

**DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CANINE ADOPTION
AND HOW OWNER EXPERIENCE IMPACTS ON SUCCESS**

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ABSTRACT

In 2010 in the United Kingdom an estimated 89,571 dogs passed through re-homing centres (Stavisky et al. 2012). Around 50% of these were relinquished by owners, with the rest largely being strays. Reasons for relinquishment have been widely reported. After adoption, the percentage of dogs being returned to re-homing centres (re-relinquishment) has been reported between 0% and 26% across a cross section of United Kingdom organisations (King, 2010).

To date, research considering the success of canine adoption has been mostly retrospective and relatively limited in scope. The aim of this study was to investigate owner's experience of adoption as they are the decision makers who ultimately control the outcome.

This study recruited a prospective cohort of 248 dog owners and considered their aims and expectations of dog ownership at the pre-adoption stage. 112 participants shared their experience post adoption. A mixed methods approach was used integrating both qualitative and quantitative research. Seven different re-homing organisations were recruited to encompass a range of different re-homing policies.

The study identified that most owners have previous experience of dog adoption, and that companionship is a key motivation for ownership. Most owners choose to source dogs from a rehoming centre for altruistic reasons. Owner expectations of dog ownership were mostly positive. Owners frequently reported problems in the post adoption period however they still reported that they perceived that dogs behaved significantly better than expected when they first went home. Participants showed reluctance to return dogs although they were more likely to consider this option in the event of their dog being aggressive. The overall re-relinquishment rate for all organisations was 12% but ranged from 4% to 20%

This study adds greater depth to our understanding of how owners experience canine adoption. Opportunities for strengthening the human-animal bond are identified to promote successful re-homing.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Dogs have played an important part in human society since the end of the last Ice Age, with the first evidence of their domestication being some 14,000 years ago (Clutton-Brock, 2001). They have many different roles in modern society including companion, protector, social facilitator, status symbol, surrogate, worker and a route to other leisure pursuits such as walking or attending training or showing activities (National Animal Welfare Trust, 2012; Robinson, 1995 and Veevers, 1985). This list is varied but shares a commonality in describing why people choose whether or not to acquire a dog.

Dogs have been an intrinsic part of human society (Clutton-Brock, 2001) probably because it benefitted them to exist alongside humans (Coppinger and Coppinger, 2002). However, in today's Western society humans act as the decision-makers for most of their canine companions and control many of their choices (Bradshaw, 2012). Dogs have therefore become increasingly reliant on their human caretakers and the number of animal welfare organisations that provide housing and care for a worldwide population of un-owned and unwanted dogs is testament to the many ways in which the human – dog partnership can fail.

When a person decides to surrender ownership of their pet (as opposed to having the animal removed from them or abandoning it to life as a stray) this is normally termed 'relinquishment'. This can occur through private re-homing of the animal but welfare organisations often provide care for such animals whilst they seek to place them into new homes. These organisations are often described as 're-homing centres', 'rescue centres' or 'shelters' and placement of an animal into a new home is described as 'adoption' or 'fostering' of the animal rather than being described as a sale or purchase. If the animal is later returned to the shelter it is described as having been re-relinquished.

In 2010 the UK was thought to contain at least 89,571 dogs in welfare organisations, 44.3% of these had a waiting list and 47.5% were at full

capacity at some time in the previous year (Stavisky et al. 2012). There is wide variation in these shelters (Stavisky et al. 2012) and little legislation regarding their management (Companion Animal Welfare Council, 2011). Large numbers of dogs are euthanased because homes cannot be found. Recent estimates suggest between 7.4% and 10.4% of dogs taken into welfare organisations are euthanased because the numbers in need of shelter outweigh the available spaces (Clark et al. 2012 and Stavisky et al. 2012).

Other parts of Europe present a stark contrast to this as in some countries, e.g. in Italy, it is illegal for dogs to be destroyed unless they are suffering from intractable illness or pose a danger to society (Normando et al. 2006). However as a result many unwanted dogs end up living within overcrowded shelters or remain in the streets for prolonged periods of time, maybe even a lifetime, which can pose a significant welfare issue (Barrera et al. 2010; Stephen and Ledger, 2005 and De Palma et al. 2005).

Historically, an overpopulation of dogs arising due to irresponsible breeding was blamed for the mismatch between potential homes and the dogs, and shelters were thought to be populated by unwanted litters (Moulton et al. 1991). However, there is now a growing body of evidence to suggest that this situation may be changing. The majority of dogs in re-homing centres are adult who have had owners which have relinquished them (DiGiacoma et al. 1998; Posage et al. 1998; Marston et al. 2004 and Morris et al. 2011). The relinquishment can be for a variety of reasons, but the owner's decision to relinquish their pet can have significant implications for the animal's future welfare. The outcome is influenced by whether the animal goes on to be re-homed and stays rehomed and thus there are three ways in which the population of un-owned animals can be reduced. Firstly, by reducing those that are relinquished, secondly by increasing the rate of adoption and thirdly by reducing re-relinquishment when animals are re-homed (McDowell et al. 2011).

Relinquishment

It is hard to gather comprehensive data on the population of dogs residing in re-homing centres because there is no central monitoring of data (Wenstrup and Dowdichuk, 1998 and Bartlett et al. 2005). There have been calls for a co-ordinated effort to gather and share information, but present knowledge relies largely on synthesising research to try and create a representative body of evidence (Wenstrup and Dowdichuk, 1999; Zawistowski et al. 1998; Clark et al. 2012 and Stavisky et al. 2012). There is a risk that research studies are biased in their results towards a particular area or geographical location and also that reported findings may become rapidly out of date (Zawistowski, 1998).

Understanding why a dog is being re-homed from a shelter poses another challenge. Often, animals will be picked up as strays in which case it is impossible to determine anything about their previous life or how they came to be free-roaming. Even when an owner voluntarily surrenders a dog to a re-homing centre and engages in discussion with the staff as to why they can no longer keep the dog, it can be difficult to obtain an unbiased report. Research by Stephen and Ledger (2007) suggests that relinquishing owners may be reluctant to fully disclose the reasons that they have decided to give up ownership. This may be as they want to avoid being judged for their decision. Society as a whole often takes a negative view of people who choose not to keep their pet (DiGiacoma et al. 1998 and Rajecki et al. 2000). This judgemental attitude may be unfounded as there is convincing evidence that many owners find it a great hardship to part with a pet (DiGiacoma et al. 1998 and Shore, 2005). However, it may follow that if there is a lack of empathy shown when dealing with upset owners that these owners may seek to protect themselves against further emotional upset being caused by the hostile reactions of other people. This may include adjusting the recollection of their experience so as to disclose reasons for relinquishment that most people would agree are unavoidable and unmanageable. In psychology this is labelled as

cognitive dissonance (Egan, 2002 and Gross, 2005). Alternatively, relinquishing owners may attempt to underplay the reasons for their pets' relinquishment in the hope that this enhances the animals' chances of being successfully re-homed (Serguson et al. 2005 and Stephen and Ledger, 2007). If the relinquishing owners fear that their animal may not be accepted by the shelter, or may not be considered suitable for re-homing, they may downplay the problems they have been having with their pet and be selective about the information they disclose (Serguson et al. 2005 and Stephen and Ledger, 2007). Understanding the reasons for relinquishment, and providing accurate information to subsequent owners, is therefore fraught with difficulty.

Reported reasons for relinquishment fall into categories based either on owner factors or animal factors. Owner factors include those related to ill health or allergy to the pet, the birth of a child, a change in employment or housing situation or another unforeseen crisis such as bereavement or divorce (Salman et al. 1998; Scarlett et al. 1999; Miller et al. 1996; Scarlett et al. 2002; Diesel et al. 2010; Salman et al. 2000; Marston et al. 2004; New et al. 1999 and 2000; Shore et al. 2003 and Morris and Steffler, 2011). The majority of published papers on relinquishment originate from the United States where one study by New et al. (1999) cited housing problems as the most common reason for relinquishment. A paper by Miller et al. (1996) detailed that whilst the pet's behaviour was the most commonly identified reason for relinquishment (30%), not having enough time or money for the animal was given in 21% of cases and moving house in a further 19%. Owner factors are thus more highly represented in this study when considered in combination. In 2003, Shore et al. built on this work by identifying 98 owners that had cited moving home as the primary reason for relinquishment at one U.S shelter. When retrospective interviews were conducted with 67 owners, 57 confirmed that moving had been the primary reason for placing their pet in the shelter, with 42.1% of these detailing landlord restrictions. Where moving was the reason for relinquishment, 31% were due to work and a further 30% were due to

family commitments. The mean age of these pets was 1.96 years and the mean length of ownership was only 1.5 years, however owners reported a strong bond with the animals they had relinquished (Shore et al. 2003). This work is supported by DiGiacoma et al. (1998) who conducted qualitative research that concluded that it is hard for owners to relinquish a pet. When relinquishment occurs it is often a result of not having given proper consideration to the impact that caring for a pet can have on the owner's life, together with barriers to resolving problems such as constraints of time or money. In addition, DiGiacoma et al. (1998) propose a compounding of factors which owners try to cope with, but are ultimately overwhelmed by, when external pressures are added, such as landlord restrictions or public order complaints.

Studies outside of the U.S place less emphasis on owner factors and these findings may in part relate to geographical housing and employment factors. However, Marston et al. (2004) looked at reasons for 20,729 dogs entering an Australian shelter and found that whilst 83.8% were strays, of the 15.7% that were voluntarily relinquished 40.42% of these were due to housing issues. In the UK, Diesel et al. (2010) conducted work that encompassed 14 centres belonging to a nationwide re-homing charity. Significant reasons for relinquishment were reported as behaviour issues and the owner not having enough time for the pet, and these two factors may be linked. Where animal factors are the primary motivation for relinquishment, behaviour is the most commonly cited reason in the majority of research papers (Corridan, 2010; Salman et al. 1998; Miller et al. 1996; Diesel et al. 2010; Scarlett et al. 1999; Salman et al. 2000 and DiGiacoma et al. 1998). Caution should be exercised to guard against terming these animals as suffering from 'behaviour problems' as this implies that the behaviour being displayed is abnormal. Whilst this may be the case it is also possible that the animal is behaving normally for their species but in a way that the owner finds unacceptable, and it may therefore be preferable to call them behaviour conflicts. Further analysis of the

detail of these conflicts reveals such scenarios as aggression towards people and other animals, separation anxiety, unspecified fear and anxiety, housetraining issues and general control issues (Salman et al. 2000; Diesel et al. 2010 and Miller et al. 1996).

It is possible that many of the factors described as reasons for relinquishment also occur with owners who never relinquish their pets. What is it then that prompts some people to relinquish their pet when others may continue? Various studies have attempted to explore and compare the characteristics of relinquishing and retaining owners and the pets they choose to keep or surrender. In 2000, New et al. reported that in the United States, relinquished animals are statistically more likely to be younger, sexually intact, of mixed breed and sourced from a shelter, friend or pet shop. It is unclear what it is about this group of animals, or the people that own them, that increases the likelihood of relinquishment. It may be that more of these types of animals exist within the pet population, and thus are likely to make up a higher number within any representative group. Alternatively it may be that these animals are truly relinquished with greater frequency. If this explanation were true, it would still be unclear whether this population of animals poses greater challenges for their owner, or whether it simply describes animals with a different owner demographic that may have features which increase the likelihood of relinquishment. Duxbury et al. (2003) conducted a study which looked at the outcome (in terms of retention in the home) for 248 puppies adopted from a re-homing centre. They found that puppies whose owners attended training classes, used a headcollar on their dog, let the dog sleep in the bedroom, handled the puppy a lot and had no children, were more likely to retain the pet in the home. These results provide important insights but cannot be generalised to shelter animals as it has been shown that most of these are adults. It is also likely to be more committed owners that are involved in the activities described, and thus the real question may be what level of attachment these owners have with their dogs, and what it is that creates an enduring bond (Marston

et al. 2005a and Shore et al. 2003)? The human-animal bond has been defined as a reciprocal relationship benefitting both parties, and where the behaviours of each are influenced by the other (Robinson, 1995). The work of Corridan (2010) proposes that dogs are more likely to be relinquished when there is a mismatch between the expected and actual effort involved in being their caregiver. This is not to ignore the work of DiGiacoma et al. (1998) which reported how difficult it is for some people to relinquish their pets. Based on the interviews conducted it would appear that some people only relinquish a pet as a last resort or when they feel that the animal would have a better life with someone else.

Some research suggests there may be alternatives to relinquishment. DiGiacoma et al. (1998) suggest that offering help and support to struggling owners may help them to retain the pet in their home. This theory is endorsed by the work of Scarlett et al. (2002) who propose that pre-pet counselling, proactive behaviour advice and compulsory neutering may all help reduce the number of animals being relinquished. Marder and Duxbury (2008) and Scarlett et al. (2002) both suggest that vets should offer pre-adoption counselling. To help consider how effective this may be it is fitting to consider the pet population in Norway and Iceland. Lund et al. (2010) look at attitudes to dog ownership where re-homing centres are rare (Norway) or even non-existent (Iceland). They explain this by citing strict laws surrounding pet ownership resulting in careful regulation of animal numbers and an increased commitment on the part of the owners. However, when the study went on to explore attitudes to pet keeping they looked at circumstances under which people might wish to end their role as a pet owner and what alternatives would be considered. The majority of the 35 people interviewed were reluctant to consider euthanasia of an animal but they were prepared to consider re-homing. It may be that countries with a greater population of animals are making it too easy for people to obtain a pet and thus contributing to 'impulsive' pet acquisition that are more readily relinquished (Miller et

al. 1996 and Patronek et al. 1996) but this is unclear. Alternatively it could simply be that animals are still relinquished in Norway and Iceland but through private adoptions as opposed to through shelter organisations.

The work of Vucinic et al. (2009) and Kass et al. (2001) suggest that some people will also use shelters as a resource for euthanasia of their pets and not just as a route for re-homing. In a Belgrade shelter, Vucinic et al. (2009) details that between January 2004 and December 2007 86.6% of 1161 relinquished animals were left by their owners specifically for euthanasia. Of these 25.7% were due to old age and illness, 21.2% due to illness, 17.8% due to problem behaviour, 12.6% due to uncomplicated old age and 8.2% due to trauma. In these cases it would seem that people may be choosing to use the shelter as a more acceptable means to euthanasia than private veterinary practice, although it is not clear why this would be the case. Financial considerations may be a factor as some shelters will offer this service free of charge, whereas private veterinary practices will require payment. Kass et al. (2001) attempted to look at the difference between owners relinquishing pets for euthanasia and re-homing. They looked at 2617 dogs being relinquished to one United States shelter and found that those relinquishing for euthanasia had owned their pets much longer with a median duration of ownership of 10.9 years compared to 1.2 years for those giving them up for re-homing. Again they found the vast majority of dogs relinquished for euthanasia (82%) were due to ill health and old age and only 16% were due to behaviour. They conclude that when animals are relinquished for euthanasia it is when the owners are committed enough to make a difficult decision that they feel is in the best interests of the pet. However, there are well documented negative effects on those who conduct the act of euthanasia, and that this can manifest as resentment or blame towards relinquishing owners (Rogelberg et al. 2007; Baran et al. 2009 and Frommer and Arluke, 1999).

The morality of relinquishing a dog for re-homing is no more clearly cut, even when the owners act with the best of intentions in seeking to give their pet a better life with someone else. Perhaps it is especially problematic in this case when the distress felt on the part of the relinquishing owner can be intense. The cost of relinquishment for the dog depends on the outcome for them, e.g. how quickly will they be re-homed. Consideration must be given to how well the shelter meets their welfare needs and how suitable will their next home be if and when they find one? There is also a need to consider the wellbeing of those who care for the dogs, both during their time at the shelter and in any of their subsequent new homes. These ideas will be developed further in the following sections.

Consequences of relinquishment

There would seem to be obvious negative implications for dogs which find themselves facing the restrictions and challenges of life in a shelter environment. Without even considering any environmental changes, relinquished dogs have, by definition, been separated from their owner(s). They must then adapt to an unfamiliar place with novel and unpredictable sights, smells, sounds and people and are likely to experience significant changes to their daily routine including type and timing of food, exercise frequency, sleeping patterns and social encounters (Barrera et al. 2010; Taylor and Mills, 2007 and Tuber et al. 1999). Studies have tried to quantify how these cumulative stressors affect a dog's welfare, but this is a challenging area of research. Hennessey et al. (1997) measured cortisol levels in dogs at a re-homing centre compared with pet dogs in their home environment. Cortisol levels were consistently higher in the dogs at the re-homing centre than those in their own home, although they did decrease over time up to day nine. This may well indicate that the dogs in the shelter were under more stress but this does not necessarily correlate to a negative psychological state. Such an effect could also be due to physiological

stress due to increased arousal (Hiby et al. 2006 and Titulaer et al. 2013). A study by Hiby et al. (2006) attempted to combine cortisol measurements with behavioural indicators of poor welfare to look at kennel stress in dogs and compared dogs from a home environment to those that had been living as a stray or were returned to kennels. Cortisol levels were initially similar between dogs but rose to higher levels in dogs from a home environment. However the behavioural indicators used were not validated as measures of psychological welfare and it was not possible to ascertain if the dogs from a home environment had previously been accustomed to a kennel, e.g. a boarding kennels (it was assumed not) or if the stray dogs had spent time in kennels (it was assumed they had). A more extensive study of behavioural indicators of poor welfare was conducted by Stephen and Ledger (2005) who looked at 15 stress-related behaviours across five kennels in the United Kingdom over a six week period. Two thirds of dogs showed at least one stress related behaviour in the first two weeks. In 2009 Chappell looked again at physiological and behavioural indicators of stress in dogs, measuring urinary cortisol, respiratory rate, appetite, weight, body condition score and diarrhoea (which can be stress related). After arrival at a United Kingdom rehoming centre, 60% of dogs had decreasing levels of urinary cortisol between day one and eight, but 40% had increasing levels. Taken in isolation the behavioural indicators and other associated outcomes are therefore ambiguous and make it difficult to reach a clear cut conclusion.

To take a different perspective on the welfare implications of shelter housing, some studies have attempted to take a more in-depth look at the effect of time in kennels on a dog's psychological welfare. Titulaer et al. (2013) did this by using 'cognitive bias' to assess a dog's emotional state. They trained dogs that certain stimuli resulted in a rewarding outcome and that an opposing stimulus resulted in an unrewarding outcome. Dogs were then presented with a neutral stimulus. Those who anticipated a rewarding outcome (judged by

speed of approach) were seen as having a positive emotional state and an 'optimistic bias'. Those that anticipated an unrewarding state were seen as having a negative emotional state or 'pessimistic bias'. The test was used to compare short and long term resident dogs within one re-homing centre. There was no difference between the two groups, with both short and long term resident dogs showing an optimistic bias. There was also no difference in urinary creatinine: cortisol ratio between groups. Some behavioural differences were observed. Long term resident dogs rested more between interactions with people, were more prone to showing aggression to other dogs and exhibited more object play. These results should be interpreted with caution as it may be an inherently different population of dogs that end up in long term housing. It could be that these dogs had behavioural issues such as fear or anxiety around people or dogs that resulted in them being difficult to re-home, and could go some way to explaining the results. Similarly Barrera et al. (2010) looked at dogs that had been housed at an Italian shelter for over two years and compared their social interactions with people to household pets with no experience of a kennel environment. They demonstrated that the dogs which lived at the shelter showed significantly more fear and anxiety related behaviour when exposed to an unfamiliar human. However, the same dogs also voluntarily maintained proximity with the human as long as the human's movements remained passive. Somewhat in contrast, the owned dogs waited by the door. This could suggest that the shelter dogs were seeking human contact, even with an unfamiliar human, and despite being fearful about doing so. The owned dogs were assumed to be most interested in the whereabouts of their particular owner. If these conclusions hold true, then this would certainly suggest a detrimental effect on the dog's welfare as a result of living at the shelter as Barrera et al. (2010) report that on average, these dogs only received 13 minutes of human contact per day. This theory is supported by the work of Gacsi (2001) who subjected 60 dogs from a shelter environment to a version of Ainsworth's 'strange situation test' (Gacsi, 2001). Again these dogs were housed in an Italian shelter in

groups of 30-100 dogs, but their human contact was limited to once daily exposure for feeding. A total of twenty dogs at two different shelters were introduced to an unfamiliar human for ten minutes per day for three days. A test was then performed comparing these dogs to ten dogs from each shelter who were only introduced to a novel person. Despite only having brief contact over a short duration, the dogs showed increased attachment to the familiar human both seeking proximity and preferring contact with the person over seeking to escape from the unfamiliar environment. At the least, this would appear to demonstrate that social bonds with humans are important to dogs, that attachments can be formed relatively quickly and that they may perform a function in helping dogs cope with novel situations. Although both these studies originate from Italy, there is international agreement that when dogs are in re-homing centres they are subjected to significant restrictions in the availability of social interactions with people (Companion Animal Welfare Council, 2011; Taylor and Mills, 2007 and Tuber et al. 1999).

It has been suggested that individual studies are inconclusive in their demonstration of how stressful a shelter environment is for dogs (Taylor and Mills, 2007). However, when considered as a whole the cumulative data does point towards kennels being an aversive place for dogs to live. It would be reasonable to conclude that being relinquished is problematic in terms of ensuring dog's achieve a high standard of welfare. The next logical question is then, how do dogs leave kennels?

Outcome for dogs

Dogs leave shelters in a number of ways. As well as being re-homed, they may be re-united with their original owners, transferred to other organisations, remain at the shelter indefinitely or be euthanased (Marston et al. 2004; Protopopova, 2012 and Leusher et al. 2009). The outcome depends on the legal obligations of the organisation as

defined by regional authorities, the culture of the society in which the organisation is based and the aims and objectives of the organisation itself as well as the individual characteristics of the dog (Marston and Bennett, 2003). Some shelters euthanase dogs after they have been resident for more than a set length of stay, regardless of their future re-homing prospects. Others may selectively euthanase dogs dependent on any underlying health or behavioural issues that act as barriers to re-homing, and still others may house dogs indefinitely as long as they are considered healthy (Moulton et al. 1991). These differences are important when considering data on length of stay, as whilst a decreasing length of stay may be desirable, it may also be a representation of an increasing number of animals being euthanased (Protopopova, 2012). A successful outcome for dogs leaving a shelter is normally considered to be placing them into a new home and this relies on them being chosen by a new owner.

