I've always loved my animals very much, but this little guy has enriched my life so much, just from a day-to-day existence with him! He is amazing!
  54. Since I brought Marco into our household, I've concentrated all my rescue efforts on special needs puppy mill dogs. He and his cage partner Lexie are the reason I do puppy mill rescue.
  55. We love her — we had NO IDEA what we

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

- Seeing how she “looked after” and protected our baby after he was born when the rescue organization said she wouldn’t do well with small children.
- Watching her go from a dog that was terrorized of humans to one who now plays, loves for me to cuddle her and pet her and runs around like she is the happiest little girl in the world.
- Taking a dog that was afraid of everything, that was deathly sick, and watching her change into a happy, healthy dog full of life. She shows us every day how much she appreciates the second chance she was given.
- Seeing him do the Cocker wiggle for the first time. When his bum started to go, I cried. A Cocker Spaniel is not a Cocker Spaniel without the Cocker wiggle.
- Watching her blossom into the dog she should have been all along. If you ever doubted that dogs have a complex emotional makeup, then work with a puppy mill survivor. They are not much different than humans as far as the issues they have to overcome when they have suffered abuse.
- I could pick him up and hold him, and he got satisfaction from being touched. That was a long time coming.
- Having him snuggle with me when he is sleepy and forgets to be afraid.
- She finally started giving kisses after about four years!! I knew then she trusted us and loves us!
- For me, the first time that Phoebe actively sought affection from me .... Although she readily did this with my husband after about six months, it took another three years to happen with me.
- Seeing the emotional changes with her. I give her so much credit for choosing to trust people again after what she went through the first six years of her life. She has learned to be a dog again, to play, to love, to trust. That transformation has been amazing to watch.
- Seeing her dance in circles and howl because she knows we’re going for a walk or a ride in the car. And the kisses and cuddles she gives me every morning — I think she is excited about what each day will offer.

were getting into — but it has been a wonderful, challenging experience.

56. He’s neurotic and needy, but he’s wonderful. He’s great with our other dog; he’s great with our cats; he’s very bonded with us. I can’t imagine life without him, pee and all.
57. She is a joy. I couldn’t ask for a better dog, and she is now well adjusted with a few quirks. I totally accept them.
58. I will never regret keeping Kylie. She passed away peacefully in her sleep on her fluffy, warm bed far from the abuse she encountered during the first part of her life.

59. Kona is the best thing that has ever happened to us. She has taught us so much and is loving and forgiving. So much that we just adopted another puppy mill dog.

60. Kailee suffered from diabetes that turned out to be not controllable. She also had severe luxating patella. Our veterinarian recommended that Kailee be euthanized, and she was put to sleep two months ago. I answered the questions as best I could, giving answers pertaining to when she was with us. It is still so sad; she was 8 years old and spent her whole life as a breeder in a puppy mill. She was only released to a rescue group

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

- Seeing her run in the back yard. She puts her ears back and RUNS like the wind. It makes my heart melt to know she can run, play, eat, drink water and sleep whenever she wants.
- Watching her blossom. She couldn't even walk upstairs due to muscle atrophy when we got her. She made no noise. Hid in corners. Now, when I come home, she is looking out the upstairs window and runs down the steps making a yodeling noise.
- To see Marnie blossom before our eyes from a very sad, emotionally hurt little dog to an extremely happy, healthy, loving dog who demonstrates every single day that she appreciates her life with us.

when she got too sick to be of use. She loved and touched everyone she met in her short life outside of the mill.