Various studies have looked at owner's attitudes to adopting a dog from a shelter environment. People's motivation for re-homing a dog appear to include altruistic and non-altruistic reasons, e.g. believing they are offering a good home to an animal in need, deliberately wanting an older dog as opposed to a puppy, financial considerations and believing that the shelter will provide pets that have been assessed as a suitable pet for their needs (Mornemont et al. 2012 and Marston et al. 2005b). However, the study by Marston et al. (2005b), which reported on the experience of 62 owners adopting dogs from two Australian shelters, found that only 19% of people expressed an overall positive attitude towards the shelter. This contrasts somewhat with the work of Mornemont et al. (2012), who conducted a survey (also based in Australia), and found that of 1654 self-selecting participants, 80% would have considered obtaining a dog in the near future and 85.2% of them would have considered adopting a shelter dog despite expecting them to display more behavioural issues. The majority of these respondents held positive views about the shelter and saw re-homing a dog as a 'good' thing to do. Interestingly though, 33% of participants in

this study had experience of working in a shelter and there is the potential for this to bias results. From a United Kingdom perspective, Wells and Hepper (1992) questioned owners visiting an animal shelter in Northern Ireland and found that potential owners would preferentially obtain an animal from a breeder, followed by a shelter and then through a newspaper, pet shop or friend. The internet was not widely available at the time of this study so 'on-line' advertising was not included. When choosing a shelter dog, dogs given up by owners were more desirable than strays and it was believed that these findings were due to people wanting predictable dogs (Wells and Hepper, 1992). This is supported by the work of another Australian study by King et al. (2009) who questioned 967 self-selecting participants about their expectations of pet ownership. The majority (75.8%) of respondents in this survey expressed a preference to adopting a puppy and 67.7% stated that it would be 'extremely important' that the dog was safe with children. This is compared to 60.3% who felt that it was extremely important that the dog was healthy. However, Weiss et al. (2012) questioned 1491 owners of newly adopted pets from shelters in the United States. They found that people placed the greatest emphasis on the appearance of the pet, then on behaviour with people or 'personality'. Health concerns in this study also rated higher than issues surrounding behaviour and thus there is a lack of consensus as to what potential dog owners want from their new pet.

A number of studies have looked at factors that influence which dogs are successfully re-homed and it may be useful to consider this data in order to further determine the barriers to getting dogs into new homes. It has been consistently shown that younger dogs are re-homed more quickly than older dogs (Brown et al. 2013; Diesel et al. 2007; Lepper et al. 2002 and Normando et al. 2006). Diesel et al. (2007), from the United Kingdom, and Lepper et al. (2002), from the United States both found that female dogs are adopted in preference to male dogs and purebred dogs in preference to crossbreeds. Certain breed types also appear to be more popular with Diesel et al. (2007) citing gundogs or

utility breeds and both Lepper et al. (2001) and Protopopova et al. (2012) citing lapdogs as preferred breeds for adoption. There is further evidence from the field of social psychology that people do form breed stereotypes and have certain expectations about how similar looking dogs might act (Wright et al. 2007). The same study found that negative associations are more easily formed than positive ones (Wright et al. 2007). Medical and behavioural issues are reported as a barrier to re-homing by Diesel et al. (2007), Lepper et al. (2002) and Normando et al. (2006). Murphy et al (2013) challenges this by suggesting that owners may be willing to make considerable commitments, both in terms of time and money, to care for a sick pet. However, whilst the research attempted to draw conclusions aimed at promoting successful adoptions, their data was drawn from hypothetical situations in which owners were asked to consider a pet they already owned, not one they were thinking of adopting, and furthermore the level of proposed expenditure was not matched to income. Lepper et al (2002) also found that dogs with a history of living in a home were more likely to be adopted than strays. This supports the work of Wells and Hepper (1992) which questioned potential owners and also found a preference for dogs with a known history.

What can shelters do to help?

Knowing which dogs are likely to be adopted allows shelters to make pragmatic decisions about where to spend finite resources (Lepper et al. 2002). For instance it may be necessary to consider euthanasing animals that are unlikely to be re-homed, in order to maximise resources and to prevent the dog from living in the shelter for a prolonged period of time (Clark et al. 2012). Alternatively this information could be used to target interventions aimed at getting more difficult groups of dogs out into homes (Lepper et al. 2002). Interestingly, Normando et al. (2006) found that adoptions were slower

when more dogs were available for re-homing and thus it may be possible to promote adoption of more difficult dogs simply by restricting the choice that potential adopters have. Of course there are ethical concerns with this approach as it may prevent 'hidden' dogs from finding homes. Protopopova et al. (2012) looked at whether training dogs to look directly at human visitors increased their chances of adoption but they found that it did not. However, they did demonstrate that dogs living in the first kennels to be visited by the public were adopted more quickly. This study took place in one United States shelter but similar findings were reported by Wells and Hepper (2001) working at a shelter in Northern Ireland. If these findings are generalisable then it suggests a relatively easy method for shelters to promote less attractive dogs, simply by changing their kennel position. Butterfield et al. (2012) suggest that the language we use to describe dogs also affects how they are perceived, with more anthropomorphic language eliciting more positive emotions. This suggests that another simple and ethical action that could be taken to promote adoptions is to use carefully chosen wording when describing animals to potential adopters.

Leuscher and Medlock (2009) conducted a study in which a group of dogs were given more generalised training in what could be described as 'good manners' such as not pulling on the lead, sitting when asked and greeting visitors in a calm manner. They found that when compared to an untrained group of dogs, trained dogs were 1.4 times more likely to be adopted. It is unclear if this is because potential owners perceived the benefits of the training, if the act of being trained altered the dogs behaviour towards people in a positive way (whether or not the training itself was successful), or whether the staff were more proactive in re-homing trained dogs. In any case, it is difficult to argue against using training to promote adoptions, whenever resources allow, as it also provides kennelled dogs with enrichment (Leuscher and Medlock, 2009). Bailey and Sellars (1998) argue for shelters to undertake more specialised training to try and best prepare each

individual dog for life in a new home and claim that using such an approach has reduced their rate of re-relinquishment. This is endorsed by the work of the Companion Animal Welfare Council (2011) and McConnell (2012) who argue that while potential owners can prepare for their new arrival, the dog cannot and may struggle to predict what to expect in their new home. While this is commendable, behaviour conflicts have been shown to be a major reason for relinquishment and thus this could place a heavy burden on an organisation's resources. As an alternative strategy, many re-homing centres utilise 'temperament tests' to assess an animal's suitability for re-homing (Taylor and Mills, 2007).

Temperament is a term used to describe how an individual reacts in a given context and a temperament trait describes a set of behaviours that are stable and consistent over time (Valsecchi, 2011). A temperament test attempts to predict the behaviour a dog is likely to display in a new home (Mornemont et al. 2010 and Taylor and Mills, 2007).

Some organisations use these tests purely to identify animals to be euthanased on the basis that they are considered unsuitable to be rehomed as pets (Mornemont et al. 2010 and Bennett et al, 2012). Alternatively they may be used to identify behavioural issues which require attention either within the shelter or the home (Stephen and Ledger, 2007). In theory they can be employed as a tool to 'match' dogs to owners (Dowling-Guyer et al. 2011 and Fratkin et al. 2013). This has inherent appeal as people appear to value a reliable predictor of temperament when choosing a dog (Wells and Hepper, 2000 and King et al. 2009). However, there are widely reported limitations concerning their validity (e.g. whether they are testing what they claim to), reliability (how accurate they are) and feasibility (how practical they are), so caution is advised in interpretation of their findings (Diesel et al. 2008a and Taylor and Mills, 2007). Bennett et al. (2012) make an important point by considering to what degree euthanasing animals that fail the test will have on the test's validity. If this occurs these

animals are immediately removed from any follow up and because they are no longer part of the population under assessment any 'false positives' i.e. any animal wrongly identified as having an undesirable trait, will never be included in any follow up evaluations of the accuracy of the predictions. In contrast, animals that are wrongly identified as being at no or low risk of displaying undesirable behaviours can and will be included. Christensen et al. (2007) and Poulsen et al. (2010) both report studies where dogs passed a temperament test but later showed aggressive behaviour in their new home. This is perhaps to be expected if it is acknowledged that a fundamental assumption of the temperament test is that temperament remains stable across time and context (Fratkin et al. 2013). This assumption has been repeatedly questioned (Ledger et al. 1995; Mornemont et al. 2010; Poulsen et al. 2010 and Taylor and Mills, 2007) and is well illustrated by the work of Mohan-Gibbons et al. (2012) who investigated food guarding behaviour in a population of shelter dogs. Food guarding was chosen as the focus of the study because the authors cite it as a common reason for dogs to fail a temperament test and be euthanased. However, in this study, owners' adopting dogs that demonstrated food guarding behaviour at the shelter were able to successfully implement behaviour modification plans that reduced or stopped the behaviour in the home.

To try and measure the true validity of temperament tests some studies have attempted to compare their results to assessment by a specialist in behavioural science (Bennett et al. 2012 and Sticco et al. 2011), to the history provided by the relinquishing owner (Ledger et al. 1995; Stephen and Ledger, 2007 and Bollen and Horowitz, 2008), to staff assessment of behaviour (Valsecchi et al, 2011 and Van der Borg et al, 1991) and to behaviour in the new home (Ledger and Baxter, 1995; Poulsen et al. 2010; Sticco et al. 2011 and Van der Borg et al. 1991). Results are variable although in general validity improves when a combination of assessment techniques are used (Bennett et al, 2012; Bollen and Horowitz, 2008; Stephen and Ledger, 2007 and Van der Borg et al. 1991). Of course this will increase the resources needed to

conduct the test and there is a trade-off between accuracy and feasibility.

Mornemont et al. (2010) looked at 50 different temperament tests being conducted across 8 different organisations and found wide variation in the way in which tests were conducted both between test procedures and in the way in which individual tests were conducted. Unfortunately, overcoming these problems often leads to consequences in terms of feasibility. The work of Sticco et al. (2011), which obtained reasonable results in terms of validity and reliability, required the use of a 'highly qualified' assessor. Similarly, the work of Van der Borg et al. (1991) used a combination of staff assessment and a temperament test to predict behaviour in the home. Problem behaviours (as defined by the new owner) were successfully predicted in 80% of all follow ups, but the test had limited practical application as it took 1.5 hours to test a single dog.

Temperament tests may play a useful role for shelters. There is potential for them to be used to prevent aggressive dogs from being placed in homes and they have been used to successfully reduce the number of dogs being re-relinquished (Bollen and Horowitz, 2008 and Van der Borg et al. 1991). However, this may be at the cost of removing potentially re-homeable dogs from the shelter population (Bennett et al. 2012 and Mornemont et al. 2010) and there appears to be limit as to how far it is possible to predict an individual's behaviour in an unknown context. As of yet there is no strong evidence base to support the validity or reliability of any particular test (Bennett et al. 2012; Mornemont et al. 2010 and Taylor and Mills, 2007). Thus their use should be justified according to the purpose for which they are being employed, i.e. whether it is permissible to accept false positives in the interests of public safety or if it is necessary to have a means of screening the shelter population in order to reduce numbers and maintain resources.

Adopting a dog requires co-operation between the re-homing organisations and the potential owners. The dog itself will undoubtedly influence the decisions which are made, but there is potential for interventions to be put in place that may help encourage adoptions or promote dogs which are less likely to be considered by potential owners. Re-homing a dog is desirable because it removes the dog from an aversive environment and frees up resources for another animal. However, for an adoption to be successful the dog must be chosen by a potential owner, who may be seeking a dog that fulfils certain criteria, and the dog must then be retained in the home and not be re-relinquished. The outcome for canine adoption is thus dependent on the decisions made by a potential owner, the many factors which influence this and how the subsequent relationship with their new pet develops.

Success of adoptions

The reasons for re-relinquishment are closely correlated to those for original relinquishment. A wide scale study by Diesel et al (2008b) recorded how many dogs were returned to a national re-homing charity in the UK and recorded a re-relinquishment rate of 14%. On further analysis, large breed dogs and dogs with behaviour issues were more likely to be returned, as were those adopted by young owners or where there were children in the home. There is also some evidence that owners were perhaps unprepared for the changes the dog would bring as re-relinquishing owners were more likely to report that their dog was more work than expected. Interestingly, 39.1% of re-relinquishment occurred within two weeks suggesting that people are decisive and make quick decisions about returning a dog to kennels when compared to original relinquishment. McConnell (2012) reports figures of 20% of returns occurring in two weeks and the author concludes that this is due to adopting owners having unrealistic expectations regarding what to expect when adopting an adult dog. They go further by proposing

that even if every effort is made to match an owner to a suitable dog, as behaviour can be unstable across time and context, owners may not be making a choice based on accurate information. In contrast, Mondelli et al. (2004) describe the situation in an Italian shelter where no pre- or post- adoption help is offered to owners. Across a six year period between January 1996 and December 2001 re-relinquishment rates remained steady at around 15%. A large number (40%) of re-relinquishments occurred in the first week and 7% of dogs being were returned more than once. When this occurred only 20% of owners gave the same reason as previous owners. Most re-relinquished dogs were due to behaviour issues and most dogs were over six months old. A recent study by Fuh et al. (2012) found that in Taiwan re-relinquishment rates were as high as 36.6% and that once again behaviour issues were the biggest factor.

King (2010) conducted a study considering the effect of re-homing centre policies on re-relinquishment rates. This study encompassed 372 shelters in the UK and found re-relinquishment rates varied between 0 and 26% with a median value of 5%. Reasons for returning a dog to kennels included change in owner circumstances (19.7%), behaviour conflicts (15.9%), incompatibility with other animals (14%), owner ill health (8.9%) or allergy (6.4%), the animal being more work than expected (3.8%), the animal being an unsuitable choice (3.2%), other people objecting to the animal (1.9%) and the animal being too costly (0.6%). Increasing an animal's social interactions and enrichment opportunities had no effect on reducing re-relinquishment rates, nor did increasing adoption fees. However, re-homing dogs to households where the owners were out at work was suggested as a risk factor for re-relinquishment.

While prospective studies following owners both pre and post-adoption are rare, a number of studies have attempted follow up of owners after adopting a dog. Wells and Hepper (2000) focused on behaviour conflicts reported in dogs in the first six weeks following adoption. They had a total of 536 respondents to a post adoption questionnaire, and of

these 36 dogs had been re-relinquished. The majority (89.7%) of re-relinquishments in this study were of dogs that displayed undesirable behaviours, however what is most interesting is that many of these same undesirable behaviours were seen in dogs that were retained in the home. Of dogs that were successfully adopted, 67.1% showed similar issues. However, only 30% of dogs that showed aggression to people were re-relinquished with corresponding figures of 15.6% of all dogs showing aggression to other dogs, 15.4% of dogs showing sexually motivated behaviours, 13% of straying dogs, 10.9% of those described as hyperactive, 10.9% of barking dogs, 8.8% of destructive dogs, 7.3% of fearful dogs and 5.2% of dogs with elimination issues being returned. Lord et al. (2008) investigated both health and behaviour problems post adoption and found that in one large United States organisation 51.9% of adopted animals had health issues in the week following adoption (mainly respiratory disease) and 10.3% had unresolved health issues one month post adoption. However 98.3% of animals were still in the home, suggesting that owners were willing to work through these problems once they had taken on responsibility for the animal. The work of Neidhardt and Boyd (2002) attempted to explore this further by considering the relationship that people form with an adopted pet. They contacted owners that had adopted pets from three United States shelters and asked them about their satisfaction with their new pet at two weeks, six months and twelve months post adoption. Most owners were very satisfied with their pet, although the reasons for this were not expanded upon. The majority (80%) of owners still had their pet after one year and of those that had returned a pet, 36% did so due to incompatibility with another pet and 19% due to issues with a human member of the household. Behaviour conflicts accounted for 28% of re-relinquishments. This study also looked at other reasons for dogs no longer being with their adopting owners and found that of the 20% of owners that no longer had their pet, 49% of those dogs had been re-relinquished, 12% had been privately re-homed, 25% had died and 11% had run away. It is important to bear this in mind when reviewing figures for re-

relinquishment as what may at first appear to be very low figures may not be due to animals retained in the home. For instance Soto et al (2005) quote re-relinquishment figures in a Brazilian town of only 3.2%. However only 59.1% of dogs were still with their adoptive owners as a further 34.9% had died, 15% had been privately re-homed and 4.3% had strayed. The real success of canine adoption should perhaps then be measured in terms of a successful relationship forming between a new owner and their adopted animal.

When a dog becomes established in a household owners demonstrate a strong commitment. A study by the National Animal Welfare Trust, conducted in 2012, surveyed 2724 UK adults of which 44% were pet owners. Of these, ten percent of owners stated that their pet was their greatest companion and eleven percent of women felt closer to their pet than to a partner or child. Most (81%) of owners felt that their dog increased their happiness and many were willing to make sacrifices in order to protect their relationship with their pet. Examples of this include 30% being willing to give up a holiday, 26% to miss out on days out and 19% to forgo luxuries.

A number of publications have suggested that recently adopted animals are at greater risk of re-relinquishment because owners have not yet formed an enduring bond with that animal (Herron et al. 2007; Horwitz, 2010; Marston and Bennett, 2003; Peterson, 2005; McConnell 2012 and Shore, 2005). Marston and Bennett (2003) consider this in terms of the physiology of the human-animal relationship and propose that there is less influence of the hormone oxytocin in promoting a bond between an owner and a recently adopted adult pet than there is with a puppy or kitten. Furthermore, adult animals will have previous and sometimes unknown life experiences which may make it more problematic for them to settle within an existing household (Horowitz, 2010). McConnell (2012) specifically discussed unrealistic owner expectation as contributing to re-relinquishment and in particular a possible misconception that an older pet will be easier to care for than a puppy. A study by Shore (2005) looking at owners re-relinquishing

an adopted pet found that most owners cited lack of research on their part and / or a poor choice of dog as the main contributing factors. Half of owners stated that the issues they experienced were 'immediately apparent'. This begs the question as to whether these owners would have made different decisions with another dog, and 44.3% of owners did express a willingness to try again. What is unclear is if the next dog would be a better match, or whether the owners would be better prepared to deal with the next set of challenges. Corridan (2010) suggests that the strength of the human-animal bond can be predicted based on comparing owner expectation to projected figures for actual caregiving requirements. It may be that a proportion of canine adoptions fail because owners do not know what to expect. Despite the best of intentions it can be difficult to accurately assess the needs of an adult dog residing in a re-homing centre. However, without causing unnecessary alarm, there may be potential for counselling prospective owners regarding the issues they may encounter and the avenues for ongoing support should they decide to proceed with adoption.

Houpt et al. (1996) and Corridan (2010) suggest a role for pre-adoption counselling in terms of managing owner expectations and thus helping to promote successful adoptions. A study by Herron et al (2007) provides some data to corroborate this point of view. A total of 113 adopting owners were provided with advice on housetraining their new pet, either in a written form (59 owners) or in the written form with additional verbal discussion (54 owners). Owners that engaged in the discussion with shelter staff about what to expect expressed greater satisfaction with their dog one month after adoption using quantitative methods, despite there being no difference in housetraining success between groups. Normando et al. (2006) provide a different perspective to reach a similar conclusion by looking at the effect of foster schemes on successful adoption. They found that eventual adoption was enhanced by the use of foster care, and that even dogs with complex medical or behavioural issues were successfully placed

into long term homes as in a high proportion of cases foster carers eventually adopted the pet. For instance of those dogs showing aggression to people, 94% were successfully adopted to foster carers and none were re-relinquished. This may suggest that if people persevere with behaviour conflicts long enough to form a bond, then there is greater commitment to work through problems. Alternatively it may be that more committed owners put themselves forward as foster carers. Inevitably there will only ever be a finite number of foster homes available. Such an approach may suggest a role for gradually introducing more challenging dogs to their new owner(s), so that the relationship can form whilst the owners receive support in taking on the responsibility of ownership. 'Trial periods' may also help with a gradual transition to full adoption (Normando et al. 2006).

In all re-homings it would seem that understanding what owners want for their relationship with their pet and providing guidance as to what to expect may help to nurture a successful bond. Peterson (2005) suggests that re-homing organisations should regard themselves as an 'opportunity to educate owners regarding realistic expectations'. However to date there has been little evidence as to what it is that new owners actually do expect from their relationship with an adopted adult pet and how this correlates to their experience over time. Without this knowledge it is difficult for organisations to make informed choices in guiding re-homing policy.

The literature review in this dissertation has demonstrated the complexity of canine adoption. Figure 1 provides an illustrated summary of the different stakeholders together with possible outcomes.

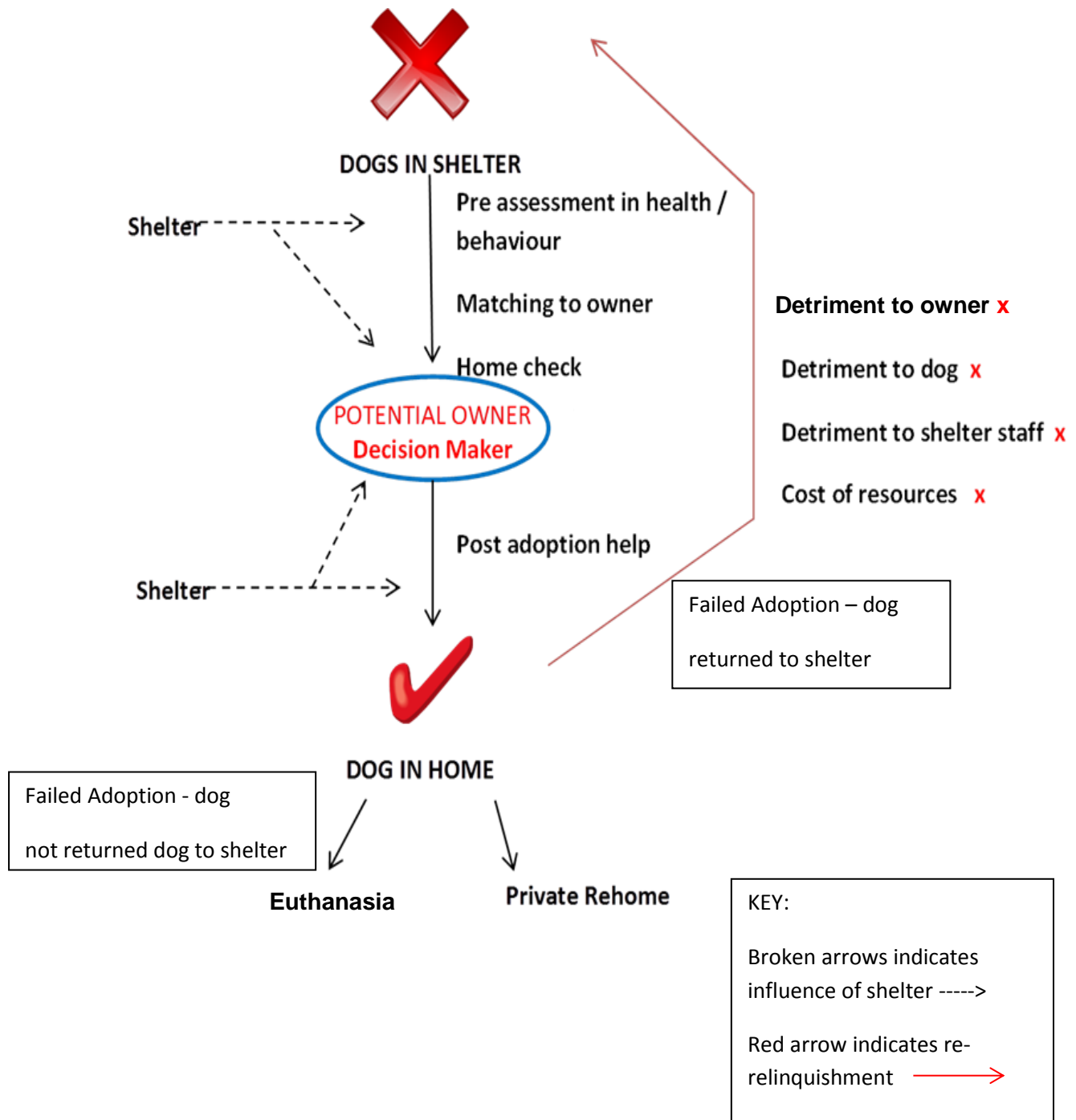


Figure 1: Overview of canine adoption

AIMS OF STUDY

Aims of Study

Relinquishment of dogs into welfare organisations is a worldwide problem that has far reaching impacts. Reasons for relinquishment have been found to be varied, but can be considered in terms of a broken human-animal bond. Successful adoption requires formation of a new relationship, which starts when an owner chooses to take a dog into their lives. Potential owners seem to desire predictability in their choice of canine companion, however in reality they are often faced with making a decision based on incomplete information. This occurs despite the best intentions of re-homing organisations both because the background and history of relinquished dogs is often unknown and because it can be difficult to predict future behaviour across changing time and context.

A different approach to promoting successful adoption may lie in managing owner expectations so that they are prepared to meet the challenges that may arise as the relationship with their new dog develops. This would hopefully support formation of an enduring bond over time.

The aim of this study was to explore how owner's experienced canine adoption. A prospective cohort followed potential adopters across seven different re-homing centres, with particular emphasis on understanding the role of owner aims and expectations on their decision making process. The relationship which owners had formed with their new dog was then re-visited in order to determine the bond that owners made with their chosen dog and what factors had impacted on this. Ultimately the aim is to facilitate long-term placement of dogs into homes by suggesting ways in which the human animal bond can be supported and promoted. Contributing to an understanding of canine adoption at this fundamental level may help to provide further insights in this developing field.

METHODS

Study design

The study consisted of two phases. The initial study recruited a prospective cohort of respondents at the time that they committed to adopting a particular dog. A paper-based questionnaire was used to explore why participants had chosen to re-home a shelter dog and their aims and expectations of dog ownership. The second study re-engaged with consenting participants from phase one. A web-based questionnaire was used to explore the owner's experience of dog ownership, and their relationship with their new dog.

Recruitment of shelters

Respondents were recruited from seven different re-homing organisations who were introduced to the research project through e-mail contact in the summer of 2013 (see Appendix 1). The shelters were purposefully selected to represent a range of re-homing policies and therefore to represent a cross section of different types of U.K organisations.

A total of ten organisations were approached through personal contacts of the researchers and all agreed to take part. However after further consideration two organisations were omitted due to the practicalities of data collection. A further organisation agreed to take part, but failed to return any recruitment questionnaires throughout the study period.

After initiating e-mail contact each participating organisation was then visited in person by the researcher during the summer of 2013, in order to gain a thorough understanding of the background of the organisation and the re-homing policies employed. A questionnaire was designed in order to collect uniform data from each organisation (see Appendix 2). Organisations were asked to provide data regarding intake and re-homing rates for the period between January and December 2011 and 2012 to provide a crude overview of each organisations capacity.

Only the data between January and December 2012 was available across all organisations.

As well as providing an opportunity to gather data the visits were also seen as an important step towards building a positive working relationship. The aims and the logistics of the proposed research was explained and consent to participate was obtained. Each participating organisation was supplied with blank questionnaires to supply to respondents (see Appendix 3) together with two posters for display in public areas which explained in more detail the background to the study, the aims of the research and who to contact for further information (see Appendix 4). Each organisation was supplied with postage paid envelopes for return of completed questionnaires and a letter summarising the plan of action (see Appendix 5).

The researcher maintained contact with participating organisations throughout the study. This included monthly e-mails requesting re-homing and re-relinquishment figures, and return of completed questionnaires. In addition, organisations were sent a number of progress reports and 'thank you' communications to try and maintain compliance.

Recruitment of Owners

Responsibility for recruiting respondents lay with the re-homing centre staff. They were asked to distribute the paper questionnaire to the owner of every dog that was re-homed. Staff were asked to distribute the questionnaire when adopters committed to a particular dog. Due to the different re-homing protocols between centres, it was not possible to standardise this phase of data collection. For example, some organisations chose to incorporate the questionnaire into the process of pre-adoption counselling, whereas others asked for it to be completed when the new owners came to collect their dog.

The second phase of data collection included all consenting owners who had supplied e-mail details that allowed contact for follow up after adoption.

Questionnaire design

Both the pre-and post- adoption questionnaire went through a number of development phases prior to being piloted.

The initial questionnaire was a self-administered paper document. In order to maximise responses it was essential that it was visually appealing and quick to fill in.

The pilot questionnaire included four statements for owners to complete as free text and a multiple-choice question. It was piloted at two organisations in December 2013, and also with staff at Nottingham University School of Veterinary Medicine and Science. Respondents were asked to contribute any feedback they had regarding the layout of the questionnaire and how easy it was to fill in. A total of twenty responses were collected. Of those who chose to comment (six in total), respondents found the questionnaire either very easy or easy to complete. However upon further discussion with experienced members of research staff some flaws in the pilot questionnaire were found. The design was re-considered to include space for owners to fill in the date of completion, and the breed of the dog. A further question was inserted to try and further elucidate the owner's expectations of life with their new pet. The final questionnaire is represented in appendix three.

The follow up questionnaire was self-administered via a web-based survey provider (SurveyGizmo.com). It contained ten sections exploring owners experience of ownership through a combination of open and closed questions presented as free text boxes, check boxes and ratings options filled in as Likert Scales. Development of this survey took place through a number of stages, with changes being

suggested by colleagues, senior research supervisors and pet owners. The fourth version of the survey was sent to the respondents of the pilot version of the initial questionnaire and received positive responses. No further changes were made. Key features of the follow up survey are summarised in table 1. A paper version of the completed survey was also designed using Microsoft Word and this is illustrated in full in Appendix 6.

Section Title	Theme	Number of questions	Type of questions
Background	Owner demographics	5	Free text and tick boxes
About your dog	Dog demographics	3	Free text
Previously owned dogs	Previous experience of dog ownership	1	Multiple choice
Reasons for choosing a dog	Expectations of dog ownership	1	Tick boxes
Your experience with this dog	Outcome of adoption, e.g. was the dog still with the new owner and if not, what happened?	2	Tick boxes
How your dog settled in	Comparison of expected, actual and predicted dog behaviour in the new home and owner satisfaction with dog	6	Likert scales and free text.
Avenues of support	Actual and predicted sources of support for dog ownership	4	Tick boxes and Likert scales
Decision making	Commitment to ownership	2	Tick boxes and free text
Possible future outcomes	Commitment to ownership	2	Multiple choice and free text
Life with your new dog	Experience of dog ownership	4	Free text and multiple choice

Section Title	Theme	Number of questions	Type of questions
Your relationship with your new dog	Human-animal bond	12	Likert scales
Final comments	Open for any contribution from participants	1	Free text

Table 1 - Summary of post adoption questionnaire

Questionnaire distribution

The initial questionnaire was piloted in December 2013 and data collection for phase one of the study took place between the start of January and the end of April 2014.

It was requested that completed questionnaires be retained at the rehoming centre and be returned to the researcher by postal delivery. In all but a very small minority of cases (where owners chose to return the form individually) this process was carried out after monthly e-mail reminders were sent out by the researcher.

After receiving back the initial questionnaire, consenting participants were sent a second questionnaire exploring their relationship with their new dog via an e-mail link to a web based survey. The timing of follow-up varied between three and eight weeks from return of first questionnaire. A record was maintained of phase two survey invites that had been sent and responses were monitored on a fortnightly basis. Reminder e-mails for non-responders were sent every two weeks until such time as the owner unsubscribed to the survey or data collection stopped. E-mail delivery was checked and where bounced e-mails were detected, the address was double checked against the raw data. If necessary invites were re-sent after corrections had been made.

Data extraction

At the end of each month throughout the data collection period for phase one, participating organisations supplied figures for the number of animals that they had re-homed, and the number of animals returned to them. This enabled response rates for the questionnaire to be calculated and gave an indication of the on-going re-relinquishment figures. Response rates per organisation were calculated as number of questionnaires returned / number of dogs re-homed.

A total of 248 recruitment questionnaires were included in analysis of phase one, including 20 questionnaires completed as part of the pilot study. For the questionnaires included in the pilot, which did not include question four, and when responses were incomplete, individual questions were identified as either being omitted '(Pilot)' or being unanswered '(Blank)'.

A total of 130 follow-up questionnaires were returned in phase two of the study. Of these 104 were unique, completed responses and eight were unique partial responses, giving a total of 112 questionnaires that were used in analysis. There were six duplicated complete responses, and 12 duplicated partial responses, attributed to respondents abandoning earlier attempts. Where respondents had submitted multiple responses, only the first, completed questionnaire was included in analysis. In the single instance where a respondent submitted multiple, partial responses the results were considered. The first two attempted responses lacked a lot of data and thus were taken as 'practice' or incomplete attempts. As such, only the third and final partial response was included for analysis in this instance.

Data Analysis

Individual responses from the initial, paper questionnaire were recorded in electronic format (Microsoft Word, 2010; version 14). A list

of answers corresponding to each question was then compiled, with participant identity anonymised.

Qualitative methods were then used to identify emergent themes from the original data according to the methods described for thematic textual analysis. Transcription of the original data into a standard format by the primary researcher facilitated familiarisation with the raw data and codes were generated from this through an inductive process. Each statement could fall into multiple codes. At the end of analysis, the data was re-coded to ensure that new codes which emerged throughout analysis were not lost to the earlier interpretation of the data. All coding was conducted by the primary researcher and the data was not examined by a second person.

The responses from the phase two, web based questionnaire were exported into a spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel, 2010; version 14). Data were then re-coded to facilitate generation of descriptive statistics for analysis. The responses for the Likert scales were recorded by the survey software as a figure between 0 and 100 for each response. The data set was small enough that the primary researcher could check accuracy by double-checking each cell individually.

Descriptive statistics were generated for the closed questions from the second phase of data collection using Microsoft Excel (2010; version 14). The results generated were checked for normality. Where data were normally distributed statistics including mean and standard deviation were calculated. Non-normally distributed data were described using median and interquartile range. Open text answers were subjected to qualitative analysis in a similar manner to that described for the first phase of the study.

Further statistical analysis included comparison of the owner's expectations and experience of their dog's behaviour when they first got them home. As the data was found to be non-normally distributed the null hypothesis that there was no difference between owner's reports of the expected and actual behaviour was tested by the use of

a non-parametric test for related samples. Calculation of the Wilcoxon signed rank test was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for windows (2011, version 20).

The relationship between aggression and likelihood of re-relinquishment was also examined. The null hypothesis that there was no difference between whether owners would or would not consider re-relinquishment as a result of any form of aggressive behaviour was tested by the use of a 2x2 contingency table. Calculation of the two-tailed Fishers exact test was performed test using GraphPad software (www.graphpad.com).

P values for statistical significance were set at 0.05

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethical Review Committee at the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, University of Nottingham.

The initial questionnaire provided an overview of why the data was being collected and what it would be used for. Participants were asked to identify themselves by providing their name and their dog's name, and were requested to provide contact details for future follow up. This was on an entirely voluntary basis and it was made clear, both through the survey itself and through the support materials provided for each organisation to display, that if participants wished to remain anonymous their answers would still count as valuable data without any personal details being included. Participants were also advised that if they wished to withdraw themselves from the study that this could be done by contacting the researcher at any time. If a participant had submitted an anonymous initial questionnaire, but later wished to withdraw from the study completely, the researcher would have been able to locate and remove the individual's responses by

using the name of the re-homing organisation, the date the questionnaire was filled in and the name of the dog.

Participants who supplied contact details were then sent the follow-up survey via an-email link. Personal details were securely held by the researcher, and anonymised for the purposes of reporting. This data was not shared with any other individual or organisation, and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

The second survey reminded participants who was conducting the survey, and why. Participants could unsubscribe directly from the survey via a link to the host website. They were also provided with contact details for the researcher to allow them to raise any issues or concerns.

RESULTS

1 - Background information from Shelters

Organisational Structure

Table 2 describes the main characteristics of the seven charities that participated in distributing the recruitment questionnaire. The shelters that participated had different management structures. They housed dogs in both foster homes and kennels, with capacity for between 16 and 150+ dogs. All the shelters provided some degree of veterinary care which ranged from an on-site vet checking every dog, to the dogs being taken to a private vet only if they were ill. All the shelters provided a degree of behavioural support for the dogs using staff with different levels of expertise. Whilst some organisations offered considerable post adoption support for on-going medical and behavioural issues, other organisations expected owners to make an informed decision as to whether they could provide for the needs of their new dog themselves.

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Re-homing centre management</u>	<u>Scope of mission</u>	<u>Funding</u>	<u>Total capacity</u>	<u>Min length of stay</u>	<u>Max length of stay</u>	<u>Source of dogs</u>	<u>Veterinary care</u>	<u>Behavioural care</u>
A	Single site, independent	Breed specific	Donations, Fundraising and adoption fees	47 (single housed)	<24hrs if suitable home on waiting list	None	Relinquished by owners, strays, transfer from other organisations and born on site	External by private vet as and when needed	In-house by specialist staff – dogs causing concern are 'hidden' from re-homing and matched to suitable owners by staff

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Re-homing centre management</u>	<u>Scope of mission</u>	<u>Funding</u>	<u>Total capacity</u>	<u>Min length of stay</u>	<u>Max length of stay</u>	<u>Source of dogs</u>	<u>Veterinary care</u>	<u>Behavioural care</u>
B	Single site, independent	Multi- breed within multi- species centre	Donations, fundraising and adoption fees	30 (single housed) + 2 to 4 foster homes	7 days	None	Relinquished by owners and born on site	External by private vet as soon as practical	In-house by re-homing staff
C	Single site with links to national charity	Multi- breed within multi- species centre	Donations, fundraising and adoption fees together with local and private funding	100 (single housed)	<24hrs	None (long term residents reviewed every 6mths)	Relinquished by owners, strays, transfer from other organisations, born on site, seized from owners for welfare reasons and strays on council contract	In house vet, mandatory check prior to being cleared for re-homing	In-house by re-homing staff

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Re-homing centre management</u>	<u>Scope of mission</u>	<u>Funding</u>	<u>Total capacity</u>	<u>Min length of stay</u>	<u>Max length of stay</u>	<u>Source of dogs</u>	<u>Veterinary care</u>	<u>Behavioural care</u>
D	Part of larger organisation but with financial freedom within a set budget	Multi-breed within multi-species centre	Funding from parent organisation bolstered by additional fundraising	57 dogs in 42 kennels	5 days	None	Seized from owners for welfare reasons	In house vet as soon as practical after arrival (normally within 48hrs).	In-house by re-homing staff, formal assessment on day 5
E	Rented kennels in a private boarding establishment	Breed specific	Donation, fundraising and adoption fees	16 (single housed) + 7 foster homes	<24hrs if suitable home on waiting list	None	Relinquished by owners and born on site	External by private vet within 48hrs after arrival	Volunteer vet nurse with interest in behaviour provides advice, also referral to external residential dog trainers
F	UK wide network via foster homes	Breed specific	Donation, funding and adoption fees	No maximum, dependent on foster homes available	<24hrs	None	Relinquished by owners, strays, transfer from other organisations and born on site	None unless reason for concern	No formal arrangement, foster carers assess temperament and give advice.

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Re-homing centre management</u>	<u>Scope of mission</u>	<u>Funding</u>	<u>Total capacity</u>	<u>Min length of stay</u>	<u>Max length of stay</u>	<u>Source of dogs</u>	<u>Veterinary care</u>	<u>Behavioural care</u>
G	Multi-site national re- homing organisation	Multi- breed within single species centre	Central funding from legacies, investments and sponsorship together with donations, fundraising and adoption fees	150 dogs, most housed in pairs. Short and long term housing	8 days	None (long term residents reviewed every 6mths)	Relinquished by owners, strays, transfer from other organisations and born on site	In house vet within 48hrs after arrival	Formal in-house assessment over 7 day period overseen by qualified in-house behaviourists. Dogs causing concern may be 'hidden' from re-homing within specialist units from where they are matched to suitable owners by staff

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Euthanasia policy</u>	<u>Public introduction to dog</u>	<u>Home checks</u>	<u>Post adoption checks</u>	<u>Post adoption support</u>	<u>Comments</u>
A	For medical and behavioural reasons if dog perceived as suffering or dangerous	Via reception displays and on-line advertising. No direct access to kennels until matched to possible dog via questionnaire	No	1 and 6 weeks	Funding for medical and behavioural problems	Pragmatic and flexible response to re-homing. Only centre where all household members do not have to meet a dog prior to re-homing. Always looking to improve on current procedures and policies
B	For medical and behavioural reasons if dog perceived as suffering or dangerous	Via reception displays and on-line advertising. Direct access to kennels but not allowed to meet dog until re-homing questionnaire is complete	Only if 'extra' concerns e.g. first time owner or challenging dog	Via email 1,4 and 12 weeks	No funding but general advice available as required	Significant emphasis on public education with many interactive learning opportunities on site

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Euthanasia policy</u>	<u>Public introduction to dog</u>	<u>Home checks</u>	<u>Post adoption checks</u>	<u>Post adoption support</u>	<u>Comments</u>
C	For medical and behavioural reasons if dog perceived as suffering or dangerous OR if dog thought to have slim chance of re-homing	Via reception displays and on-line advertising. Direct access to kennels but not allowed to meet dog until re-homing questionnaire is complete	Yes	6 weeks	In-house follow up or funding for medical issues. Behaviour issues creating a barrier to re-homing often results in euthanasia	Working towards a flexible approach to re-homing to 'move away from a prescriptive yes or no and look at the individual dogs needs and what part the extended family will play'
D	For medical and behavioural reasons if dog perceived as suffering or dangerous	Via reception displays and on-line advertising. Direct access to kennels but not allowed to meet dog until re-homing questionnaire is complete	Yes	No	None	Most dogs at the centre have suffered prior neglect and there is often very little known about their history

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Euthanasia policy</u>	<u>Public introduction to dog</u>	<u>Home checks</u>	<u>Post adoption checks</u>	<u>Post adoption support</u>	<u>Comments</u>
E	For medical and behavioural reasons if dog perceived as suffering or dangerous	Potential owners fill in a questionnaire and are placed on a waiting list while the organisation matches them to a dog	Yes- before being 'matched' to a dog	24 hrs and 2-4 weeks	Funding for medical issues	Ethos is based on affiliation with breed and belief that they need knowledgeable homes. Will re-home dog to a working role, but not to first time owners unless dog is elderly or very quiet.
F	For medical and behavioural reasons if dog perceived as suffering or dangerous	Potential owners fill in a questionnaire and are placed on a waiting list while the organisation matches them to a dog	Yes – before being 'matched' to a dog	2 weeks and 6 months	Extensive funding for medical issues	Work hard to keep a dog in the home. Will not re-home a dog to a working role. Re-homing procedure is very labour intensive and involves acquiring a detailed knowledge of each individual dog in an environment that will closely match their new home, what potential owners want from their dog and what they can offer in return.

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Euthanasia policy</u>	<u>Public introduction to dog</u>	<u>Home checks</u>	<u>Post adoption checks</u>	<u>Post adoption support</u>	<u>Comments</u>
G	For medical and behavioural reasons if dog perceived as suffering or dangerous. If dogs are to be considered for euthanasia for behavioural reasons this is only as a last resort when they are either too dangerous for staff to handle, or when quality of life has been documented as unsatisfactory on repeated evaluation, when all other avenues have been pursued and when the organisations head of behaviour and head of veterinary care are in agreement.	Via reception displays and on-line advertising. Direct access to kennels but not allowed to meet dog until re-homing questionnaire is complete	No, but all potential owners must attend a pre-adoption training session	1 week	Funding for medical issues. In-house behavioural support	Considerable resources are available and utilised to re-home more challenging dogs with complex medical or behavioural issues

Table 2: Characteristics of participating organisations

N.B All participating organisations encourage owners to return a dog should the adoption prove unsuccessful.

Adoption fees charged by each organisation

Five out of the seven organisations charged more for adoption of a puppy than an adult dog and one organisation asked less for elderly dogs (see Figure 2). Fees ranged from between £20 to £250. Two organisations asked for the same donation whatever age of dog was being adopted.

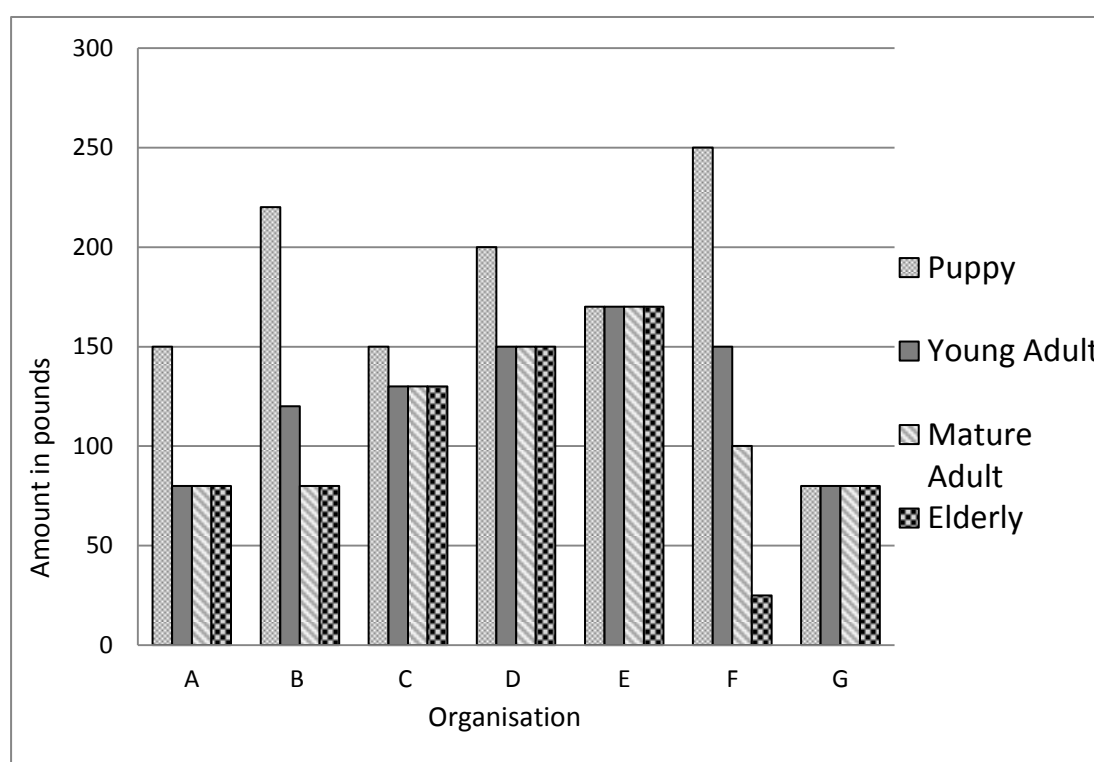


Figure 2: Fees which are charged by each organisation for adoption of a dog

NB Organisation E suggested a donation figure but potential owners were not obliged to pay a fixed amount.