61. I would not trade my Honey Bear for any other dog on the planet!!!!!! She is unique, and I love her unconditionally.
62. We were her foster parents and got her straight from the mill (Amish dog auction). We adopted her because we knew she'd have a long adjustment period and felt that her chances of adoption were slim. She is a wonderful dog, and we've never had any regrets. Sure, she's different from other dogs, but that's what makes her special.
63. She was old and un-housetrainable, and I felt no one would want her. I did not like her when I first fostered her. But I grew to love her and was so happy I could give her a good life for her remaining years.
64. I am so happy that we could show Dawson that not all people are bad and that we are able to give her a great life now. She has brought me an awareness of puppy mill dogs and the cruel life they live.
65. She is the best little girl now, and the amazement at every small step she has made has been life changing for me.
66. We had no experience with mill dogs prior to adopting Dottie. But watching her transformation over the years (gaining trust) and seeing the fear disappear from her eyes has been very gratifying.
67. I have no regrets and adore my Barkley. He has such an amazing spirit and soul. I'm honored God trusted me to change his life.
68. I love Hoover with all my heart, but it has been a long, hard journey.
69. This little dog will hold a special place in my heart forever. Having had dogs all my life, Newton was my first puppy mill rescue, and I thank God every day for getting him out of that horrible life and into mine.
70. There is nothing like the feeling you get when a puppy mill dog starts to bond with you. The bond that is created is very, very special, and I will definitely adopt a puppy mill dog again. We actually brought another one into our family about five months ago.
71. It was/is a test of my ability to train and also to help the most down-trodden. He'll never be "the dog at my kid's soccer game," but at least he's no longer in hell.
72. We realized she would never be a normal dog, but we were so happy that we could give her a good home for the rest of her life and that she would know love and kindness until she died.
73. When she first came into our home, I was just going to foster her, but she was so emotionally and physically damaged that I could not let her go. Now she is such a joy; she plays constantly and has such a zest for life.
74. It was very sad to watch this little dog when she first came home. Everything was new to



her, and she didn't understand anything and didn't know what to expect. If I decide to adopt another dog, I would choose another puppy mill dog.

75. Never having had a rescue before I wondered several times if it was a mistake, but I would never have given her away. Now I can't imagine life without her.
76. She would not have been alive today. She is a sweet loving dog who doesn't ask for much

— water and food, some affection. She is quiet and sleeps often. She is a great example of the results neglect can have .... She is used to being ignored; it's obvious.

77. I believe that dogs find you, and Pudding came into my life when I needed her. We both learned to trust again together.
78. No one else would put up with his very odd behaviors. We were meant for each other.

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

- I have learned so much about the emotional side of dogs. I have joined a rescue group and another group that is fighting to end mass commercial dog breeding. I have a cause and a purpose.
- Seeing him grow and become a more normal dog as each year has passed. I am so proud of him now and only wish that he had had the chance to be a normal dog, not a puppy mill dog.
- Seeing a dog who came to our home with sad eyes that had no life in them at all and was so fearful when I put her food dish down that she would run away unless I left the room to now being the most affectionate, happy Golden Retriever with dancing eyes. People say, "What a change in her," as she is going to them for affection.
- Seeing her go from a cowering, frightened animal to being a loving, happy pet. The first time she actually tried to play with one of the other dogs, my husband and I both cried. She has come so much farther than either of us thought was possible. It is truly a miracle to us.
- That through love and patience we were able to undo some of the harm done to this innocent, beautiful dog when she was in the puppy mill. We have given her a wonderful life, and that means the world to us.
- Watching him blossom into a dog from a trembling statue.
- Seeing her zoom in the yard and come running toward me. Eyes lighting up when I come home from work. Coming when I call her. Sleeping on her side or back. Letting me massage her and rub her paws while she reclines. Allowing me to hold her for longer periods of time. Watching her turn from a waif to a princess.
- To watch her learn to respond to love when she never had it before, to have a soft bed all her own, to have a warm body to sleep next to, to have grass to walk on ... to see her little personality blossom as she realized she was free, finally free, and so very loved.
- Just seeing the little bits of progress that he is making — it's very slow in coming, but that makes it even better. When we are walking outside and he loves it so, you can tell what he's feeling. Then when we walk outside, and I praise him for doing his business, he perks right up and starts that prancing that he does — he holds his head so high and prances as if saying see how proud I am. Then you see that behavior and think of what kind of dog he really would have been if he wasn't in the circumstance that he was put in. I get angry at the people (if you want to call them people) who did this to him and to so many others just like him. It angers me tremendously.