Intake and adoption figures across different organisations

Figure 3 details the number of dogs entering each organisation, and the number of dogs re-homed between January and December 2012. The number of dogs arriving ranged from 205 to 692 with a median of 411. The number of dogs re-homed ranged from 253 to 581 with a median of 343. For four organisations the number of dogs arriving at the centre was greater than the number of dogs re-homed. The figures for the number of dogs entering organisation F were unavailable as these records were not easily accessible by the organisation.

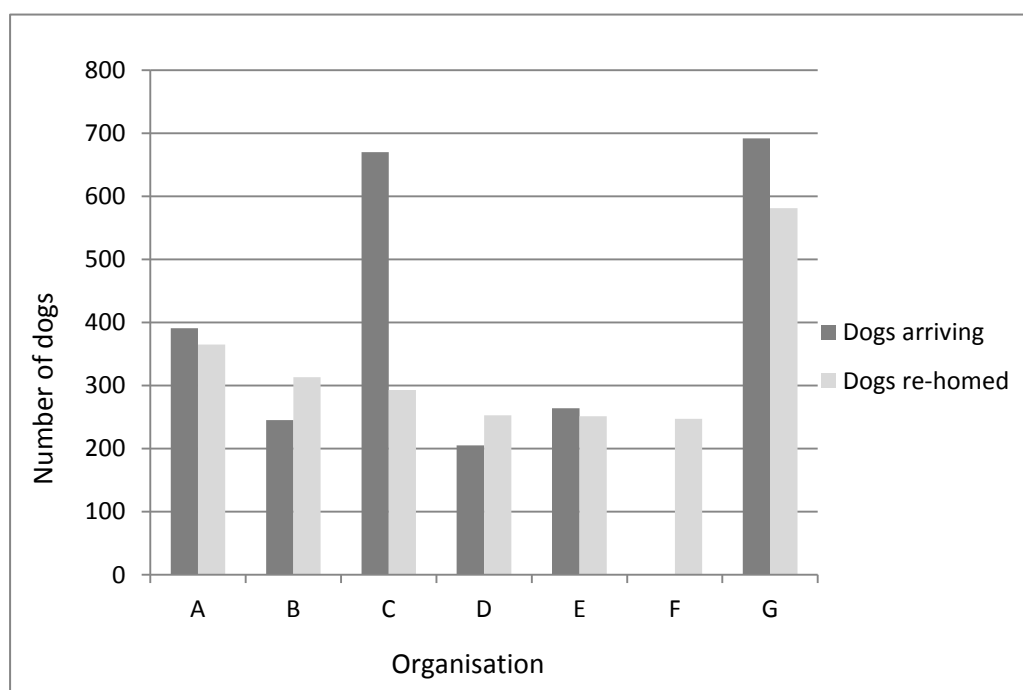


Figure 3: Intake and re-homing figures for the year 2011-2012.

Shelter re-homing and re-relinquishment

The number of dogs re-homed by each organisation throughout the study period ranged from 48 to 291 with a median of 124. Re-relinquishment ranged from 4% to 20% with a median of 11%. This is illustrated in more detail in Table 3.

Organisation	Re-homing Jan-April 2014	Re-relinquishment Jan-April 2014	Proportion
A	157	32	20%
B	109	7	6%
C	108	16	15%
D	68	3	4%
E	87	10	11%
F	48	3	6%
G	291	35	12%
TOTAL	868	106	12%

Table 3: Return and re-relinquishment rates in participating organisations during study period

Return figures per organisation

The median response rate for the recruitment questionnaire overall was 29% but individual organisations ranged from 6% to 65% of adoptions. This is illustrated further in Table 4.

Organisation	Number of recruitment questionnaires returned	Response rate = number of questionnaires/ number of dogs rehomed
A	102	65%
B	26	24%
C	6	6%
D	10	15%
E	15	17%
F (+10 pilot questionnaires)	23	48%
G (+10 pilot questionnaires)	46	16%
TOTAL	248	29%

Table 4: Estimated response rates for each participating organisation

RESULTS

2 - Recruitment questionnaire

Analysis of Question 1- 'I want to adopt a dog because....'

The main themes to emerge identified the perceived benefits to the owner alongside a wish to help an animal in need. Social benefits to people and increased activity are commonly mentioned. Dogs are discussed in terms of general positivity, for example; '*They bring me enormous joy and fun. Dogs are ace*'. Owners also discussed their decision making, with the majority following a logical decision making process which was often based on previous experience. For example: '*Have loved dogs all my life, had as a child. Want my own now I can afford one!*' A smaller number of respondents admitted a more emotional response such as '*Cos I loves him*'. A complete list of the codes, with example quotes, is displayed in table 5.

Category	Code	Number of quotes	Examples
Social Benefits to humans	Companionship for owners: <i>Where respondent discussed the fact that the dog would provide company for them in the absence of any other role or function, for example as a friend or to reduce loneliness</i>	62	<p>'I want a companion'</p> <p>'I miss the company'</p> <p>'It will stop me from being lonely, it's a friend for life and I love cuddles'</p> <p>'I have been a temporary boarder for Guide dog puppies, but felt I needed my very own dog as a permanent companion to love. I was widowed last year'</p> <p>'I have recently lost my Akita & missing the companionship'</p>

Category	Code	Number of quotes	Examples
			'I've just lost my best friend and would like another bud'
	Companionship for other family members: <i>Where the dog was being introduced as company for another family member, for example a child or an elderly relative</i>	11	'We love the companionship and getting out for walks. This dog we are hoping will be a close companion for my 14 year old son who suffers with anxiety' 'We love dogs and my daughter loves having the company of them'
	Extension of family: <i>Where respondents specifically identified that the dog would exist within their household as a family member</i>	8	'We are an outdoor family, feel that a dog will complete our little team (1 grown up, 1 child, 2 three legged rescue cats)' 'A dog will complete our family'
	Educating children: <i>Where respondents discussed a desire that dog ownership would help their children to develop emotional maturity, for instance that the dog would teach the children responsibility or empathy towards other living things</i>	6	'We want the company of a dog. It teaches our daughter respect and the need to care for others'
	To bring family closer together: <i>Where respondents discussed their hope that owning a dog would bring the family closer together, for example through shared activities or experience</i>	5	'It will help to gather the family together and to be more happy family'

Category	Code	Number of quotes	Examples
	Social Facilitation: <i>Where respondents stated that they hoped the dog would give them increased opportunity to meet and interact with other people</i>	1	'Companionship, enjoy walks, social side of owning a dog'
Benefits to individual owner	Love of species: <i>Where respondents made a broad statement about their love of dogs, without specifying what it is about them that makes them so appealing</i>	34	'They are good, friendly sociable animals' 'We love dogs' 'They bring me enormous joy and fun. Dogs are ace'
	Increased activity / health benefits: <i>Where the aim was for the dog to improve the health and physical wellbeing of the respondent, for example through weight loss or increased exercise</i>	24	'Our family would like to go outdoors more and share good times with a loving dog' 'We have an elderly dog and we are active walkers so we are looking for a pet to share this with'
	Caregiving: <i>Where respondents discussed wanting a dog as an outlet for affection, for example as something to love</i>	14	'We love dogs, we have a great place for them to live and we have time and love to give ' 'I need a reason to get up in the morning. I need someone to love and care for'
	Fulfilment: <i>Where respondents made broad statements about a positive emotional state that the dog could provide or bring to their lives, for example – 'Happiness', 'Makes home complete'</i>	11	'We loved our Border collie and when he passed away there was a big part of our world missing that we want to fill again'

Category	Code	Number of quotes	Examples
	Necessity: <i>Where respondents felt strongly that they must have a dog – for example it is no longer a choice for them but something they consider as a fundamental need e.g. 'could not live without'</i>	5	'I always have a dog. My dog recently died and I can't live alone without my best friend'
	New challenges: <i>Where respondents discussed wanting a dog as a project to work on, for example wanting something to train or to learn to care for</i>	4	'We feel we could give him a loving home and help him become a well-trained pet'
	Lifting Spirits: <i>Where respondents hinted at a low mood and that the dog would help them to overcome this and to provide them with a positive focus, for example 'it will give me a reason to get up in the morning'</i>	3	'I have recently lost 2 + life isn't the same without a reason to walk in the morning'
	Mutual Benefit: <i>Where respondents discussed that they and their choice of dog would help each other, for example 'we need each other'</i>	2	'We need each other'
	Relaxation: <i>Where respondents discussed that the dog would help them to relax or manage feelings of stress</i>	2	'Because we'd like to give a rescue dog a home. Dogs are often a good way to relax young people. We both work with young people and find animals help them to relax, open up and chat'
	Specific function: <i>Where respondents discussed wanting a dog for a specific functional role – for example as a working dog or to take part in showing or competitive activities</i>	1	'I do agility'

Category	Code	Number of quotes	Examples
Benefits to animal	Altruism: <i>Where the respondent discussed re-homing a dog in order to 'do a good deed' for example to give the dog a good home or a second chance, to help charity or because they felt sorry for the dog</i>	48	<p>'I love dogs & rescue dogs really deserve loving homes'</p> <p>'They deserve a chance in life'</p> <p>'I know there are so many needing good homes & hopefully it helps solve someone else's problem'</p> <p>'No dog should have to live in kennels, good or bad. I hope I can offer her (will be re-named.....) a good home and a decent life'</p> <p>'There are too many puppies and not enough homes'</p>
	Companionship for other animal: <i>Where the dog was introduced as company for an existing dog within the household</i>	21	<p>'We have an ageing bitch with one of her puppies (now 7). He is devoted + inseparable. Need to integrate a young (2-3) bitch to take-over as his best chum. A puppy would not be an option – too much stress for the old dog'</p> <p>'I lost my old Goldie and my other was lonely'</p>
Logical decision making	Replacement for previous pet: <i>Where respondents specifically discussed the loss of a previous dog and / or the role of the new dog helping them to deal with the sense of loss</i>	57	<p>'We have always kept dogs. We like their company and enjoy walking with them. Our last one died 4 months ago from cancer. He was 14 years old'</p>

Category	Code	Number of quotes	Examples
			<p>'Recently lost my German Shepherd'</p> <p>'My previous dog died 2yrs ago and we are ready for a new pet'</p> <p>'My last dog died @ age 3 years and I'm now ready for my next adventure with a different dog'</p> <p>'Our current dog is getting older and we want to have fallen in love with our rescue dog before she gets too old or sick'</p> <p>'We recently lost a dog at age 14 (died) and (male dog) is 14 + (female dog) needs a friend for when (male dog) goes'</p>
	<p>Lifestyle choice: <i>Where the respondent stated a long term association with dogs as a part of their life, for example 'we have always had dogs' or 'we grew up with dogs' or where the dog was a beneficial addition to their home environment for no specific reason, for example 'we like having a dog around'</i></p>	55	<p>'I have always owned a dog'</p> <p>'Have had wonderful dogs since childhood'</p> <p>'We enjoy walking and its never the same without a dog. Loved dogs all my life'</p> <p>'We have grown up with dogs as part of our family – it would be 'odd' without one as they enrich our family life'</p> <p>'Trained and knowledge of animal. Children need</p>

Category	Code	Number of quotes	Examples
			interaction with animals and we have always had animals, horses, goats, pigs, cats, dogs'
	Right time: <i>Where respondents identified that they had decided to get a dog previously, but had waited until their circumstances were suited to dog ownership, for example retirement, working from home, or children reaching a suitable age</i>	23	'We have retired and feel it's the right time to get another dog' 'Have loved dogs all my life, had as a child. Want my own now I can afford one!'
	Dog factors: <i>Where respondents stated that they were looking for a dog that met specific requirements in terms of the physical characteristics of the dog (age, breed, appearance)</i>	9	'Want older dog' 'We've been without a dog for 21 months and preferred to adopt an adult dog for company + walks'
	Trust in organisation: <i>Where respondents made a determined choice to obtain a dog from a specific organisation due to positive association with the centre</i>	2	'I know he will have a health check & assessed for temperament & behaviour'
Illogical decision making	Couldn't say no: <i>Where respondents felt compelled to adopt a dog due to their instant attraction to the dog e.g. impulsive or love at first sight reactions</i>	3	'Cos I loves him'
Other	Protest against commercial breeding: <i>Where respondents made a negative statement about breeding dogs for profitable purposes or stated</i>	4	'I feel strongly that we should rescue dogs rather than encourage dog breeders when there are still dogs needing

Category	Code	Number of quotes	Examples
	<i>concerns about obtaining dogs from puppy farms or backgrounds with questionable welfare standards</i>		homes'
Blank	Blank: 3 forms did not have this question answered. 2 of these forms were completely unanswered.		

Table 5: Owner reasons for dog adoption

Analysis of Question 2 –‘I have chosen to get my dog from a rescue centre because.....’

The most common theme for obtaining a dog from a re-homing centre was to help the dog and make a positive contribution to animal welfare, either on an individual basis to the chosen dog or in a broader sense, for example: ‘*Giving a dog a new life / home / new experiences*’ and ‘*It’s the right thing to do*’. Respondents also showed a willingness to use re-homing centres either to obtain a dog that met specific requirements for example; ‘*Wanted an older dog as we are retired and didn’t want a puppy*’ or due to confidence in the re-homing process for example; ‘*They need a home. You know what you are getting. You get support*’. A complete list of the codes, with example quotes, is seen in table 6.

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
Altruism	<i>Where the respondent discussed re-homing a dog in order to ‘do a good deed’ for example to give the dog a good home or a second chance, to help charity or because they felt sorry for the dog</i>	170	‘Want to give a dog a home rather than encouraging more breeding’ ‘Giving a dog a new life / home / new experiences’ ‘It’s the right thing to do’ ‘I want to give an older dog a chance’ ‘Would like to try and stop puppy farming’ ‘I strongly believe in rescues over breeding. A

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			<p>chance to give a good, permanent loving home to a dog who's been through hard times'</p> <p>'Puppies are easily homed, whereas older / unwanted dogs often end up left behind'</p> <p>'Everyone deserves a second chance'</p> <p>'Far too many animals need a good home, breeders should not keep adding more animals for greed'</p> <p>'It's not their fault they have to be rehomed. Donating to dog charities will support future dogs who need care. I can make a difference'</p>
Dog factors	<i>Where respondents state they were looking for a dog that meets specific requirements in terms of the physical characteristics of the dog (age, breed, appearance)</i>	34	<p>'Rescue dogs deserve a break and also able to obtain adult dog'</p> <p>'We want to give a loving home to an unwanted dog. We have had a puppy before and don't particularly enjoy that stage'</p> <p>'Wanted an older dog as we are retired and didn't want a puppy'</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			'We like that particular breed'
Owner factors	Caregiving: <i>Where respondents discussed wanting a dog as an outlet for affection, for example as something to love</i>	25	'I would like continue giving the love and care they need' 'To give them a loving, caring new home with love and affection'
	Couldn't say no: <i>Where respondents had felt compelled to adopt a dog due to their instant attraction to the dog e.g. impulsive or love at first sight reactions</i>	2	'I fell in love with the dog I saw and we all like animals especially dogs'
Re-homing centre factors	Trust in organisation: <i>Where respondents made a determined choice to obtain a dog from the specific organisation due to positive association with the centre</i>	27	'I have adopted from here before & trust the establishment' 'Reliable home checks. Good background of dog's previous history. Back up after adoption' 'They do a valuable job and checks are done and we are assessed for our suitability to the dog'
	A protest against commercial breeding: <i>Where respondents made a negative statement about breeding dogs for profitable purposes or stated concerns about obtaining dogs from puppy farms or backgrounds with questionable welfare</i>	24	'Don't agree with dog breeding' 'Feel there are too many abandoned dogs. Do not want to encourage unnecessary breeding'

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			'Every pet deserves a home not just pedigrees'
	Charitable donations: <i>Where respondents expressed a desire to support charitable work through adopting their dog from a re-homing organisation</i>	11	'Would rather give an 'unwanted' dog a home. Money not an issue but generally prefer to support charities' 'I am a long-time supporter of (organisation G) and sponsor two dogs'
	Practicality: <i>Where respondents were looking for a dog from a convenient source, for example the centre was near their home or they felt that the dogs were more affordable</i>	9	'The cost of puppies is very high and if we can rehome one that would be great' 'I live local and have had a dog from (organisation A) previously'
	Recommendation: <i>Where the organisation was been recommended to the respondent through friends, family or acquaintances</i>	6	'They have a good reputation, friends recommend them and it gives a dog a second chance' 'I have friends who have had a good experience here' 'My wife told me'
'Safety Net'	Previous experience: <i>Where respondents detailed having re-homed a previous dog from the organisation or having used the organisation before,</i>	35	'I have adopted from here before & trust the establishment'

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
	<i>and they wished to repeat this experience</i>		<p>'Our normal route to finding a pet'</p> <p>'Had wonderful experiences of adopting before and wanted to be able to have that experience again. Also so many dogs that need a home and we can offer that'</p>
	<i>Predictability: Where respondents expressed a belief that the organisation would provide them with a dog of predictable behaviour or temperament and therefore expressed a feeling of safety through adopting a dog with them</i>	16	<p>'It's my first time owning a dog and I want one that's already been trained'</p> <p>'They need a home. You know what you are getting. You get support'</p> <p>'Would not wish to conventionally purchase an adult bitch, with unknown provenance'</p> <p>'You have some idea of characteristics + behaviours'</p>

Table 6: Owner reasons for choosing a rescue dog

Analysis of question 3 – ‘I have chosen my particular dog because.....’

The main theme for why people chose a particular dog was predictability. This was described in terms of the dog’s personality, breed characteristics, familiarity, behaviour and recommendation by the re-homing organisation. Less commonly, people revealed more impulsive decisions such as ‘*She is pretty and unusual and we loved her on sight*’ or ‘*I fell in love*’. A small number of respondents chose their dog based on how well they expected them to fit into the household, for example: ‘*He best suits our needs for what the environment is that we are taking him into*’. A minority of comments discussed a wish to make the individual dog’s life better for example ‘*She has been there the longest and she is fabulous and deserves a home*’. A complete list of the codes, with example quotes, is seen in table 7.

Category	Code	Number of responses	Examples
Predictability	Personality trait: <i>Where the respondent detailed a belief that the dog had desirable personality traits which were not related to specific, measurable behaviours. For example the dog was happy or friendly</i>	60	<p>'She is very calm and loving'</p> <p>'Beautiful temperament'</p> <p>'He has character, + has been down on his luck'</p> <p>'He seems a balanced dog who will fit in with our home arrangements'</p> <p>'Boisterous'</p> <p>'She has a sweet nature, enjoys life to the full and is v. obedient & shows genuine affection for us and our other dog'</p>
	Breed characteristics: <i>Where respondents expressed an affiliation with the particular breed of dog they had chosen, but NOT due to previous personal experience of the breed</i>	50	<p>'Intelligence, breed characteristics '</p> <p>'Right breed (collie) & dog is bright, friendly & right age'</p> <p>'He was 10yrs old, small, and my favourite breed type JRT'</p> <p>'Specific to our requirements colour, breed and sex'</p> <p>'Staffy's have had a real bad time in the press in recent times, and I would like to show that not all Staffy's are evil, but can make lovely, loving pets'</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Examples
	Similarity to previous dog: <i>Where respondents made their choice due to positive experience with a previous dog, and similarities between their new dog and the previous dog</i>	36	<p>'I like the breed – had 2 previously'</p> <p>'Already have Springer'</p> <p>'He's same as my old dog lovely nature'</p> <p>'My last one was a J.R.T'</p>
	Behaviour with potential owner: <i>Where the dog demonstrated specific, measurable behaviour with the respondents that they found appealing, for instance the dog was bouncy, active or lively</i>	30	<p>'Quiet, good with cats and calm'</p> <p>'He is a Border Collie, a breed we know and like, and young so he will hopefully be with us a long time – and because he appears to be good with other dogs – important on walks'</p> <p>'He seems good with my children and well trained'</p>
	Meets specific behaviour requirements: <i>Where the respondents required particular behaviours from the dog to meet their lifestyle and chose the dog based on knowledge of these being present or absent, for example, good with children, cats or happy being left alone</i>	22	<p>'I liked him, he is housetrained and would be able to be left on his own at times'</p> <p>'He ticks all the boxes (cat, child, travels well)'</p> <p>'It is a breed I am familiar with + I am told it comes from a home with an elderly lady so will suit my lifestyle. It won't be too frisky + jump up + should not need too much toilet training'</p> <p>'He's a plodder like me'</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Examples
	Chosen by organisation: <i>Where the respondents described that the dog had been chosen for them, or that their choice was suggested by family, friends or acquaintances</i>	7	<p>'We were matched with him and once we'd met we couldn't resist'</p> <p>'Like collies; advice from centre seems to suggest he will fit our lifestyle and we will fit his'</p>
	Advertising: <i>Where respondents were influenced by the advertising displayed by the organisation</i>	3	'My husband & I looked at her photo & knew she was right for us. Her age & temperament appeared ideal for what we were looking for'
	Support from centre: <i>Where the owner's choice was influenced by the knowledge that they would receive post adoption support from the re-homing centre</i>	1	'I know if anything happens to me he will be looked after'
Impulsive	Physical characteristics: <i>Where respondents stated that they were looking for a dog that met specific requirements in terms of the physical characteristics of the dog that did not relate to a specific breed. For example: age, sex or appearance</i>	68	<p>'She is a pup! Also correct markings'</p> <p>'He looks very nice'</p> <p>'Little dogs suit me better'</p> <p>'She is pretty and unusual and we loved her on sight'</p> <p>'He is cute and white'</p> <p>'Cute when hairy (not after haircut!)</p> <p>'He's old and needs a lovely home to 'retire''</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Examples
	Couldn't say no: <i>Where respondents felt compelled to adopt a particular dog due to their instant attraction e.g. impulsive or love at first sight reactions</i>	34	<p>'I fell in love'</p> <p>'Have been looking for a few weeks, waiting for "that connection"</p> <p>'Not what I intended, was looking for an older dog but this one (8 months) responded well to me and was a joy to get to know'</p> <p>'Love at first sight'</p>
	Dog made choice: <i>Where the respondent felt that the dog chose them rather than them having made a conscious decision to pick the dog themselves</i>	4	'The dog chose us, but she was 6 months old and will grow up with us'
	Availability: <i>Where the respondent chose their dog based on them being available for re-homing when they were looking, possibly in combination with other specific requirements such as being a puppy or a certain breed</i>	2	'She was the only female pup of the litter'
	Chosen by friends or family: <i>Where the respondent described that the dog has been chosen for them, or that their choice was suggested by family, friends or acquaintances</i>	2	'Friendly, excitable. My husband initially selected her. I would choose any dog'
	Unsure: <i>Where respondents were unsure why they</i>	2	'No idea'

Category	Code	Number of responses	Examples
	<i>chose their dog, or their choice was somewhat random</i>		
Ease	<i>Suited to current lifestyle: Where respondents made a choice based on a perception that the dog would fit into their household without struggling to settle in or requiring further training</i>	24	<p>'She suits our circumstances'</p> <p>'He best suits our needs for what the environment is that we are taking him into'</p> <p>'He fits into our life & we suit him too'</p>
	<i>Behaviour with existing dog: Where the dog demonstrated specific, measurable behaviour with an existing household dog that the respondents found appealing</i>	11	<p>'He's adorable ☺ Also he is fun loving, good with children and enjoys human interaction. He is also strong enough to enjoy the company of a very energetic dog that visits regularly'</p> <p>'Pretty, gets on existing dog – vice versa'</p>
Altruism	<i>Caregiving: Where the respondent chose the dog based on specific needs of the dog that they felt able to fulfil, or because they feel that this dog was a particularly deserving cause. For example to help the dog get over nervousness or the dog that had been there the longest</i>	10	<p>'(They) "fit". We (family of four) all want a dog in our home. (They) need and deserve a loving home to chill out and have fun in'</p> <p>'Think I can do a lot to help her get her faith back in humans'</p> <p>'She has been there the longest and she is fabulous and deserves a home'</p>
	<i>Mutual benefit: Where respondents discussed that they and their choice of dog would help each other, for</i>	3	'Because I have osteoarthritis sciatica and sugar diabetes and (she) is so loving, gentle and kind and completely ignores my little cat who sits

Category	Code	Number of responses	Examples
	<i>example 'we need each other'</i>		on my bed and hisses at (her). And at the end of November 2012 I lost my brother to Myeloma cancer and now I have no blood family, and I felt so empty and alone and I got in touch with (organisation F) and he came to see me and I had to wait 10 months for (her) but she was worth it, and I have someone to get up for each day and get out and we have a walk. And care for and love + be loved by and I feel I have a purpose in life once again. I am not alone any more'
Adaptability	<i>Where the respondent stated a desire to get a dog that they could train, or would be able to adapt to fit their lifestyle and requirements</i>	11	'She is young and able to bring her up the way we want' 'He is young and can learn family life'
Difference to previous dog	<i>Where respondents made a conscious decision to get a dog that was different to their previous dog</i>	1	'Completely diff dog to our previous dog – which was a Staffie'

Table 7: Owner reasons for choosing their particular dog

Analysis of question 4 – ‘How do you feel about the changes this dog will bring to your life?’

This question was not included in the pilot questionnaire. The most common response was to express a general positivity about adopting a new pet. Where specific benefits were discussed a common emergent theme was social benefits to people, for example;

‘Companionship in retirement’ or *‘She will be good company and a good at calming us’*. Benefits to human health and welfare were also important, for example; *‘Very positive – I will have to get used to getting up earlier in the mornings to take him out & walking more in the afternoons therefore more fresh air and exercise’*. A minority of respondents expressed a feeling of generalised anxiety or uncertainty and about what to expect, for example; *‘Apprehensive, nervous and excited!’* Very few respondents expressed any specific concerns, for example: *‘Some downsides / restrictions outweighed by relationship with dog’*. A complete list of the codes, with example quotes, is seen in Table 8.

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
General Positivity	<i>Where the respondent was looking forward to obtaining their dog but the reasons for this were not specified, for example feeling happy or excited</i>	135	<i>‘Happy’</i> <i>‘Looking forward to them’</i> <i>‘Happy new memories to build’</i> <i>‘Excited’</i> <i>‘Expect them to be numerous and positive’</i>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			<p>‘Enjoyment, companionship and hopefully a positive learning experience for our family’</p> <p>‘He will make our life whole again’</p> <p>‘I’m confident there will be no adverse changes to my life only enrichment’</p> <p>‘They will all be positive I am sure’</p> <p>‘It will bring joy, happiness and more love to the family’</p>
General anxiety	<i>Where the respondent had some concerns about obtaining their new dog, but the specific reasons for this are not detailed, for instance they feel nervous or anxious</i>	14	<p>‘It’s going to be manic but we are prepared’</p> <p>‘Apprehensive, nervous and excited! ‘</p> <p>‘Always apprehensive with a new one but we have met him before’</p>
Social benefit to human	<i>Companionship: Where the respondent was particularly looking forward to the company the dog would bring</i>	45	<p>‘She will be very rewarding and offer companionship for life’</p> <p>‘It will make me feel less lonely but otherwise will not change many things. It will be walked by my daughter with her 2 dogs’</p> <p>‘I cannot bear life without a dog. They are such faithful</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			<p>companions and so rewarding'</p> <p>'Companionship in retirement'</p> <p>'Company, on walks + runs and around the house'</p>
	Family role: <i>Where the respondent was particularly looking forward to the dog enhancing family life through shared activity and experience</i>	9	<p>'Coped having kids – hopefully dog will be easier – get us out more in the fresh air'</p> <p>'We are looking forward to enjoying family walks and him welcoming us home every day'</p> <p>'Bring the family closer, get us to exercise more! More family activities e.g. walking in woods'</p>
	Fun: <i>Where the respondent described the dog as a catalyst for having more fun</i>	8	<p>'He will enhance my life bringing a new energy and lots of love and joy'</p> <p>'Positive – fun'</p>
	Filling a void: <i>Where the owners discussed how having a dog would complete their life or fill a void from a lost companion</i>	7	<p>'She will replace an old dog that we loved and we will love her the same'</p> <p>'He will make our life whole again'</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
	Social Facilitation: <i>Where the respondent was particularly looking forward to the opportunity for increased social interaction through dog ownership</i>	5	'Extremely positive. The walking is good for us both, so many people talk to us and already she is a dear companion, especially when I am feeling lonely'
	Travel: <i>Where the respondent was particularly looking forward to taking holidays or trips with the dog – the dog was a catalyst for more enjoyable leisure time</i>	3	'Some trepidation – and excitement. We plan to travel in our camper van and take our dog with us'
	Relaxation: <i>Where the respondent described the dog as a route to relaxation</i>	1	'She will be good company and a good at calming us'
	Security: <i>Where the respondent was particularly looking forward to the feelings of security that dog ownership brings</i>	1	'Due to bereavement it will be company, security and enjoyment'
Health and welfare benefits	Exercise: <i>Where the respondent was particularly looking forward to increased activity with their new dog</i>	58	<p>'Companionship, keeps us fit'</p> <p>'Make me run faster!'</p> <p>'Very positive – I will have to get used to getting up earlier in the mornings to take him out & walking more in the afternoons therefore more fresh air and exercise'</p> <p>'Very positive. Losing weight now!'</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			<p>'To get me out each day. To keep us both active'</p> <p>'This will be a big change for (the dog) and myself – as a 1st time owner – but hopefully all good. She needs a lot of exercise and so do I'</p>
Shared experiences with dog	Caregiving role: <i>Where the respondent was particularly looking forward to the dog being an outlet for caregiving and being something to love</i>	9	<p>'Good, it will get us out on walks & will help us to not just think about ourselves & care for him'</p> <p>'Beneficial to all of us. Someone to love'</p>
	Functional role: <i>Where the respondent was particularly looking forward to engaging in specific activities with the dog, for example showing or competing</i>	4	'Looking forward to training and the responsibility'
Expectations	Willing to work on things: <i>Where the respondent expected difficulties with their new dog but expressed a willingness to deal with issues as they arrive and to work through them</i>	10	<p>'We are prepared to train this dog to be well mannered so we can take our dog with us and enjoy long walks'</p> <p>'Ok, had dog before for 11yrs, it's a partnership more than anything'</p>
	Not expecting any surprises: <i>Where the respondent expressed a belief that they were well prepared for the arrival of their new dog, and did not expect to face any unexpected events</i>	8	<p>'Very aware'</p> <p>'I'm used to having dogs and he wouldn't bring any changes to my life'</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
	Unsure what to expect: <i>Where the respondent admitted that they felt unsure what to expect from life with their new dog</i>	6	'Not sure'
	Commitment concerns: <i>Where the respondent expressed specific concerns relating to the restrictions on their lifestyle associated with keeping a dog</i>	5	'Some downsides / restrictions outweighed by relationship with dog' 'Only on the type of hotel, and shopping list'
	Not expecting any changes: <i>Where the respondents did not expect to have to adapt their lifestyle or make any changes to accommodate their new dog</i>	5	'I am so used to long walks with my dog etc. (+ holidays by the sea together) that, as soon as we adjust to each other, I do not think there will be too many changes' 'I'm used to having dogs and he wouldn't bring any changes to my life'
Benefit to other pets	<i>Where the dog was perceived as a benefit to other dogs within the household, for instance providing company or acting as a playmate</i>	2	'Calm my other dog down'

Table 8: Owner's feelings about adoption of new dog

Analysis of question 5 – ‘Please list any worries you have, or any possible problems you anticipate with your new dog:’

The main theme to emerge from this question was that a lot of owners were not expecting any problems with their new dog. Where problems were discussed, they most commonly related to the dog settling in or adapting to the owners’ lifestyle, for example : ‘*That it will take a little time for him to gain confidence in living in a house*’ or ‘*Little apprehensive re how cat and dog will get on*’. Relationship issues were also discussed, for example letting the dog down, getting to know each other or distress at the eventual end of the relationship. Some respondents expressed concerns about known medical or behaviour problems, or the possibility of discovering new issues, for example; ‘*(He) is quite nervous of sudden noises so we will have to introduce him gradually*’ and ‘*We have to housetrain her and teach her not to worry if she is left alone*’. A minority of owners expressed concerns about the possibility of more generalised training or behaviour issues. A complete list of the codes, with example quotes, is seen in Table 9.

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
NONE	<i>Where a respondent did not expressed any worries. NB ‘Blank’ answers were included in this category if the rest of the questionnaire was filled in and this was the only empty answer.</i>	115	‘None ‘ ‘No worries – have had collies before’ ‘I don’t anticipate any problems’ ‘I have no worries’ ‘

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			<p>No worries whatsoever. We will meet challenges if they arise'</p> <p>'Being positive feel she will fit in brilliantly'</p> <p>'No worries at all he is an angel'</p> <p>'I don't have any worries. I can't foresee any possible problems'</p>
General training	Basic Training: <i>Where respondents expressed concerns regarding having to train their dog as per any household pet</i>	20	<p>'He is young and will need some training'</p> <p>'Ex-stray so possibility he might try and run away again. May be difficult to train or get used to living in a house'</p> <p>'Anxiety, over excitable behaviour, and strength of (her), I am hoping that proper training classes will help us both'</p>
	Unspecified behaviour problems: <i>Where respondents expressed concerns regarding non-specified behavioural problems they anticipated that they may experience with their new pet</i>	5	<p>'Worries - that we can manage difficult behaviours. Concerned that he will enjoy living with us'</p> <p>'Negative behaviour change over time. Issues always a worry. Training will be ongoing'</p> <p>'She has spoilt attitude – a little madam'</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			'How he behaves, reacts to his new home'
Specific behaviour problem	Managing a specific fear: <i>Where the respondent was aware of or concerned about a specific fear or anxiety that the dog suffered from and how they could help the dog to overcome this</i>	18	<p>'No worries. Anticipate possible problems at the vet because of knowledge of the dogs history'</p> <p>'(He) is quite nervous of sudden noises so we will have to introduce him gradually'</p> <p>'We know we have to work on her socialisation with other dogs'</p>
	Separation anxiety: <i>Where the respondents expressed specific concerns regarding leaving the dog alone</i>	11	<p>'We have to housetrain her and teach her not to worry if she is left alone'</p> <p>'Barking issue when left, anxious. All problem we need to deal with'</p>
	Destructiveness: <i>Where the respondent expressed specific concerns that the dog could damage their property</i>	9	<p>'Chewing things around the home'</p> <p>'Extremely wet & dirty car after long wet walks'</p>
	Housetraining: <i>Where the owners expressed specific concerns regarding soiling in the house or housetraining their new dog</i>	8	<p>'Housetraining! Leaving her on her own for the days I work'</p> <p>'Possibly house training as not sure if already trained.'</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			Hopefully she will settle and like us!
	Barking: <i>Where the respondents expressed specific concerns regarding the dog barking excessively</i>	6	<p>'Noisy'</p> <p>'I have been told that he sometimes barks when he meets other dogs especially if on the lead. I have not experienced this yet'</p>
	Aggression to people: <i>Where the respondent was specifically concerned that the dog may be aggressive towards themselves or other humans</i>	5	<p>'That she'll not settle – or might bite'</p> <p>'We had another rescue dog for a short while. Having had to give him up because he went for me we were very wary of a 'new' dog, however she is proving to be very easy going & already much part of the family'</p> <p>'Signs of aggression'</p>
	Straying: <i>Where the respondents expressed specific concerns regarding the dog running away</i>	3	<p>'Ex-stray so possibility he might try and run away again. May be difficult to train or get used to living in a house'</p>
Relationship Issues	Letting the dog down: <i>Where respondents expressed concerns that they may not be able to provide the dog with what they need, or that the dog may not be happy with them</i>	12	<p>'Worried about giving him enough time + attention; worried about keeping him safe. Don't anticipate problems but naturally anxious'</p> <p>'Chewing. Being unable to run after a dog and dying before</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			<p>the dog!’</p> <p>‘We hope they love us as much as we love them’ He is not happy!</p> <p>‘We’ll not be able to give him all he needs. He doesn’t settle and we have to bring him back (we are not planning to!) We really appreciate the support the centre offers”</p>
	Getting to know each other: <i>Where respondents expressed concerns about getting to know their new dog, and the dog getting to know them, for instance that they were unsure of what to expect in the early days of the relationship</i>	6	<p>‘None in particular, obviously we need to get to know and understand him’</p> <p>‘He won’t ‘connect’ with us at his age’</p>
	Anticipatory grief: <i>Where the owner expressed concern regarding the grief they will feel at the loss of the dog, or that it will be hard to cope with the inevitable ageing of an older dog</i>	5	<p>‘Losing her’</p> <p>‘The only possible worry is that she will become ill one day, but at present she is fit and well and we are enjoying life together ‘</p>
	Negative effect on behaviour of children: <i>Where the owner expressed concern regarding the effect the dog might have on children’s behaviour</i>	1	<p>‘My daughter sneaking her into her room and getting my daughter to tidy up her stuff’</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
Veterinary Issues	Medical Concerns: <i>Where the respondent expressed specific concerns regarding the health of the dog, for instance managing medical conditions</i>	15	<p>'(He) has something wrong with his leg, this does worry us but we are confident we can deal with this with the support from (organisation G)</p> <p>' Because he's old with an unknown history, potential health issues may occur'</p> <p>'A slight suspect R/H hip movement'</p>
Financial Issues	Cost: <i>Where the respondent detailed specific concerns regarding the cost of caring for their new dog</i>	1	'Separation anxiety. Cost of veterinary treatment. Adjustment to new life'
'Fitting In'	Settling in to new environment: <i>Where respondents expressed concerns regarding their new dog getting to know their household and established routines</i>	39	<p>'She may take time settling in and relaxing as she's had a lot to cope with'</p> <p>'That it will take a little time for him to gain confidence in living in a house'</p> <p>'That she won't settle with us'</p>
	Compatibility with existing pet: <i>Where respondents expressed concerns regarding how well the new dog would mix with existing household animals</i>	20	<p>'Integrating and getting along with the Chihuahua – a small dog with a big bite syndrome!!'</p> <p>'Little apprehensive re how cat and dog will get on'</p> <p>'Will introduce him very carefully under supervision to our</p>

Category	Code	Number of responses	Example
			chickens'
	Restrictions on current lifestyle: <i>Where the respondent expressed specific concerns regarding the commitment involved in looking after a dog, and the changes they would have to make to accommodate this</i>	2	'Getting back into routines and lack of ability to go away whenever we want to'
	Compatibility with family members: <i>Where respondents had specific worries about introducing the dog to family members</i>	2	'Just that he will have a bit of coming and going when I look after grandchildren'

Table 9: Owner worries about life with their new dog

Analysis of question 6 – Sources of Information:

Respondents were able to select as many options as were relevant to them. The most common source of information was the re-homing centre website, but almost as many respondents indicated having used previous experience. The three least popular sources of information were veterinary staff, television documentaries and dog trainers or behaviourists. Responses for the 'other' category included 'You Tube', 'Advertising' and 'Training as a dog handler'.

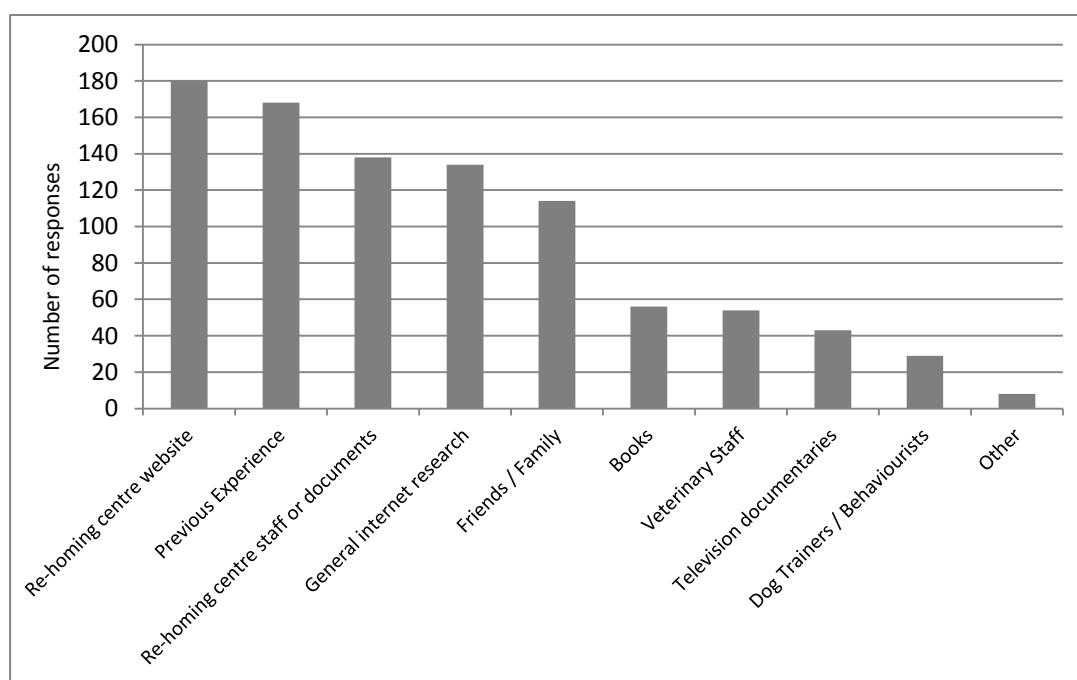


Figure 4: Sources of information accessed by owners prior to adoption

(n=204 but multiple responses per answer)

RESULTS

3 - Descriptive data from follow-up questionnaire

Responses

A total of 130 follow-up questionnaires were returned. Of these 104 were unique, completed responses and eight were unique partial responses, giving a total of 112 questionnaires that were used in analysis. There were six duplicated complete responses, and twelve duplicated partial responses.

The response rate for unique responses to follow up questionnaire was 45%.

Demographic data – owner details (n=112)

The follow up questionnaire was most frequently completed by female participants (78.6% of respondents). There was also a higher frequency of returns from older age groups, with only 0.9% of responses coming from those between 18 and 24, and 9.8% from those between 25 and 34. The more mature age groups were quite evenly represented with 43.8% of respondents being between 35 and 54 and 45.5% being over 55. Respondents came predominantly from village environments (39.3%) with towns or cities being represented by 35.7% of responses and rural environments by 25.0%.

Single adult households comprised 18.8% of respondents, the majority of households having two adult occupants (67.8%). There were three adult occupants in 10.7% of households, and four in 2.7%. The majority of households were childless. Of the 50 households that had children there were eight that had children less than 5 years of age, seven that had children between 6 and 11 years, nineteen with

children between 12 and 16 years and sixteen with children over 16 years of age.

Demographic data – dog details (n=112)

For dogs included in analysis of the follow up questionnaire only 8% of those adopted were puppies under 6 months, with 30% being adolescents between 6 and 18 months. 50% were between 18 months and 8 years, and 12% were over 8 years. Gundogs and Pastoral breeds made up the majority of breed group, followed by mixed breeds. A small number of dogs were from the terrier, hound or toy groups but there were no dogs from the utility or working groups. This is illustrated further in Figure 5.

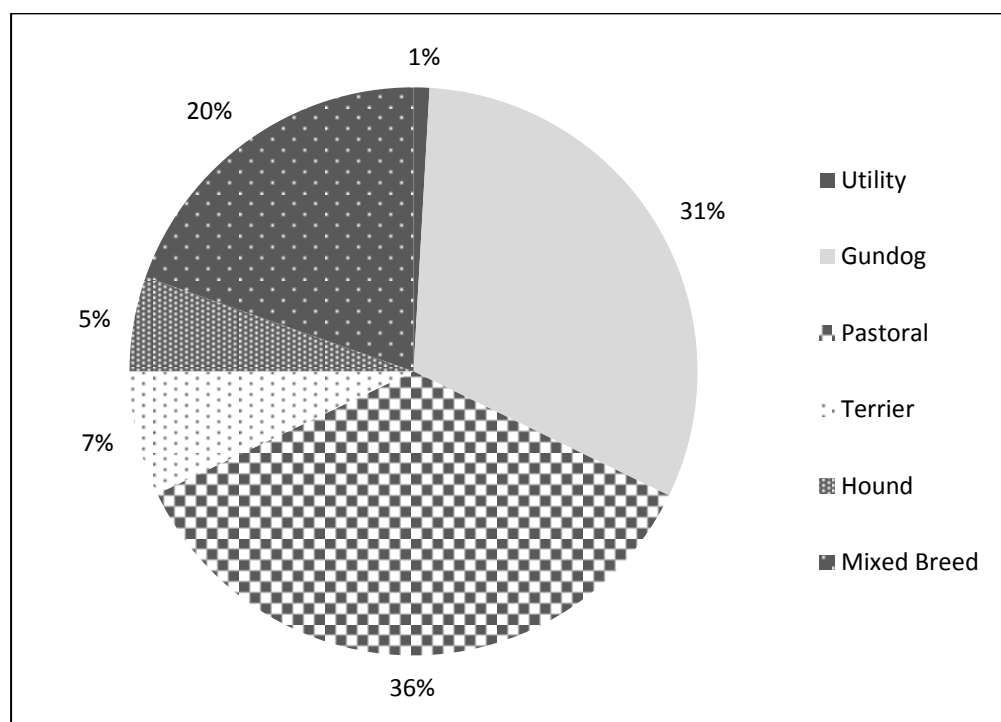


Figure 5: Breed of adopted dog (n=112)

Previous experience of dog ownership

Eighty-eight percent of respondents had owned a previous dog, with 58% having owned two previous dogs, 37% three previous dogs, 21% four previous dogs and 7% at least 5 previous dogs. Gun dogs, pastoral breeds and mixed breed dogs were consistently owned with a higher frequency than other breed groups when considering ownership of the previous five dogs. This is illustrated in more detail in Figure 6.