79. We are so happy that Taffy has come so far. She is a delight to have in our home. Maybe not as affectionate as our non-puppy mill dogs, but a delight, nevertheless.
80. Tucker is my bud and would follow me anywhere, through anything. He kept “alerting” on me when I had rectal bleeding, so I went to the doctor and had a precancerous polyp removed. None of the other dogs in the household did this.
81. In the future, I will always adopt a puppy mill survivor.
82. I love her so much!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
83. I can't imagine life without Rugby. I love having the opportunity to give him a wonderful life from here on out.
84. I spent a lot of time, money and energy rehabilitating Sebastion, but it has all been worth it. When we are just relaxing at home, he is a very loving, affectionate dog. He is also extremely bonded with my other dog. They act like they've been together for their whole lives, so I believe that Sebastion has made life better for my other dog as well.
85. Sassy has had some health issues that have been difficult and costly to deal with, but I knew that was a possibility when I adopted a mill survivor. She is a member of the family, and I don't regret adopting her one bit.
86. Rescuing a mill dog has been a challenge but a very rewarding one. The trust and love we have for each other is so strong. She's my girl.
87. I am sure we have learned more from her than she has learned from us. Her behavior was more difficult to work through than we expected, but it has been a labor of love and such joy to see her happy.
88. I love her to bits even though she can be trying at times, especially when other people are around.
89. Simone is an amazing, one-of-a-kind dog. She is an absolute joy to have in my life.
90. Palmer is the joy of our life. He is just the sweetest dog you could ever imagine. He brings us endless joy and love.
91. The smallest steps forward in her sad life have fulfilled my life as her “mom,” and I see slow, deliberate change in her daily.
92. I love her very much. The issues can be hard, and it hurts when your dog shows fear of you even though you've never even raised your voice to her. But I know it has nothing to do with me.
93. Pluto's zest for life is contagious! He is happy, impish, funny and social beyond my wildest dreams. What a great addition to my life!
94. We love Noelle and would not trade this experience for anything. She convinced us to rescue only special needs dogs from now on. Our whole neighborhood knows Noelle from our walks in the front yard, so she will be missed by more than my family.
95. Mika was the sweetest and most adorable little dog I have ever had the pleasure to be owned by. She brought four years of unbeatable joy into my life, and I am still grieving over her death to cancer. She was precious to me, and I will never forget her or how much she adored her mommy!
96. Although her difficulties, especially with separation anxiety, make me nervous, and I want her to be the happiest dog possible, I cannot imagine my life without her. She is a sweetheart.
97. I love her to death and wouldn't trade her for anything. She has come a long way, and while she will never be a perfect dog and will always have her issues, she and I are very close, and I think she is, for the most part, happy and knows she is loved.
98. She might not be what a lot of people would consider perfect, but she is a great dog, and she is an inspiration, showing what a dog that was in a puppy mill for eight years can overcome and achieve.
99. I knew it would be difficult having a dog like this. But it was still a shock. However, I love him unconditionally .... It is a joy to see his little victories.
100. Most rewarding thing I've ever experienced with a dog ... seeing her change from a scared, unsure little dog to a happy, tail-wagging family member, who loves to have her tummy rubbed, eat treats and know she is special and precious.

101. We fostered Muffy for almost two years, and nobody wanted her .... She is very different from a normal Bichon and hard for people to get to know. Her state of deterioration was so bad that it is amazing to see how far she has come, even with the shortcomings she still has.
102. She is the apple of my eye, and we were made for each other.
103. I am amazed at her personality now and what she had to overcome, what she endured without whining and that it took so long to find her "heaven." She is precious and she is fun!
104. I was deeply depressed after losing my son, and Kody has been a life saver. He makes me laugh every day, and we enjoy our life together.
105. It has been a very long road, but I have learned so much from this brave little dog. Also, I've never had a dog so absolutely devoted to me. Once she learned to trust me, it was amazing seeing her blossom.
106. She was extremely insecure and frightened — I wanted to help her so very much — I am incredibly happy to have adopted and worked with her.
107. Love him!! He still has a lot of emotional problems and some physical ones, but he is a total sweetheart. Everyone loves him.
108. Jezabell is a huge blessing to our family. We

adore her, and she has especially blessed my husband, since she prefers him and is so close to him. For example, she sleeps touching his head on the pillow every night.

109. I would love to have Grendel seem to enjoy sitting on my lap, BUT she seems to enjoy her life. And since this is about her and not me, I can be happy about that. There are times when she comes outside with me, and she lies in the grass and looks around and seems to be thinking "life is good." (I know that I am humanizing her experiences.)
110. It is a joy to watch an abused animal learn to love, laugh and play and become one of the gang.
111. It has been very hard, but the rewards of having this Bernese mountain dog become much more like the BMD's that I have known, trained and shown has been rewarding. I have a wonderful companion!
112. Ginger was supposed to be my foster dog. After three months, I realized he was totally bonded to another one of my dogs and that both would suffer if they were split up. Plus, it was going to take a special person to adopt him, and I had fallen in love with him.
113. He has bonded to me as much as I have bonded to him. I'm his life, and as a result I can't imagine ever not having him in my life.
114. All of our dogs have been rescued, but we

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

- Absolutely everything. It is a pure joy to work with and love these dogs.
- Seeing Quincy blossom from a shy little ball of curly white fur into a dog with a personality and sense of humor. Seeing him romp in the yard and toss his head and feel free. Seeing him make buddies with the dogs on either side of our yard.
- Watching her come out of her shell and be the dog God created. Living day-to-day, we don't often see how far she's come until we start remembering what she was like when we first got her. To watch her run down the three stairs to the outside and just stand with her nose in the air, sniffing all the signs of spring, then to have her dash over to see me on the other side of the yard, tail held high and wagging, is huge! For many weeks after we first got her, the tail was securely tucked between her legs. We love seeing her be so brave!

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

- Seeing a dog who at times seemed beyond help become a fairly well-adjusted, active dog, considering. At times early on I wondered whether I was being cruel by keeping her alive in a world that was so absolutely terrifying to her. Now I'm so happy that we stuck with it.
- Seeing Rudy gain confidence and learn how to play, however inefficiently, lol.
- Seeing her find joy in things she never was exposed to. Hiking in the mountains, rolling in snow, frolicking.
- Totally accepting of me and all the dogs "we" foster. She is a big help with the new pups here.
- His acceptance of people and his love for cuddling. He is a happy fellow. How other people react to him in such a positive way. He is not very pretty for a Papillon, but he makes up for it in personality. The reason I adopted him is he all of a sudden at about a month of being fostered here decided to stay (he made the decision). His whole attitude changed, and he went on a total sell job for me to adopt him. When he first arrived right out of the mill, I said that this dog will be the death of me, climbing fences, humping everything that did not move too fast, marking everything and running away from me.
- Watching her the morning she forgot to be afraid. She had always walked down the hall hugging the wall with her tail tucked. One morning we were heading out for breakfast, and she trotted down the middle of the hall with her tail up and relaxed. I cried with joy!
- Seeing her go from death's door to a reasonably happy little dog. She was very brave and continued to plug along despite all her problems. She never gave up, so how could we give up on her?
- Seeing him go from so terrified that the rescue considered putting him to sleep, to having him be the dog that gets to attend all sorts of neighborhood and social events and enjoy himself.
- To watch Skeeter blossom into almost a normal dog, to see him find joy and happiness in his life, to see him smile while sniffing the breeze and enjoying the sunshine outdoors; there is no greater happiness. I know how extremely unhappy and absolutely petrified Skeeter was when he first arrived at our household. Now, he is almost a normal dog and so happy and full of life.
- Seeing her personality develop and blossom .... It had been stifled for so long, but you could tell she was in there somewhere. She is so funny and so sweet!

will always look to the Mill Dog Rescue (Colorado) for future companions.

115. She has taught me so, so much. The rewards of watching her turn into a "real dog" have been indescribable — purest joy that I've known.
116. We knew Duffy had been severely abused and was nearly dead when rescued, so our expectations of his being normal were not all that high. We're pleased to have watched his progress and actually watch him enjoying life instead of being terrified by it.

117. Kaya was dying when we received her. She now can breathe and has a warm home with people who love her. She will always be off, dysfunctional and odd, but we accept her the way she is and love her. She has a home, has felt the grass under her feet and seen the blue sky. She is comfortable, well fed and fussed over. She will pass with loving arms around her and a kind soft voice.