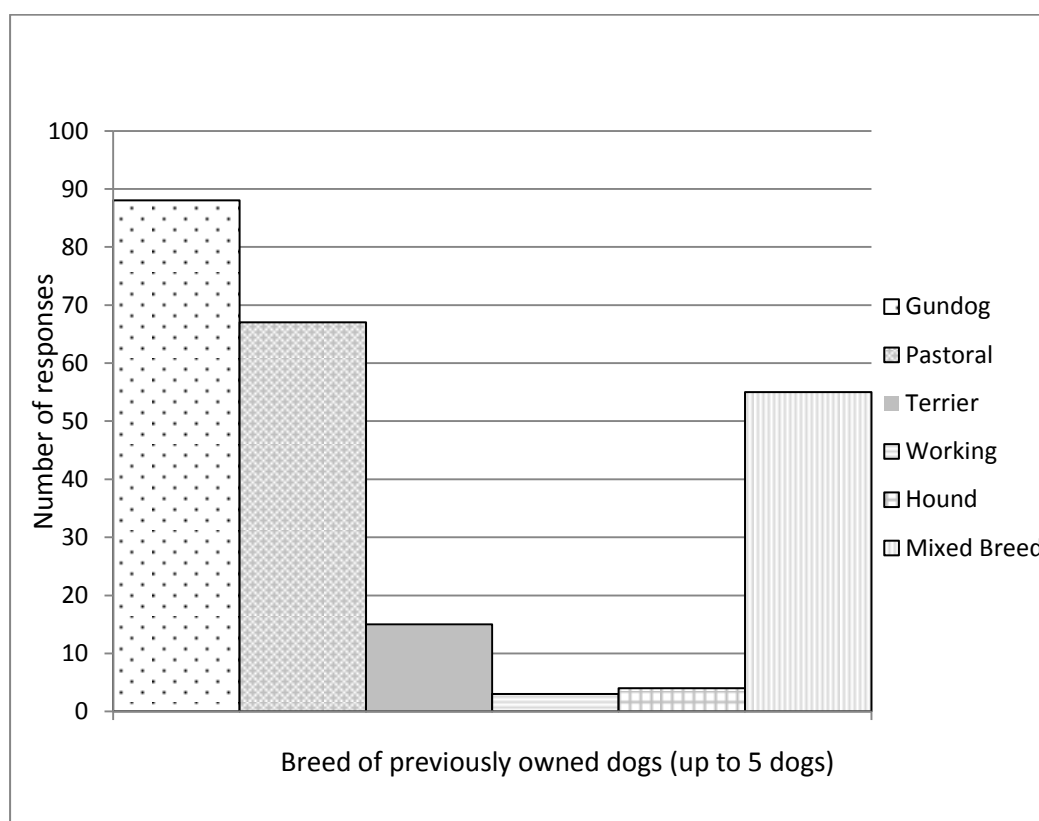


Figure 6: Breed of previously owned dogs

(n=112 people and 232 dogs as respondents listed up to 5 dogs)

The age at which respondents had obtained their previous dog showed wide variation, but puppies under 6 months and adult dogs between 18 months and 8 years were represented with higher frequencies than adolescent dogs between 6 and 18 months or dogs over 8 years of age. Figure 7 illustrates this in more detail

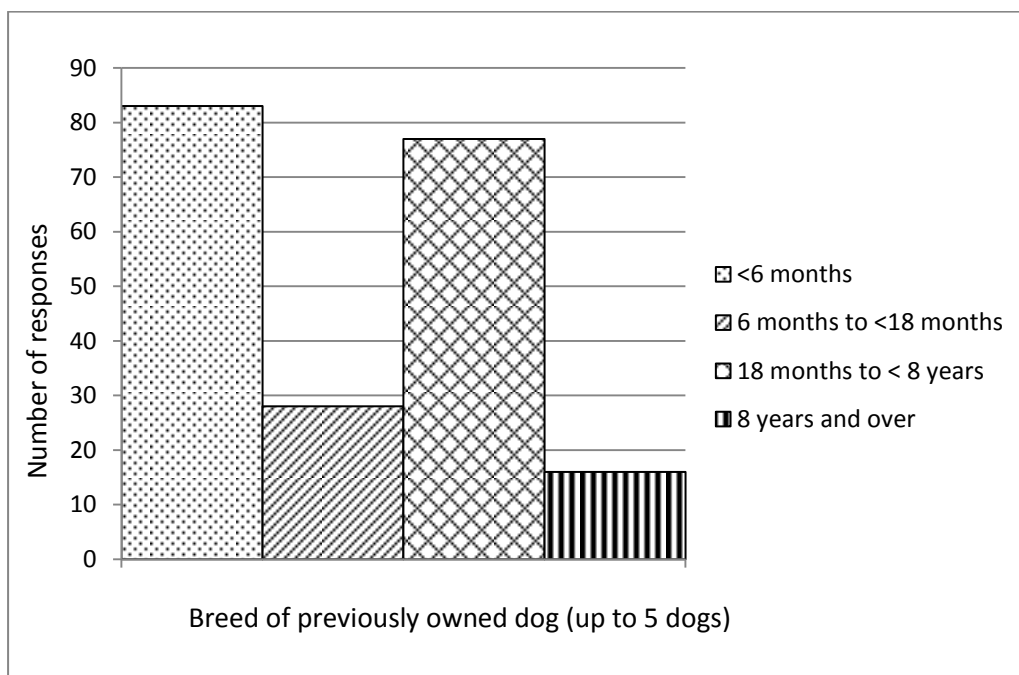


Figure 7: Age at aquisition of previously owned dogs

(n=87 people and 204 dogs as respondents listed up to 5 dogs)

Most owners had obtained their previous dogs from re-homing centres. Breeders (both registered and unregistered) were represented with the next highest frequency, with fewest dogs being obtained from private re-homing's, pet-shops or other sources. These last three sources were grouped as a single category, as illustrated by Figure 8.

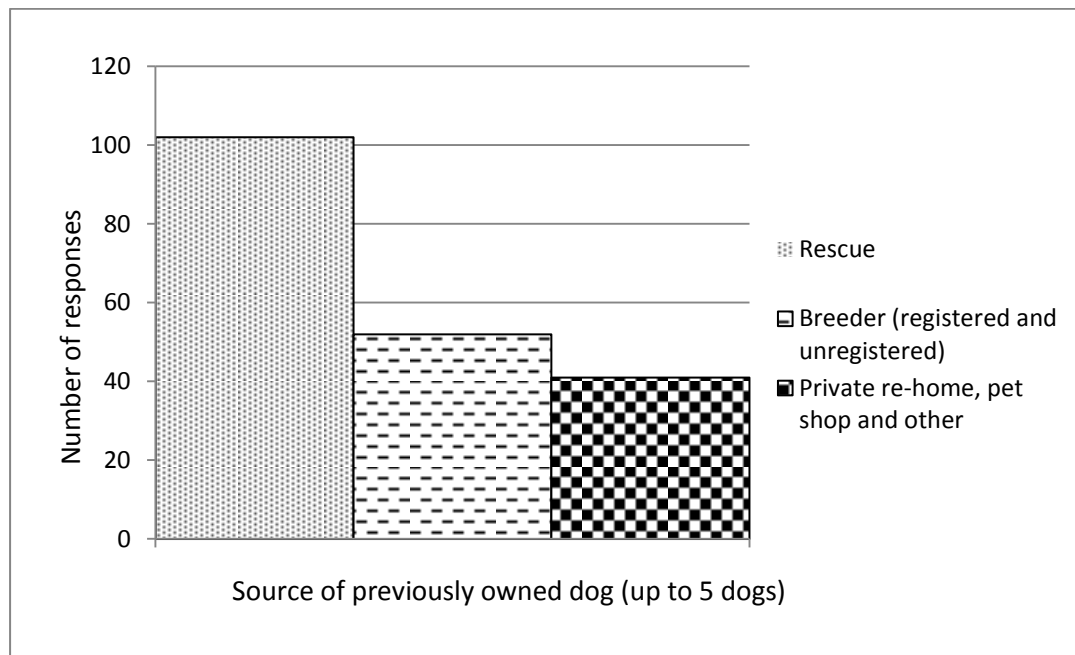


Figure 8: Source of previously owned dogs

(n=85 people and 195 dogs as respondents listed up to 5 dogs)

Finally, owners were asked what had happened to their previous dog. The vast majority of respondents stated that their previous dog had died, although a small number were still with their original owners, and a minority had been re-homed. This is shown in more detail in Figure 9.

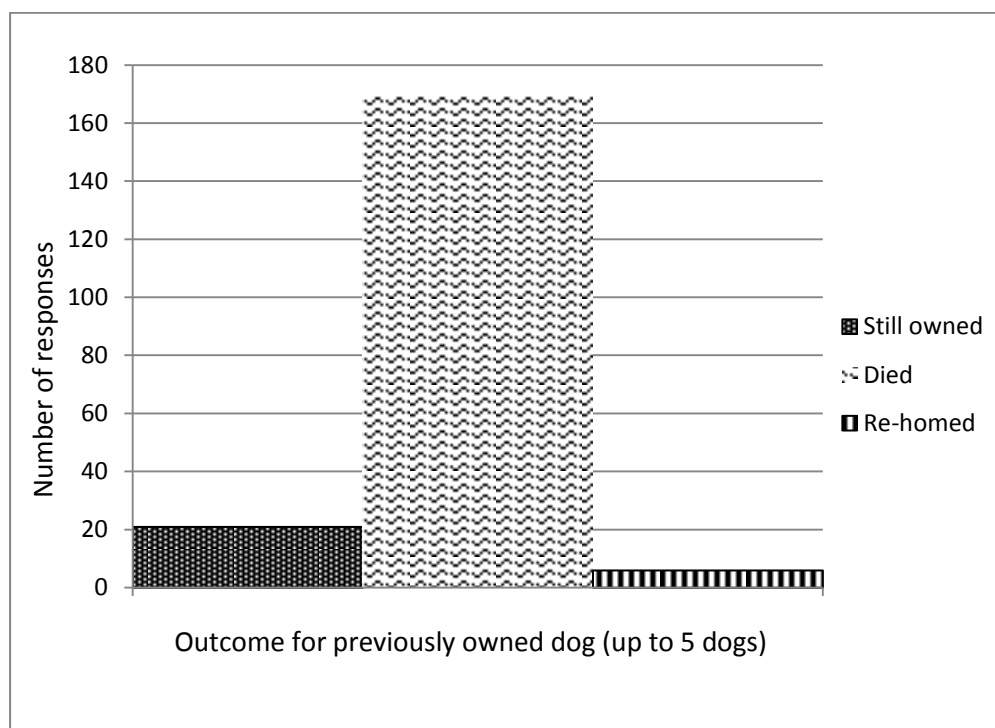


Figure 9: Outcome for previously owned dogs

(n=84 people and 196 dogs as respondents listed up to 5 dogs)

Reasons for choosing a dog

Participants were asked to indicate from a set of tick-boxes why they had chosen to adopt a dog. Respondents could choose as many options as they felt applied to them. Most responses indicated that dogs were chosen as a companion either for the owners or for another animal. A large proportion of respondents also indicated that the dogs would be a catalyst for increased activity and to get outside more, or to make the dog's life better and offer it a good home. Responses for other included '*Because he chose us!*'; '*I could provide a home to a rescue dog*' and '*enriching our lives*'. Figure 10 depicts these answers in more detail.

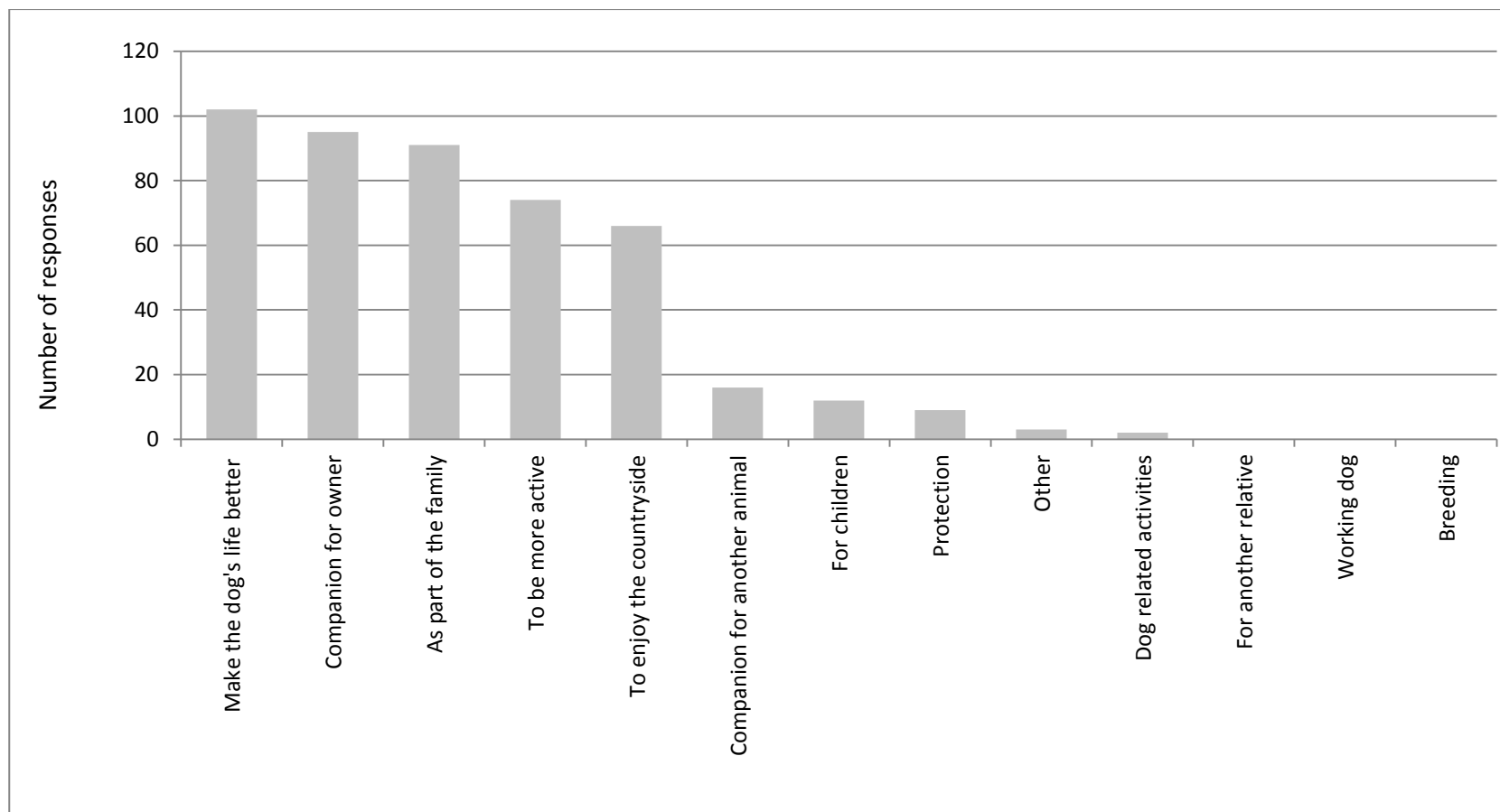


Figure 10: Respondents' reason for wanting a new dog (n=112)

Owner experience of dog adoption

Of the 112 participants who provided unique responses to the follow up questionnaire, 110 still owned their dog. The two owners that no longer had their pet had returned them to the re-homing centre from which they were adopted.

Expectations of dog behaviour are described in terms of the median measurement and inter-quartile range. The calculated quartiles for how well owners expected their dogs to behave when they first got them home was lower than for how well the dogs actually behaved, but the results suggest that owners expected their dog's behaviour to continue to improve over time. When asked how well they thought they knew their dog prior to adoption, the median result was 21, but the median result for how likely it was that owners would adopt again was 100. These measurements are shown in Table 10.

	How well did you <i>expect</i> your dog to behave when you first got them home? (n=109) 0= Very badly 100= Perfectly	How well did your dog behave when you first got them home? (n=110) 0= Very badly 100= Perfectly	How well did you expect your dog to behave once they settled in? (n=110) 0= Very badly 100= Perfectly	How well do you feel you knew your dog prior to adoption? (n=110) 0= Not at all 100= Very well	How likely is it that you would adopt another dog in the future? (n=110) 0= Never again 100= Definitely
Median	47	71	80	21	100
Interquartile range	28-53	50-94	66-93	8-50	93-100

Table 10: Expectations of dog behaviour

The Wilcoxon signed rank test to test the null hypothesis that there was no reported difference between the dogs expected behaviour and actual behaviour when they first went home was performed and rejected ($p < 0.001$). Consideration of the data

demonstrated that the owner's perception was that their dogs had behaved significantly better than they had expected them to when they first took them home.

Some respondents also provided free text answers to describe any unexpected events that had happened with their dog. A minority of owners described positive events such as unexpectedly good behaviour, engaging in new activities or being unprepared for the bond that would form between themselves and their dog. The majority of answers detailed poor training or undesirable behaviours, together with disruption to the household. A few answers highlighted that the owners felt they had been misinformed by the re-homing centre. Table 11 summarises these in more detail.

Category	Number of responses	Example
Unexpected good behaviour	17	'We didn't expect him to settle in so quickly and be such a huge part of our lives' 'Hasn't had any accidents in the house at all' 'He has been well trained previously' 'His ability to walk off the lead after only 2 weeks'
Unexpected Attachment / Bonding	6	'The recognition to us within a couple of weeks'

Category	Number of responses	Example
		'We didn't expect him to settle in so quickly and be such a huge part of our lives'
Training issues	12	<p>'Correcting bad habits and improving the training that was inherent in him'</p> <p>'Having adopted older dogs in the past, we had forgotten just how bouncy a young, untrained dog can be!'</p> <p>'(He) is improving more all the time, we can already throw a ball for him and he drops it at our feet. just need him to stop pulling as much on his lead and he will be sorted'</p>
Aggression to other dogs	8	<p>'He's not very friendly with other dogs, although he seemed to be when I walked him at the kennels.'</p> <p>'Some change in personality - walked well on the lead and suddenly began barking aggressively when meeting other dogs. This is not an issue and is something that we are working to modify.'</p>
Negative (non-aggressive) response to other animals	5	<p>'Not really social with some dogs. Very vocal.'</p> <p>'Very clingy, does not like my cats'</p>

Category	Number of responses	Example
Aggression to people	6	<p>'Initial aggression and fear around her own food'</p> <p>'Tendency to nip'</p> <p>'Chasing lawn mower and noisy garden equipment. He bites the person using them'</p>
Negative (non-aggressive) response to people	2	'Not good with children'
Generalised anxiety	9	<p>'He is afraid of shadows & his own reflection'</p> <p>"Chronic anxiety, some snapping"</p>
Health issues	6	<p>'He had a hernia that the rehoming centres vet did not notice. He also was covered in fleas which took several treatments to get rid of'</p> <p>'Bad kennel cough which needed antibiotics and a large early vets bill!'</p> <p>'Came with suspected slipped disc, but actually has a motor neurone brain condition'</p> <p>'Her behaviour changed a bit after I had her spayed. She had a nasty infection in her uterus and is obviously feeling much better now. She is much more lively and sometimes mischievous, which is great to see'</p>

Category	Number of responses	Example
Housetraining	7	<p>'Told it was house trained but we had a series of accidents for about 2-3 weeks!'</p> <p>'Perhaps he took a bit longer getting toilet trained but he is much better now.'</p>
Separation anxiety	4	'Anxious when left alone'
Chasing behaviour	4	'Chasing cats does not like traffic'
Destructive behaviour	3	'He jumps onto surfaces, runs off, chews anything, goes to bite occasionally'
Engaging in a new activity	2	<p>'Joined a dog walking group where I met lots of new people and got to visit new places. Discovered far more of the local countryside than I already knew.'</p>
Personality traits	3	'Playful'
Misinformation from re-homing organisation	4	<p>'The rescue centre only had him for a few days but thought he was good with other dogs. He is not. The said he was calm. Ok. He is sometimes, but can be rough and has no play boundaries. I am having to pay out of precious savings for personal training until such time as (he) is ready to go into a class'</p> <p>'Was listed as toilet trained and ok to be left - info from previous homes who had brought him back; neither was true. He is clean overnight now (6 weeks later) but not if</p>

Category	Number of responses	Example
		<p>left inside and also chews things when left. More boisterous than we expected to begin with but much better already'</p> <p>'Said to be calm. Often is indoors, but prone to loud barking and quite scary interludes several times a day. Said to be good with other dogs. Barks, growls and extremely difficult when sees other dogs'</p>
Disruption to household	2	'A couple of sleepless nights!!'

Table 11: Unexpected events with new dog

Respondents were asked to indicate if they had contacted the re-homing centre for advice post-adoption of their dog. Thirty-one out of 111 respondents who answered this question indicated that they had. These respondents were then asked to fill in a Likert scale indicating how useful this advice had been, with 0 being not at all helpful and 100 indicating that the problem was resolved. The minimum result given was 20, and the maximum was 100. The median result was 84 (IQR 60-99) indicating that most respondents felt broadly that the help given by the shelters had matched their needs.

Participants were then given the chance to comment on the help offered by the re-homing centre. Answers were generally positive for example:

'Outstanding support given by the rescue home', 'Had little to suggest that I didn't already know but reassuring to talk to them', 'Excellent advice, couldn't fault their support. (He) just couldn't cope with being left despite us trying everything we were advised' and 'My experience with (Organisation G) to date is superlative. They gave me the confidence to take on this beautiful puppy with a potentially serious orthopaedic condition, which I could not have done without their support'. However some owners expressed concerns regarding the need for any post adoption support, for example: 'Problems with feeding not revealed during adoption process' and 'Communication needs to be better at adoption stage at this particular place as we wouldn't needed to have contacted again'

The answers to this question also revealed some serious issues that new owners were experiencing, for example:

'None of my previous rescue dogs have exhibited aggressive behaviour, neither did my present one at first. I cannot let him off the lead, although I know he needs to run and play, because he is anti-social with other dogs. Meeting other dog walkers and watching our dogs play together has always been a big part of my rather solitary life. This is now not happening and many of the local people are not very understanding. I am preparing to take G to training classes, but he will have to be muzzled. I am not looking forward to it and one friend is also concerned for my personal safety. I think G's mad episodes indoors are a desire for rough play. He was abandoned, so nothing is known about his history. Generally he is very loving and accepting with people, but our frequent walks can be difficult. I am nearly 68, but I shall not give up on him' or

'The rescue centre did not know G very well and are not to blame as he presents very well initially and is basically very needy and loving. He is

harder work than I expected and has some quite unexpected medical conditions which are expensive, but I think he is worth it, even if I did not expect to have to work or pay out quite so much'.