118. She is a very special girl. She was paralyzed and full of sores when we received her. She is now up walking and quite social. She can be

a bit quirky at times but seems well adjusted and enjoys life. She is a clown.

119. I just adore her; when I wake up in the morning and see her stretched out next to me with her head on my pillow, I tease her that she has come a long way!! She is beautiful with a healthy coat, good weight, not skinny with a rub mark on her head; her paws are healthy now .... She is just a happy, fun dog.
120. I was realistic when taking Princess in. We just wanted to give Princess the best quality of life we could and she could accept after the horrors she'd been through. Princess is a sweetheart who shows no aggression; she deserves to be loved, for once in her life. We try to do that, as best as she will let us. We are not expecting anything from her and realize she has little to give. And that is OK with us. I love Princess and would take her in again in a heartbeat.
121. Sammie may not be the perfect dog, but just seeing her sleeping on the couch and knowing all that she has been through makes me happy. I love to see her tail wag and enthusiasm when she knows a walk is forthcoming. I enjoy watching her appreciate everything she is given. She is truly a gentle, lovable soul.
122. We're just crazy about her. She was worth all the time and patience. She's a wonderful addition to our family. I have a feeling she loves us much more than our more normal pets do. :)
123. There are very few people who would have the love and patience that it has taken to keep this dog alive and teach him about love and the enjoyment of life. He spends his days in front of the fire or in the sun or wrapped in a baby blanket in our lap, and we cherish every second of every day we have with him.
124. I feel a sense of honor for being allowed to try and bring this poor innocent victim back to a place where she deserves to be and very happy that she is responding to my efforts even if it is small and slow.
125. Can't remember what life was like without Rosko, even with all his needs and quirks. I love that little dog so.
126. She has cost us a small fortune in vet bills, medications, special diets, etc. Many people

have told me they wouldn't take on a dog with so many issues. There is absolutely nothing I wouldn't do to give her the best quality of life that I possibly can.

127. I entered into adopting a puppy mill breeder dog without any prior info about mill dogs. It was one of those situations where the "miller" was going to kill her unless someone took her right away. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat now, knowing all the trials and tribulations associated with a mill dog.
128. I rescue — no expectations. But this is the sweetest dog I have ever known. I am 56 and was a vet tech for years, so that says a lot for her.
129. He was in a mill until age 9. He has come a long way, lets you know what he wants and loves me unconditionally.
130. Regardless of her issues, she has such an incredible soul. She makes me laugh, and watching her learn to experience joy has been incredible. I can't imagine life without her.
131. She has become a life saver to my mom since my dad passed — they are always together. My mom's whole life revolves around Sunny, and Sunny seems to like that.
132. Every time I think she has completely settled in and gotten totally comfortable living with us, she does something new to make me realize she has progressed even further. Just seeing her excited to see me when I come home or playing with the other dogs or begging for a treat make me realize how much her life has improved.
133. This has been the most humbling experience I can honestly say I have had. To have this little girl come into my life on shaky ground and watch her play, run, tear through the house, tease her brother, and then want up in bed with me for a nap where she will just stay. I have never had a love like this in the sense that I have had love and joy with my sweeties, but I had them from puppies up until my heart would break when I had to let them pass over. To see her happy face staring up at me, wanting me to help her up or to take her out or even just give her permission to go ... and the most rewarding part is she will be



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

- She is healthy, free from harm and living the best life possible from a HORRIBLE EXISTENCE before. When I look at her, and she looks at me, I cry for her pain and that of the ones that NEVER made it out alive and those yet to be born!
- We have gotten so much more from her than we feel like we have given her. The little things we take for granted are big deals to her. When she pulled the quilt off the couch and decided to drag it all over the floor ... that made me smile and laugh. (Note ... it was not encouraged.) She is starting in VERY small increments to do some “puppy things.” When she played (only one time) ... hide and seek with my daughter ... I almost cried. I can’t get enough of her play bows. It was over two years before she ever gave us one. It makes my heart so happy to see her enjoy life and to do “doggy things” (good or bad, lol). Because of her I am acutely aware of a dog’s body language, even though I do think a puppy mill dog’s body language is a tad different than a so called normal dog. There are so many more rewards ... too many to list.

so deliciously happy in the mornings that she will automatically go four paws in the air for a full body belly rub and some face teasing and snuggles. Can’t get any better than that.

134. She is a survivor and remains sweet-natured in spite of what she has suffered. I never regret our decision to bring her into our household and will always treasure the bond that we have created.
135. I have learned how terribly damaging puppy mills are to the dogs ... and have become more resolute to campaign against them.
136. I have been able to have a more productive life as a member of society as he accompanies me wherever I need to go.
137. I am humbled that she loves and trusts me. It gives me such joy to see her run around the yard with a happy tail and face. There is no more fear there. I love to watch her sleep. She looks so peaceful. She has a beautiful heart, a joyful spirit.
138. Although completely blind, Sweet Pea is one of the most loving and forgiving dogs we have ever had the pleasure of sharing our lives with. Although coming from a horrendous mill that was closed down, she still trusts humans and loves them.
139. We adopted Susie Q shortly after unexpect-

edly losing our golden retriever because our Irish setter was heartbroken without his girl. Susie Q not only healed our Irish, but she brought me through the difficult time too. I think I would have resented a normal dog at that low point. Susie Q rescued me.

140. Watching Haley develop, seeing her improve at each step is just amazing. To know that I helped make this possible is an unbelievable feeling. Working on something with her and suddenly realizing “SHE GOT IT!”
141. Brittany loves her mommy, and I see so much strength in her to be able to overcome what she has endured in her past. She never has a bad day and would never hurt a soul. She has taught me trust, the meaning of true friendship and loyalty. She was not treated very nicely and yet she loves everyone she meets and greets them with a wiggle of her little butt. The sad part is when she hears puppies crying on TV or in real life, she starts pacing around and often will sit to listen and see if she can figure out where they are. She must be remembering her babies and is looking for them.
142. We have bonded closely; she saved my life. While asleep, I went into hypertensive crisis; she could not wake me, so she went to the front door at night and woke the neighbor up,

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

- Watching her blossom from a dog that was just a body ... no emotions, personality, no life behind her eyes to a dog who loved every moment of the day. Her best time was first thing in the morning when she would hear us moving around .... She would come to life ... dancing around the room and happily barking because we were starting the day, and she was going to get to eat and play and enjoy her day.
- How she was able to show people to trust her and not judge her by her looks or her past. Her seeming compassion and gentle nature for the elderly, people in wheelchairs and children.
- Seeing the degree of bonding and love she has for us, especially her “daddy.” He has had other dogs in his lifetime, but none of them had the level of love and devotion she shows him on a daily basis. To know how happy she is now and see her being happy all the time is priceless.
- To see his growth and resilience. Many people said that he would never change. Initially everyone saw him as “damaged;” now he is a healthy, well-adjusted, happy dog.
- Seeing her change and her personality unfold bit by bit. Like opening up a present every day.
- Everything. She is an absolute joy!
- Watching her go from hiding and being afraid of everything to now seeing her love people and other dogs. She now loves life. It’s like she is making up for the lost time (the first three years of her life). It has really been a joy watching her learn.
- Seeing Rooney start to trust me. The first day he actually came to me for attention, I cried. He was so frightened of me at first; I had never seen a dog be so scared of people before. I really feel like I have made a big difference in his life, and that is the best feeling in the world.
- To watch her go from the most frightened dog I have ever seen to the most fun-loving dog I have ever seen. She runs and plays all day long and seems to love life.
- I can tell she loves me and trusts me. I couldn’t ask for anything more.

who then pounded on the door to wake me up so I could take my medicine.

143. I love Cassie. She is a work in progress right now, but she is so worth it. I love her, and she has stolen my heart. I can’t imagine not having her around. She wants to fit in but just doesn’t know how. You can see it in her eyes. She loves me, and she loves her new family. We take her out in the front yard each and every day to see new things. They continue to frighten her, but I feel she must see them. Car rides are the best. She sits up above the other cars, and she is such a little lady. A bit prissy and diva-like, and I adore her. She stole my heart, and I can’t begin to tell you how proud I am of her. No one will

ever hurt her again, and I have promised her that her life will be nothing but good forever. She has taught me things, and I know I have taught her things. It is what her life is all about now. No more bad weather. No more splayed feet. No more mean people. No more hungry, cold nights. No more babies being taken from her far ahead of their time, leaving behind a mommy with another broken heart. I will protect her with my heart and with every fiber of my being. She is my everything. When she first arrived here, her eyes were empty, doll-like. Now they are happy eyes and full of love. It is so fun to watch her learn to run through the house without a care in the world. That is what my

goal in life is. A happy, well-adjusted little flufferbutt without a care in the world.