Participants were asked what other avenues of support they had utilised since adopting their dog, and what they might anticipate using in the future (predicted support). Overall, vet was the most common actual and predicted source, followed by previous experience. A minority (eight) said none was needed, indicating that most owners both anticipated a need for and used some support and advice after rehoming. Responses for the category of 'other' included '*Daughter is zoologist*' and '*The companion dog*'. These results are illustrated further in Figure 11

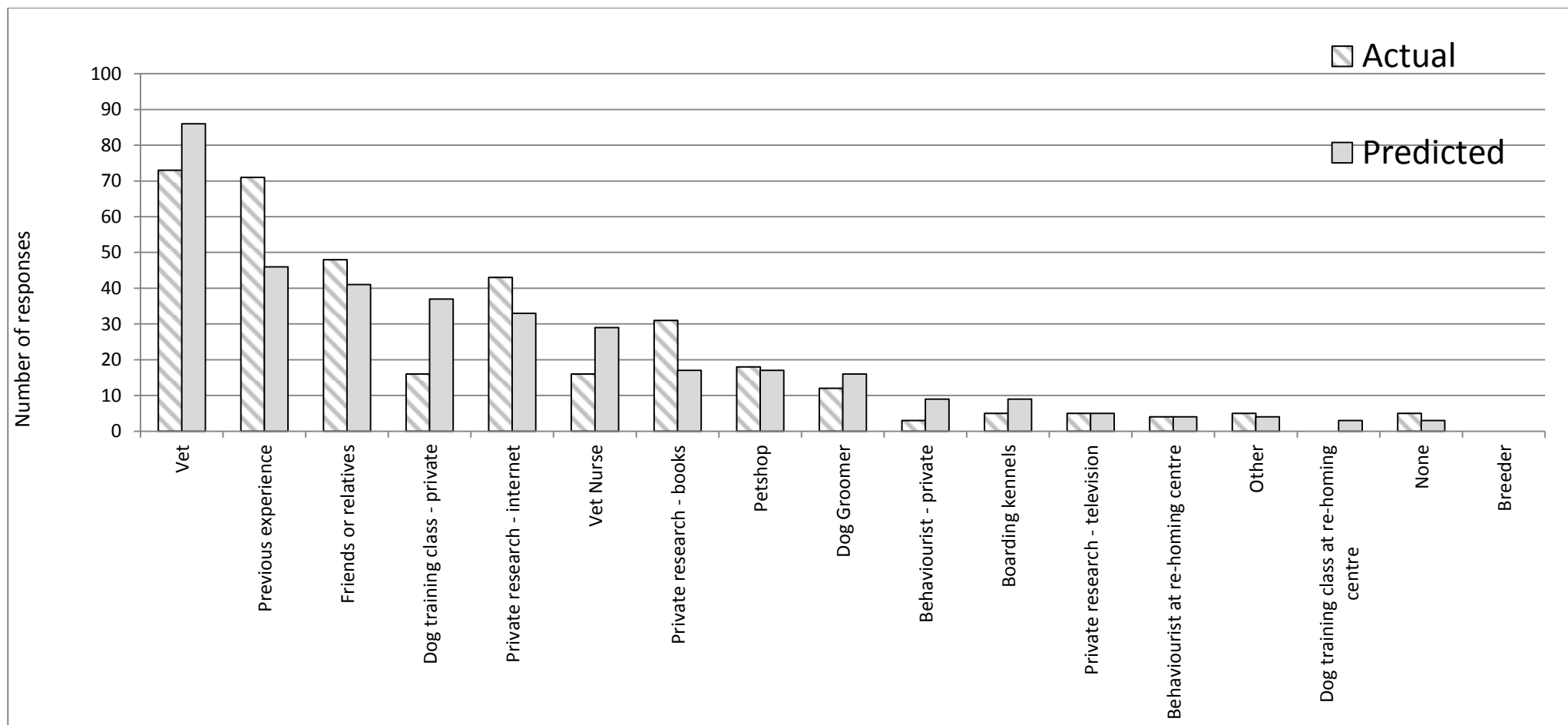


Figure 11: Actual and predicted sources of help (n=108).

NB: Predicted sources refers to those that owners anticipate accessing in the future

Decision making

Owners were asked if they had considered relinquishing their dog since taking them home. Ninety-three percent of respondents had not. Of the remaining six owners, four had considered returning the dog to the re-homing centre and two had considered privately re-homing the dog. No owners had considered euthanasia. One percent of owners had considered additional actions, which included castration.

Some owners elaborated on their reasons for considering relinquishment. Their answers described conflict with an existing pet, e.g. *'We were worried that our original dog would not bond with the puppy and on day three we thought we might have made a mistake. We did not want to return the dog though so we persevered :)'*. Training issues were also discussed, for example; *'Took a while to become clean/housetrained'*. Two respondents also expressed concerns about the dog's behaviour with grandchildren although it was not clear if this was as a result of any action on the dog's part.

Owners were asked to consider what decisions they might consider if their circumstances changed in the future. Overwhelmingly, most owners indicated that they would continue to keep the dog, as illustrated by Figure 12. Owners did not rule out returning the dog, and a very few would consider either privately re-homing or euthanasing the dog. Some respondents provided their own scenarios under which they may make future decisions and these included: *'Returning the dog if any aggression to grandchildren'*; *'Privately re-homing the dog if owner died'* and *'Euthanasing the dog if terminally ill'* (unclear if this relates to dog or owner).

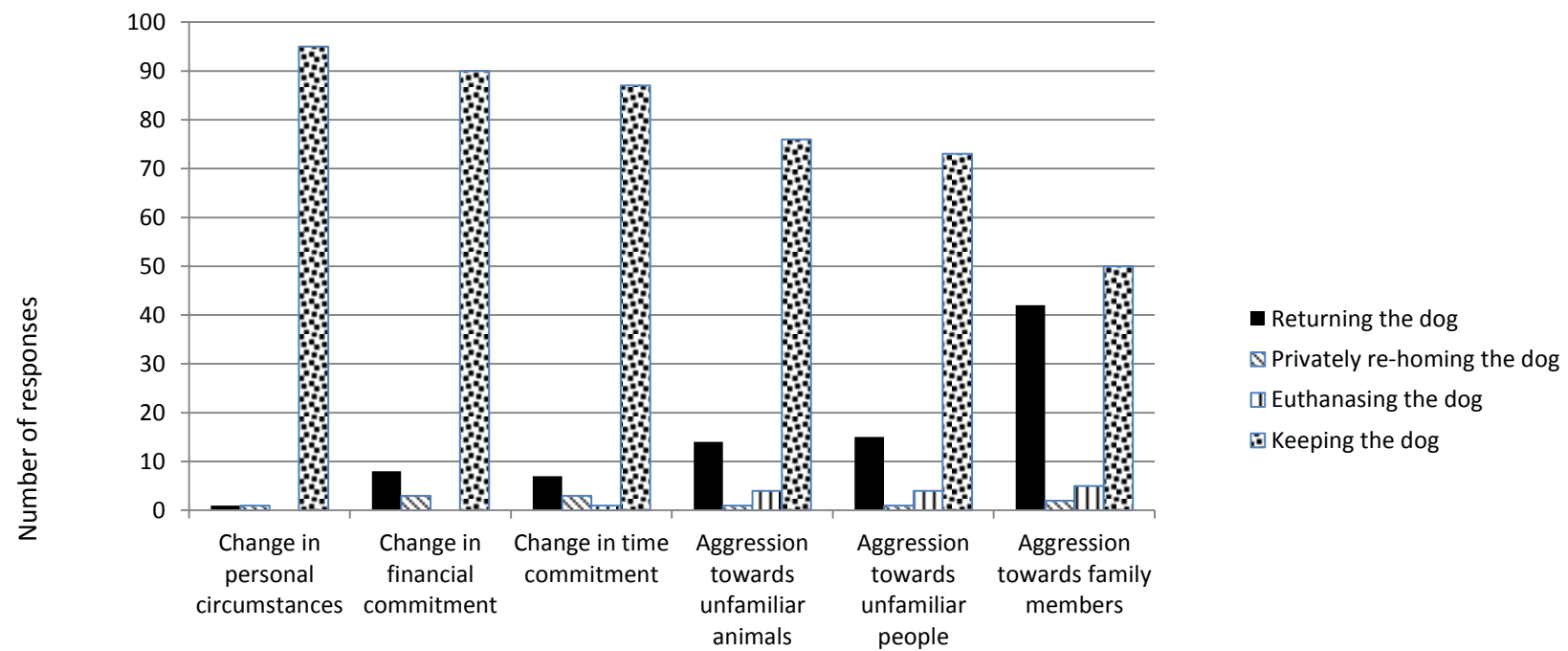


Figure 12: Possible future outcomes described by respondents (n=88)

A free text box at the end of this question allowed participants to comment on this question further. The vast majority of comments re-instated the respondent's commitment to keeping their dog, although a lot of owners also wanted to quantify further at what level they would consider taking action – e.g. '*only under extreme circumstances*'. The comments are summarised in more detail in Table 12:

Category	Frequency of responses	Example
Quantifying level of problem at which action may be taken	14	<p>'Returning the dog would only come into question in the very extremes of these circumstances'</p> <p>'I would do everything in my power to keep (her). It would have to be something extraordinary to even consider rehoming'</p> <p>'Aggression response would depend on how aggressive, some dogs who bite or are too aggressive need euthanasing for the safety of others and other dogs'</p>
Commitment to keep working on problems at home	12	<p>'Dog can be trained out of unsociable behaviour'</p> <p>'We would work through any issues'</p>
Commitment to seeking professional help	12	<p>'Would seek advice from vet or behaviourist for any behaviour problems'</p> <p>'I would always keep the dog but seek professional advice and help if necessary. A dog is for life!!'</p>
Question is too restricted – unable to answer properly	4	'The question is bland. The level of aggression is not quantified. Have had a previous Lab which hated other dogs but loved her companion dog and people. We kept her and took advice'

Category	Frequency of responses	Example
Keeping the dog	3	'We can't ever imagine having to get rid of (him) for any reason'
Question not relevant	3	'Cannot see any of the above questions affecting me'
Death of owner	2	'if I die return to rehoming centre as I am its foster mother'

Table 12: Actions owners may consider if their circumstances changed

Owners were significantly more likely to consider returning their dog if they displayed any form of aggressive behaviour as opposed to changes in personal circumstances, financial or time commitments ($p < 0.001$).

Relationship with adopted dog

Participants were asked to describe their dog's personality. Without exception, these responses were positive, although some alluded to behavioural conflicts which new owners were working through for example '*Energetic, boisterous, clever, inquisitive, and playful. Tries to please but lacks self-control yet!*' A large number of the respondents referred to characteristics which were coded as affectionate or extrovert. Even when describing characteristics which could be interpreted as negative this was often done in an affectionate way e.g. "*he is a massive, clumsy naughty oaf with a huge heart and very expressive personality*".

Category	Number of responses	Examples
Affectionate	71	'A happy loving wee Dog' 'Adorable character. Very affectionate and loyal. Friendly to people and other animals' 'Very loving and a great companion and my greatest friend.'
Extroverted	66	'Energetic, boisterous, clever, inquisitive and playful. Tries to please but lacks self-control yet!' 'Loves people, the more the merrier. Good with other dogs. Very obedient to recall. Looks to be communicated with & tries to

Category	Number of responses	Examples
		communicate with his humans. Likes his food & comforts. Knows what he wants & when he wants it!
Loveable	22	'He is just adorable, he is obedient, loving, interested, agile, happy, faithful'
Intelligent	21	'Clever lad picks things up quickly'
Relaxed	21	Big, soft, loving lump. On walks, (he) wants to say hello to every dog and human he meets. Very friendly and not a hint of aggression. At home, loves cuddles and sofa sharing. Mostly, wants to please, very occasional pretend deafness and teenage eyes if 'it's just not fair!'
Likes to please	21	'A very affectionate dog who is a pleasure to have around. Keen to please and reacts well to training, other children and other dogs.'
Obedient	20	'He is just adorable, he is obedient, loving, interested, agile, happy, faithful'
Insecure	18	'Jeckle and Hyde. Very needy, sweet, obedient and loving. Sudden changes (when bored.) Walks easily and happily, then becomes ferocious and hard to handle when he sees any other dog. Playful, but suffers from skin irritation, paw biting etc. probably all related to anxiety. Alpha male!!! (Very terrier I am told. Wish I had known before I fell in love with his sweet face.)'
Fun	18	'Loving, excitable, nervous, patient, fun'

Category	Number of responses	Examples
Stubborn	16	'Likes to think he is the "boss" which he is not.'
Content	9	'HAPPY'
Clumsy	8	'He is a massive clumsy naughty oaf with a huge heart and very expressive personality.'
Introverted	7	'She is quite timid as yet, but very good-natured and affectionate. She is beginning to show playfulness and is quite obedient. She is learning fairly quickly.'

Table 13: Description of dog's personality

Participants were asked to describe their dog's favourite things. Most respondents listed a range of 'likes' encompassing human affection, toys, food, walks, sleeping or resting places, chewing, chasing, other dogs, grooming and swimming. A few answers did not fit these broad categories, e.g. *'Anything plastic or smelly'*; *'Anything you don't want him to have or anything that squeaks'* and *'Toys, lots of cuddles and a bolt hole where she can escape and feel safe when she experiences something she is not familiar with'*.

Participants were asked to describe any particular dislikes their dogs had. Most respondents listed novel or unusual situations or objects, specific fear inducing stimuli such as traffic, thunderstorms (or other loud noises), unfamiliar dogs or people, being groomed, being wet or cold, being left alone, being reprimanded and other small animals such as cats and foxes. A few answers did not fit these broad categories, for example *'cigarette smoke'*, *'lamb'* and *'taking tablets'*.

Seventeen percent of respondents stated that they had not found any dislikes that their dog had.

Participants were asked how often they engaged in a range of activities with their adopted dog. The activities that owners engaged in most frequently included walking, feeding treats, playing, petting and training at home. Owners rarely, if ever participated in training classes, competitions or working their dog. Three respondents added the following activities: *'Daily socialisation'*, *'Daily agility training at home'* and *'Exercising with a horse between daily and weekly'*. These results are illustrated in Figure 13.

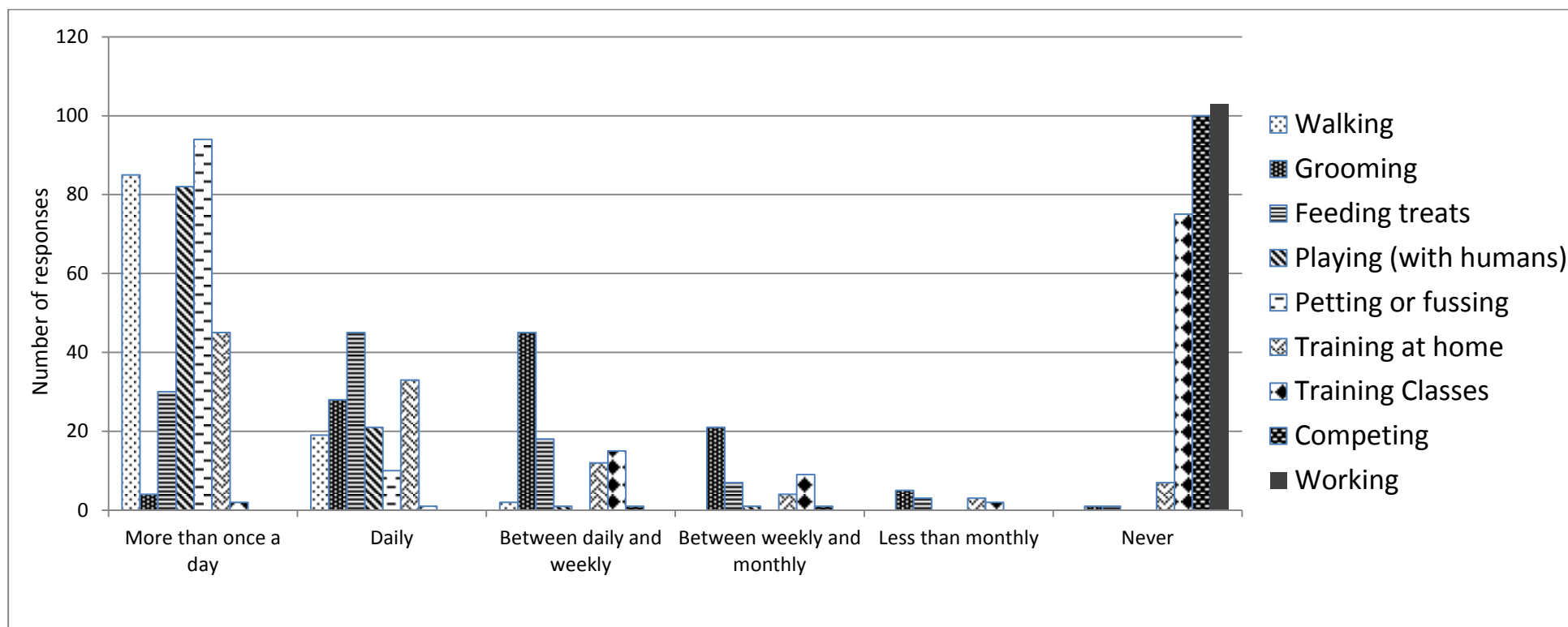


Figure 13: Time allocated by owners for dog related activities (n=104)

Respondents were asked to mark on a Likert scale how well a series of statements described their relationship with their adopted dog. A score of 0 indicated that owners strongly disagreed with the statement and a score of 100 indicated strong agreement. The results indicated that most owners viewed their relationship with their dog as a positive experience although this was less clear for statements that anthropomorphised the human-animal relationship such as 'I celebrate significant dates with my dog' 'I buy my dog presents to make them happy' and 'My dog understands me'. Owners were also less likely to allow their dog to sleep close to them. These measurements are shown in Table 14.

	Median	IQR
I enjoy spending time with my dog (n=101)	100	97-100
I celebrate significant dates with my dog (n=89)	55	6-98
I talk about my dog to other people (n=101)	100	87-100
I miss my dog when we are apart (n=99)	100	87-100
I enjoy stroking, fussing and being in contact with my dog (n=102)	100	96-100
I talk to my dog (n=102)	100	90-100
I buy my dog presents to make them happy (n=96)	71	30.5-99
My dog understands me (n=100)	70	48-90
My dog sleeps close to me (n=92)	50	2.8-99
My dog cheers me up if I am feeling down (n=101)	100	88-100
I have a close relationship with my dog (n=100)	99	82-100
I consider my dog as a member of the family (n=102)	100	96.8-100

Table 14: Participants description of their bond with adopted dog

Closing comments

Participants were given the opportunity to make any comments they wished regarding the survey itself or their relationship with their dog. Respondents gave a range of comments encompassing a broad overview of the adoption process and these are included in full in Appendix 7.

Results were generally positive and showed formation of a strong bond, for example *'Best thing we ever did' 'I love my rescue dog. We have a very strong bond and I would never part with him. He has been on a tempestuous journey but is with me for life now. Always and forever!' and 'I feel very fortunate to be a foster parent to my rescue dog'*

A number of respondents used this section as an opportunity to offer advice for future owners, for example: *'Rescue dogs are hard work but ultimately very rewarding. From past experience some of the traits they have been given in the past remain with them and as an owner you have to be aware of exactly how to handle them so the dog does not feel threatened'*

'Rescue centres must make sure potential owners really understand what they are getting into. We can see why adoptions fail. You have to be completely committed to wanting it to work. Breed type is critical'

'Adoption is a fantastic thing to do but you have to be sure that you have the skills and the time/determination to make it work. You need

to understand the sort of dog that will fit into your life/family and not be swayed by just a pretty face'

'I would strongly recommend a dog as a companion to anyone but the dog MUST be a suitable breed for one's individual environment. A puppy is a responsibility like a child. Don't take one on unless you are prepared for anything! They are very hard work but the end result is always worth it.'

Some owners did indicate negative aspects of dog ownership, although this was discussed with an optimistic outlook, for example:

'Not quite the dog I expected, should have had more time with him before adoption, but will keep him for life whatever the situation. Not as loving as previous dog but still bonding, so need more time' and 'It is exhausting having a rescue dog as they take a lot of patience and training "teaching an old dog new tricks", but very rewarding. Absolutely no regrets.'

'With hindsight I would have got to know her better before adoption as she is a challenge and my first dog but have no regrets after the slight wobble!'

'Our rescue dog has some quirks and issues that need working on - but we expected that to be the case. She is also very typical of a Border collie in temperament, which is a challenge for anyone, but one which I sought and welcome. She's already a part of the family and we wouldn't swap her. We were also very impressed with (Organisation A) and feel very secure knowing that they are there for advice, should we

need it. I would not hesitate to adopt another collie from them in the future.'

Finally, some respondents took this opportunity to comment on the survey itself for example; *'Think some of the final questions are difficult to answer when I have only had (him) 3 weeks'.*

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of what motivates new owners to adopt a dog from a re-homing centre, and what factors influence their choice of dog. Although most re-homing centres place considerable effort into guiding potential owners towards a suitable dog, it is the owners who both initiate the process by seeking to obtain a dog, and also control the outcome by demonstrating interest in individual animals.

The study was able to demonstrate that most owners choose a dog to benefit themselves, but that they choose to source their dog from a re-homing centre in order to help the dog. It also identified to what extent owners are prepared for the changes that dog ownership brings and found that, despite the best of intentions, future challenges cannot always be predicted. Owner perception prior to ownership did not always match the reality that they experienced when they took their pet home. This may suggest a role for education targeted towards better preparation of potential adopters and more structured post-adoption support. Ultimately this may help to protect the bond that people form with their dog and increase the likelihood that it becomes established over time.

Organisational Factors

The seven organisations which participated in the questionnaire were chosen because of their expressed willingness to participate in academic research and in order to provide an insight into the differences between U.K shelter facilities. Each organisation showed similarities in their funding and source of dogs, but clear differences were apparent in their intake and re-homing figures, the total capacity of each centre, the origins of the dogs available for adoption, the re-homing policies and the post adoption support. This approach to recruiting organisations was chosen not only to encompass a range of

re-homing facilities, but also to try and reduce any bias in owner experience that may have been caused by their interaction with a particular centre.

The data from both phases of the study indicates that adopting owners place considerable emphasis on the support available from the re-homing organisation. Resources provided by the re-homing centre itself (including website, paper documents and conversations with staff) were by far the most popular sources of pre-adoption information. Previous experience was the next most frequent source. Furthermore, 28% of respondents contacted the re-homing centre for advice after adopting their dog, and their free text responses suggest that most respondents took a favourable view of the help they were given. Re-homing centres are therefore of primary importance when it comes to communicating with potential owners and in particular before adoption takes place. This finding supports the work of the Companion Animal Welfare Council (2011), Houpt et al. (1996), Niedhardt and Boyd (2002) and Peterson (2005) who also suggest that re-homing centre policies should be targeted at maximising the success of re-homing.