144. Her personality has bloomed, and she loves to give kisses and be kissed. Also, what a character! I can't even get that sore with her for waking me up at 3 a.m. to talk and pat my face with her front paws. She has grown confident in many ways, and I enjoy having her at the vets' office and people giving us kind remarks on how well behaved she is.
145. Brady was our first experience with puppy mills. From him we have become advocates for adoption and a spokesperson for not buying pet store puppies. People tell us how lucky he is. We say that we are the lucky ones.
146. Watching his progress has been awe-inspiring. When I think of the condition he was in when he came to me, physically and emotionally, I cannot believe his resilience, his willingness to trust and love. He looks at me like I'm the most incredible creature in the world, but he is.
147. They love you; they just show it very differently than any other socialized dog. There's a true sense of appreciation with them. They really put you on a pedestal and look at you as their "hero."
148. Every accomplishment seems more important, every tail wag or nudge is more special when you don't get as many. Her resiliency is inspiring, and I look forward to working with her as a therapy dog and helping others who are struggling.
149. It is such a good feeling that she has learned to trust me and my sons. She was afraid of the world when she arrived and now she is enjoying life. It feels good to be a part of that. There is a special bond that is created, and it is hard to describe, but it is a wonderful feeling.
150. Angie will always be scared of humans. She lets my son, Josh, sit next to her bed and lets him pet her without shaking. She follows the other girls around the yard and is a darling little girl. I will never regret adopting a puppy mill dog or specifically, Angie. She is a wonderful little girl, and I love her just the way she is.
151. Bonnie has taught me that sometimes rescuing a dog means allowing that soul to deter-

mine the goals. She is a character — an old lady who enjoys watching the household, an occasional walk in the dog stroller, and finally being allowed some boundaries. She doesn't need rehab; she wants peace.

152. They're wonderful dogs. We LOVE being a family, and they make me laugh every day! I think they give as much as I do. The pet therapy is extremely meaningful for us. We trained at Hospice House and now visit sick children and adults in crisis.
153. Showing her that not all humans are bad and that love is wonderful to experience. She adored being loved by me and demanded it daily! I gladly obliged her.
154. Chloe is my tiniest Bichon and is like a little sprite. She loves me and loves her life here. I fostered her, and after three months she was adopted by someone in another state. After two weeks they called me to come and get her because she didn't like the other dog in the home. Once she got back here, she was so excited, she could hardly contain herself, so I felt I had to adopt her. She has to be where I am and sleeps by my head every night. She is a very special little dog, and seeing her enjoy life is very rewarding.
155. For the first time in six years, she licked my finger when there was some gravy on it .... That happened last week, and I was SO thrilled!
156. To see Goldie as she is now compared to the dog that howled the first few nights when she arrived at our home is nothing short of a miracle. I love this precious little fluff that has come into my life, and it gives me great joy to know that she finally has someone that she can love!
157. Seeing the change in Hershey from day one to now has been amazing. His capacity to learn and heal is remarkable. The mere fact that he trusts me the way he does after the way I know he was treated before is amazing.
158. She's taught me transcendence and patience. I often think to myself, OK, if she can go through all that and still learn to trust and love again, I can get over whatever is bothering me. The patience has been huge, too — showing me the incremental rewards of making it just a little further on a walk than the

day before has taught me to hold on to the small achievements.

159. Gidget was such a damaged little soul that it was a joyous experience to see her take even baby steps toward healing. To know that she is now a happy and healthy little girl is wonderful.
160. I cannot even describe the thrill it is every time he does something new and just to watch him and see the look in his eye when he wants so bad to do something, but you can see that he just can't bring himself to do it. Then all of a sudden, he does it, and he has this little twinkle in his eye and surprise that he did it and nothing bad happened to him. I look at him sometimes, and I am just amazed that this is the same dog I picked up at the airport. He was wild eyed and petrified, and you could see the torment in his eyes. Even now I still see a faraway look in his eye every once in a while, and I wonder how on earth this poor baby sat in a 2 x 4 cage every single day for seven years. I tears me up to think about it. My reward is KNOWING that he will never have to suffer again.
161. A very difficult process and not for the faint of heart. A long difficult journey, but the rewards are great at the end.
162. Coming out of a puppy mill, her foster mom characterized her as initially acting "... more like a wild animal than a dog ...." Katie measures her successes in smaller increments than normal dogs, but because she has to work so hard for them, they have even more meaning....
163. I hate to leave her for a minute. She travels everywhere with me in my motorhome and brings more joy to my life than I can put into words. We have had some health scares. She has a 5-grade heart murmur and is on five meds in the morning and three at night. I've never failed to give them to her for the last five years. I would do it all over again — she makes my life whole.
164. I would do it all over again (with changes), but I gave him unconditional love for almost three years, which is something he never knew. I just wish it could have been more. He was the sweetest little dog and the love of my life.
165. She has been my most favorite dog to date;

she was my heart, and I was hers, and I will miss her forever!!!

166. Although Lacey apparently never knew she was safe, I knew it.
167. I miss her so much; she was only with us about five years, but she filled a big place in my heart.
168. Louie brought more happiness and love into my life than I ever could have imagined possible.
169. I know that I changed her life for the better, and I am so happy that she truly knew what love is and how to give it; but the gift that she gave to me will stay with me forever. She was MY angel, not me hers.
170. I met Lucy Lou when a no-kill group I was working with took her in. She had been abandoned in a PetSmart. Our group was working an adoption. I saw this blind dog that couldn't move, wrapped in a towel. I couldn't let her be euthanized like that — scared and unloved. So, I took her home. I remember thinking that this dog was going to be a burden on me. I am ashamed of that now. She became the greatest gift in my life. She changed me and how I looked at everything in the world. Doctor's visits, blood work, teeth extractions, infections, living on prednisone .... She just kept getting up every single day — happy and grateful for her life. She was never snippy or nasty or rotten. She didn't trust easily in the beginning but not in a mean way. She just didn't want to be hurt anymore. She was an amazing, amazing gift to me. She touched the lives of everyone she met.
171. I have never felt a connection with any animal the way I felt it with Mylie. It was pure love, and I believe that was experienced both ways. I am grateful I found her and was able to give her a quality of life that she had never had before .... But the true gift was what she gave to me.
172. Magoo was so pure. He really recognized that he was in a better place. He loved every minute of his life, and you could see it in his eyes, his tail and his body. He was so accommodating and eager to please. He was happy to meet new people and share some of that zest for life.

## Part 7: Resources

### General care and rehabilitation of rescued puppy mill dogs

<http://www.anewstartonlife.com/pupppymill.htm>

<http://www.nowisconsinpupppymills.com/mill-survivors.html>

<http://www.aspca.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-articles/adopting-a-puppy-mill-dog>

<http://www.smartlivingnetwork.com/dog-health/b/caring-for-a-puppy-mill-rescue/>

<http://www.mchumane.org/RehabilitationofaPuppyMillDog.shtml>

### House-training puppy mill dogs

<http://www.aspca.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-articles/house-training-your-puppy-mill-dog>

### Support groups

<http://www.facebook.com/pupppymill>

<http://www.meetup.com/Pupppymill-rescue-dogs/>

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/PMRehabilitation/?yguid=3733202>

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/Pupppymillrescue/?yguid=3733202>

### DVD on caring for rescued puppy mill dogs

[http://www.missiondog.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=20](http://www.missiondog.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=20)

### Books

*A Rare Breed of Love* by Jana Kohl

*The Diary of Lucy Blue* by Janice Mitchell

*Dog Blessed* by Lisa Fischer

*Saving Gracie* by Carol Bradley

*Puppy Mill Dogs SPEAK! Happy Stories and Helpful Advice* by Christine Palm Shaughness and Chris M. Slawecki