This study deliberately encompassed a cross section of U.K re-homing centres and was able to illustrate some of the important differences between them. Although it is not clear in this study what influence, if any, organisational structure has on the success of re-homing, it is intriguing to note that the re-relinquishment rates varied between centres from 4% to 20%. Those centres which spent considerable time and effort into 'matching' dogs with suitable owners, housed dogs within foster homes as opposed to kennels and actively sought to educate adopting owners had the lowest rates of re-relinquishment at 4%. Those that followed a more pragmatic approach to re-homing, for example those that did not conduct home checks or would re-home to working households had the highest at 20%. It is interesting to speculate whether the different approaches impacted on success, and how the number of dogs being placed in homes is balanced against re-relinquishment, or whether these differences simply reflect the

characteristics of the dogs available for adoption. A study by King (2010) considered the effect of organisational policy on re-homing success across United Kingdom shelters and suggested that re-homing to households where owners worked had a negative effect on dogs being retained in the home but that increasing adoption fees or using foster homes had little effect. Most of the participating shelters in the present study used questionnaires to 'match' potential dogs with owners, conducted home checks and offered behaviour advice but there were fundamental differences in approach which were only appreciated by taking time to visit, discuss and observe centre staff. Further consideration of whether it is worth getting the dog into any home or waiting to find the 'perfect home' is an important question for each organisation to consider. The answer is likely to depend on the resources that are available and also the welfare of dogs whilst they are waiting for adoption. As there are also more dogs in need of new homes than are available, and shelters frequently have 'waiting lists' (Stavisky et al. 2012 and Clark et al. 2012), re-homing a dog also benefits the wider population by freeing up resources to support another relinquished animal.

Demographics of dogs and owners

Respondents to the second phase of the questionnaire were mostly female and over 35 years old, and this has been found by other similar studies (Markovits and Queen, 2009 and King et al. 2009). The majority of households were described as consisting of two adult occupants, with no children. This again is similar to the findings of previous studies (King et al. 2009). However as participants were self-selecting it is unclear if this accurately reflects the population of interest, or is biased towards those most willing to share their experience. It could also be that these findings reflect the homes that shelters consider suitable for adoption. Certainly some shelters

refused to adopt dogs to homes with young children, or restricted which dogs would be considered suitable.

The vast majority of dogs being re-homed were between 6 months and 8 years of age. This may simply reflect the demographics of dogs available within re-homing centres and therefore of relinquished dogs. However there is also evidence from the recruitment questionnaire to suggest that a common reason for choosing to re-home a dog was to avoid the 'puppy phase' of dog ownership. Owners described choosing an adult dog because they hoped it would be less labour intensive than training a puppy. For example, respondents' comments included: 'Wanted an older dog as we are retired and didn't want a puppy' and 'We have had a puppy before and don't particularly enjoy that stage'. This finding has not been widely reported before although Marston et al. (2005a) cite wanting an older dog as a factor for re-homing a dog in 30.8% of adoptions. Most studies simply state that younger dogs are more desirable for prospective owners (Brown et al. 2013; Lepper et al. 2002; Miller et al. 1996 and Normando et al. 2006). The findings of the current study together with the work of Marston et al. (2005a) suggest that it is important to question the motivation when people choose to adopt an adult dog. If people are choosing to re-home an adult dog as a more 'convenient' route to pet ownership, and in order to avoid the basic training that a puppy requires, then this may suggest a need for better education. Re-homing adult dogs can bring with them their own challenges and a number of studies cite re-relinquishment occurring when an adopted dog is more work than the owner expected (Diesel et al. 2010; Diesel et al. 2008, Marston et al. 2005a, Marston et al. 2005b and McConnell, 2012).

Most participants were not naïve concerning the responsibilities of dog ownership, reflected in the fact that 88% had owned a dog before and most of these had been obtained from re-homing centres. The majority of owners were choosing to adopt again following the death of their previous pet. This finding supports the work of Marston et al. (2005a) and Tesform and Birch (2013) who also found that people were

obtaining a dog in order to replace a previous pet or that previous experience strongly influenced the decision to adopt. This is a positive finding suggesting that owners found dog ownership to have proved rewarding in the past. However, it may place certain expectations on a new pet and comparison with the predecessor.

Reasons for dog ownership

This study shows that reasons for dog ownership are complex and varied. Respondents to both the recruitment and follow up questionnaire cite social benefits to people and in particular companionship as a key motivation for adopting a dog. In this respect it strengthens the findings of many previous studies that also looked at the reasons people choose to adopt a dog and found companionship to be a recurrent theme (Marston et al. 2005a; Miller et al. 1996; and Mondelli et al. 2004). This perhaps places a degree of pressure on the chosen dog to fulfil this role and to demonstrate appropriate social interactions. Dogs that are shy or even just aloof may run a greater risk of being overlooked for adoption. This was demonstrated by the work of Leusher and Medlock (2009) who trained dogs to interact with visitors to a shelter and found that trained dogs were more likely to be adopted. It is also possible that less sociable dogs may risk disappointing new owners in the formative stages of their relationship.

Respondents also place great emphasis on the benefits of dog ownership in terms of increased activity and improvements to human health. This may play a role in why older dogs are less likely to be adopted, as the majority of potential owners are looking forward to engaging in more exercise as part of the lifestyle that dog ownership entails. It is also clear that many respondents define themselves in terms of being a dog owner and that sharing their life with a dog is incredibly important to the way they choose to live their life. This supports the work of Dotson and Hyatt (2008) who conducted qualitative research into dog ownership. Their study describes the

human-dog relationship as 'symbiotic'; benefiting both the human and the dog. Furthermore they found that dogs can be viewed as another human member of the family and that dogs can help the owner define themselves. Tesform and Birch (2013) looked at the psychology of pet ownership and concluded that dog ownership can be linked to self-concept and social identity. In the current study, statements such as: *'I love dogs, I've had one or more for most of my life, life does not feel complete without one'*; *'We have always owned since we were married. Had five so far. Love dogs'*; *'I have had dogs since I was a small child, life without a dog is unthinkable and I would never contemplate it'* or *'I always have a dog. My dog recently died and I can't live alone without my best friend'* provide examples of this type of thinking. These findings suggest that making the right choice about which dogs to re-home should be considered very important. Promoting successful adoptions protects owners from a sense of disappointment and even failure should the relationship prove unsuccessful (DiGiacoma et al. 1998 and Shore, 2005).

Reasons for choosing to re-home a dog

Overwhelmingly, respondents describe altruistic intentions as the reason for choosing to source their dog from a re-homing centre. This finding is supported by Marston et al (2005a) who conducted a survey into dog owners post adoption and found that the majority of owners had chosen to re-home a dog for reasons of compassion. One way to view this is that as well as helping the dog, adopters may seek to achieve self-fulfilment through having done a good deed. Some owners seem to go so far as to view their choice to re-home a shelter dog as a way to define themselves through their choice to make a positive contribution to moral living. Examples of this include; *'I need a reason to get up in the morning. I need someone to love and care for'*; *'It's not their fault they have to be rehomed. Donating to dog charities*

will support future dogs who need care. I can make a difference' or 'We need each other'.

It could be argued that this again places certain expectations on the dog to prove rewarding for their new owners, and that the bond owners form with their new dog may be at risk if the work involved in integrating a shelter dog into the home of its 'saviour' is harder than anticipated. However, the data also suggests that significant numbers of respondents do run into unexpected problems with their new dog, and this is also a finding in a number of previous studies (Bailey and Sellars, 1998; Lord et al. 2008 and New et al, 2000). Whilst this can be damaging to the relationship, it is also true that overcoming these difficulties can serve to strengthen the perception that the dog 'needs' the help of their new owner. If the owner is then able to work through these problems, or has the expectation of being able to do so, then this was shown to enhance the bond between owner and dog. For example; *'We think (she) was mistreated before being rescued as she is nervous of some people. Gaining her trust will take time, she is also a bit of an escaper. She is harder work than our previous dogs but worth it' and 'It is exhausting having a rescue dog as they take a lot of patience and training "teaching an old dog new tricks", but very rewarding. Absolutely no regrets'.*

The data from the pre-adoption questionnaire provides another important insight into why some owners choose to re-home an adult dog rather than buying a puppy by illustrating that some owners place considerable emphasis on the predictability of adopting an animal from a re-homing centre. For example *'It's my first time owning a dog and I want one that's already been trained'; 'You have some idea of characteristics + behaviours' or 'Staff have a good understanding of the dogs characteristics and needs and can advise new / potential owners. Also there is assistance if you are not sure how to tackle a certain problem and dogs are fully vetted'.* This is perhaps placing too much responsibility on the re-homing centre and hints at unrealistic expectations on the part of the owner. Marston et al (2005a) reported

that only 17% of adopting owners think shelters provide 'good dogs' but it is not clear by what criteria dogs are judged as 'good' or 'bad'. In reality, the nature of the adoption process means that dogs from a shelter often have an incomplete history. There is also a risk of them having been relinquished due to problems in their previous home which may not be apparent in context of a re-homing centre. Furthermore the environment within the re-homing centre may cause undesirable changes to the dog's behaviour. Adopters need to be prepared that taking an adult dog with its own unique life experience into a novel environment can be quite a different experience to adopting a puppy. Older dogs may find it hard to adapt to established routines and expectations of behaviour whereas puppies are more likely to adapt to new experience (McConnell, 2012; Shore, 2005 and Companion Animal Welfare Council, 2011). This suggests that there is great potential for re-homing centres to impact on the success of adoption through balancing realistic expectations without deterring potential owners from providing a much needed home.

Reasons for choice of individual dog

In this study the reasons for choosing a particular dog were demonstrated to be either logical (e.g. the dog is chosen to fulfil certain pre-requisites) or impulsive (e.g. the dog was chosen based on spur of the moment attraction). This is similar to the definitions proposed by Tesform and Birch (2013) who describe decision making around acquisition of a dog as being either passive, cognitive or emotional. Passive decisions share many similarities to those described here as impulsive. Cognitive decisions involve some thought and knowledge, but this is described by Tesform and Birch (2013) as being incomplete as not all options and outcomes can be accounted for. Finally, emotional decisions are those based purely on feelings. However, emotional decisions made by owners may not be entirely negative - it should be remembered that they will have met the requirements of the

re-homing centres application process prior to adopting their dog and are likely to have considered the implications of dog ownership in the broader sense without necessarily narrowing down the list of attributes for their particular pet. As such, they could be considered as a more open minded subset of respondents. To support this view, the work of Patronek et al. (1996) suggested that, in their study, the amount of planning had little effect on the success of re-homing. However, the negative aspect of allowing owners to make an impulsive decision is that less visually appealing dogs may be overlooked. Re-homing centre staff may have to work harder to bring these dogs to the attention of potential owners.

Expectations of relationship with adopted dog

Potential owners' expectations of their relationship with an adopted dog are overwhelmingly positive. This is perhaps to be expected given that adoption is a voluntary action on the part of the owners; however it leads to the inevitable question as to whether or not this is realistic.

The findings could be explained in part by the timing of the questionnaire which was administered when respondents were likely to be excited about acquiring their new dog. Consideration should also be given to fact that it was administered within the re-homing centre. It is feasible that respondents may have worried about being judged for expressing negative feelings regarding the adoption process. A similar pattern of responses were observed when participants were expressly asked about any worries they had, or any possible problems they anticipated with their new dog. It should perhaps be a cause for concern that 115 respondents (46% of answers) failed to identify any worries or any possible problems. Where respondents did express concerns these tended towards specific behaviour concerns or generalised issues with settling the dog in, training and behaviour. A small number of responses concerned medical issues with the dog and the possibility of the respondents 'letting the dog down'.

To consider this point further it is worth returning to the fact that whilst the follow up questionnaire was only completed by two adoptees that had returned their dog, throughout the study period re-relinquishment rates across all centres ranged from 4% to 20%. This means that many more dogs were returned through failed adoptions than were followed through by the second questionnaire, and thus the widespread positivity shown prior to taking a dog home did not prove realistic in a significant proportion of re-homings.

Reality of relationship with adopted dog

Amongst those who responded to the follow up questionnaire, their experience of dog ownership could be summarised as 'optimistic'. Most owners expressed a willingness to re-home a dog again. Interestingly – given that few owners admitted to expecting problems with their new dog –there was a significant difference between owner reports of how well their dog behaved when they got it home compared to expectation, with most dogs behaving better than anticipated. Most owners also realised with hindsight that they had not known their dog particularly well prior to adoption. When these answers were explored in more detail only 23 respondents described unexpectedly positive outcomes, against 80 unexpectedly negative outcomes. This suggests that in reality the dogs displayed many more negative than positive behaviours overall, but that owners still perceived their behaviour as better than expected. Several of the negative outcomes included aggression towards people and other animals; however these owners still appeared committed to continuing the relationship. Several owners reported 'misinformation' from the re-homing centre in as much as the dog was advertised as having desirable behaviour or personality traits which were not fulfilled in the new home.

As most dogs in the study were retained in their new home it suggests a willingness on the part of new owners to accept the negative side of dog ownership despite their original expectations not being met. This may reflect the development of a bond with a particular animal.

However, it should be remembered that participation in the follow up questionnaire was voluntary, and thus it is not possible to comment on the experiences of those who choose not to respond, at least some of whom did not keep their dog. It is also interesting to speculate if any of the problems that the new owners experience were a factor in the original relinquishment of the dog, and what dictates whether an owner will tolerate them or not.

Almost without exception, participants in the follow up questionnaire demonstrated a strong bond with their new pet. Their description of their dog's personality was overwhelmingly positive, and even negative characteristics were described in affectionate terms, for example: '*He is a massive clumsy naughty oaf with a huge heart and very expressive personality*' or '*(He) is a Pomeranian and a feisty wee chap. He is funny, stubborn and joyous all at the same time*'. Most owners engaged in walking their dog, feeding them treats, playing with them, petting and fussing them and training them at home at least once per day and thus were devoting significant amounts of time to life with their new pet. Most owners scored highly on all questions measuring facets of the human-animal bond, but less emphasis was placed on anthropomorphic factors such as 'I celebrate significant dates with my dog', 'I buy my dog presents to make them happy' and 'my dog understands me'. Sleeping close to the dog was also a less popular response, which – given that most owners appear strongly bonded to their adopted dog using a multitude of other measures – is in contrast to the work of Duxbury et al. (2003) who suggested that allowing a dog to sleep close to an owner was associated with reduced risk of re-relinquishment. It may therefore be more likely that owners with a strong bond are more likely to allow the dog to sleep with them, rather than it being beneficial to promote a dog sleeping close to its owner as

a way to strengthen that relationship. It could in fact be argued that implying that unwilling owners should allow a dog to sleep close to them will create resentment on the part of the owner and thus could potentially damage their bond with that dog.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the strength of the bond respondents appeared to form with their adopted dog, the data from the follow up questionnaire demonstrates unwillingness on the part of owners to consider re-relinquishment: 93% of owners would not consider returning their dog under any of the circumstances they were asked to consider, including aggression to people. Many participants saw this question as too restricted, and wanted to clarify at what level they may consider taking action, their commitment to seeking further help if problems arose and that relinquishment would only be a last resort in extreme circumstances. Where owners would consider relinquishing their pet, this was most commonly as a result of aggression, and aggressive behaviour was shown to be statistically significant for risk of re-relinquishment. These findings corroborates the work of Diesel et al. (2010), Segurson et al. (2005) and Wells and Hepper (2000) all of whom cite incidents of aggression as increasing the risk both of relinquishment and of re-relinquishment.

Owners most frequently used veterinary professionals as a point of contact for help with their dogs post-adoption although it is unclear what form this support took. It may simply represent routine health matters. However it does suggest a role for veterinary practices in providing support for new dog owners as the other significant sources of help are previous experience, friends and family and private research. It may also be beneficial for re-homing centres to provide more organised post-adoption support as a preventative measure against owners experiencing problems in the early days and this view is supported by Marder and Duxbury (2008) and Scarlett et al. (2002). Interestingly, very few owners reported attending training classes with their dog on a regular basis post adoption. In studies by Duxbury et al. (2003), Diesel et al. (2010) and Patronek et al. (1996) attending

training classes was found to be associated with reduced risk of re-relinquishment. An alternative interpretation of this would be that owners with the strongest bond are those most willing to attend training classes, however as owners are experiencing training problems with their pet it may be very useful for both re-homing centres and veterinary professionals to direct owners to reputable trainers to help overcome some of the obstacles that new owners are experiencing.

Re-relinquishment

Only two respondents to the follow up questionnaire returned their dogs to the re-homing centre. The rates recorded for re-relinquishment suggest that there were many more unsuccessful adoptions amongst those who failed to respond to the follow up questionnaire. Reluctance to re-relinquish was also an important theme amongst retaining owners as something that they were very unwilling to do. It is therefore worth considering the data from re-relinquishing owners in more detail.

Dog 'A' and dog 'B' were both returned to the re-homing centre less than twenty five days after being adopted. A's owners wanted him as a companion, as a reason to be more active, to enjoy the countryside, as a part of the family and to make the dog's life better. They chose A as he appeared 'friendly, enjoyed playing ball' and they believed he would be 'easy to train'. They felt 'positive' about bringing him into their lives although they expressed some pre-adoption concerns about him settling in and adopting their routines. B's owners wanted him as a companion for them and their other dog, as a part of the family and to make the dog's life better. They wanted to adopt from a shelter as 'puppies are easily homed, whereas older/unwanted dogs are often left behind'. They chose B specifically because he 'gets on well with our other dog... suits our circumstances'. B's owners were 'excited' about getting him and 'looking forward to working with him and getting to know him'. With regard to pre-adoption concerns they had 'none really'

other than the fact that he 'may chew or bark etc. but confident we can help him with this'.

Perhaps the greatest insight into the re-relinquishing owners relationship with their dog, and the effect that re-relinquishment had on them, can be gained by considering their free text answers from the second phase of the study. Both respondents described ownership as being harder than expected, and that they were not prepared for the difficulties they experienced. A's owners wrote that he was '*much more reactive to every aspect of the environment than expected. He responded badly when we introduced a visitor to the house. He was more controlling and tried to dominate more than expected*'. B's owners wrote that he '*couldn't cope with being left and became very distressed. Previous owner stated could be left for 3hrs am and pm but this wasn't the case when we took him in. The trauma of what he had been through, relationship breakdown, re-homing etc. may have had a bearing on this*'.

Current teachings in behaviour medicine would advise against labelling dogs as dominant, because it has been consistently shown that the behaviour which owners interpret as the dog 'taking charge' are mostly often based in fear and are more correctly assigned as the dog responding to actual or perceived threat (Bowen and Heath, 2005). It is interesting to speculate whether a greater understanding of canine communication would have enhanced the bond A's owners had with him, and whether the re-homing centre could have played a role in this. A's owners did approach the re-homing centre for post adoption advice but scored this advice as having poorly met their needs. Aside from the re-homing centre they had only used their previous experience – of one other owned dog – and personal research for support. It seems likely that by the time help was sought that their relationship with A had already started to break down as they describe '*reasonable advice to deal with an issue in relation to growling when approached whilst eating. Little help when trying to deal with his reaction following*

meeting a visitor but difficult to know what they could have said to recover the situation under the circumstances’.

Both owners expressed difficulties with re-relinquishing their dogs and describe feelings of not being able to provide for their dog, or letting them down. This corroborates the work of Shore (2005) and DiGiacoma et al (1998). Both these studies encompass qualitative research describing that it is very hard for owners to relinquish ownership of a pet and that to do so is often a last resort. B’s owners state that it ‘wouldn’t have been fair to him or us, to put him through this distress when we had to go to work where there may be someone who perhaps didn’t work at all who could be with him all the time which is what he needed’.

A’s owners hinted at a deeper affection for him in their final comments. They describe that *‘Things didn’t turn out how we hoped. It was a difficult and sad decision to return A. He will make a wonderful dog for the right home, probably needs a more experienced environment with lots of time to help him adjust. He just wanted to feel loved and secure and I’m so sorry we ended up being unable to provide that for him’.*

Neither owner attended training classes or sought the advice of professional behaviourists to work through the problems they were experiencing with their new dogs. This is in contrast to retaining owners who repeatedly expressed that re-relinquishment would only be as a last resort when all other options had been explored. It is interesting to speculate if this truly reflects the re-relinquishing owner’s belief that the dogs would be better in another home, or a weaker bond amongst those who chose to re-relinquish. If the latter is true, it would be interesting to explore the relationship between strength of bond and length of ownership and if the re-relinquishing owners would have been more willing to work through the relationship if it had been more established. Many studies suggest that re-relinquishment is commonest in the early stages of a human-canine relationship (Diesel et al. 2010; Marston et al. 2005a and Shore, 2005). This may reflect

the owners quickly realising that they had taken on more than they could manage, however it also suggests that they are unwilling to try and work through the issues they are experiencing. As many owners retain ownership despite experiencing difficulties with their new pet it would suggest that there are more factors to consider than the isolated behaviour of the dog. This finding strengthens the work of Wells and Hepper (2000) who studied dog behaviour four weeks post adoption. In this study, behaviours which led some owners to re-relinquish dogs were clearly present in other dogs retained within the home.

Limitations

The study has achieved its aims of considering the decision making process involved in choosing to re-home a dog, the role that owner expectation has on the outcome of adoption and the relationship that owners form with an adopted dog. While the mixed methodology makes it difficult to make a traditional assessment of internal validity, the data adds to our understanding of how participants experienced adopting a dog. However, there were a number of important weaknesses which must be acknowledged.

Responsibility for recruiting respondents lay with the re-homing centre staff. In order to reach the maximum number of respondents any staff at the centre could be involved in inviting adopting owners to complete a questionnaire. The exact timing of data collection (e.g. whether prior to or at the time of collecting the dog) varied amongst organisations, dependent on their workflow and re-homing policies. The approach was tailored so as to minimise the disruption to the normal running of each centre however as a result, data collection was neither randomised nor standardised. This will have introduced bias both in terms of the potential owners that the re-homing centres offered the questionnaire to, and those who proved willing to participate. Since owners filled the recruitment questionnaire in at the re-homing centre, and returned it to them, they may also have felt obliged to provide

optimistic answers. It should also be remembered that there was wide variation between the response rates of different organisations and therefore not all centres are given comparable representation.

Participation in the follow up survey was also voluntary and therefore results are biased towards owners that were willing to take part. It may be that owners who had a more negative experience with their dog were less willing to discuss it, or that participants felt compelled to report a positive experience. Certainly a large number of owners who failed to keep their pet did not submit a follow up questionnaire. Of those who did respond, not all participants completed the questionnaire and there was no attempt to analyse the questions that were unanswered. It is possible that particular questions were more likely to be avoided for practical or emotional reasons and the decision to include partially completed responses may have in itself introduced an element of bias.

In addition to the variation between when invitations to participate in the follow up questionnaire were sent, there was also variation in the length of time between adoption of a dog and submitting a response. There was no control over this interval and participants could respond whenever suited them up until the survey closed. It is conceivable that owners who responded immediately had less time to get to know their dog than those who chose to wait and reply at a later date.

Throughout the study, data analysis was only performed by the primary researcher. It is important to recognise that the qualitative aspects may have been influenced by internal bias and that the conclusions are based on one person's subjective interpretation of the owners' comments.

At best, this study can only claim to be representative of the sample population. Results will have been biased by a number of the methodologies described. For example, the organisations that took part were a convenience sample that were willing to participate. Furthermore, three breed specific charities took part, thus there are a

large number of these breed groups amongst the dogs included for study. This is not representative of the population of dogs within U.K re-homing centres and thus no conclusions should be extrapolated from this data regarding the wider population of dogs available for re-homing. Furthermore there are many more variations in re-homing organisations than those illustrated here and thus the findings of this study cannot be assumed to hold true for other centres. Overall, this study has poor external validity and caution should be exercised when interpreting the results beyond the sample population. Similar studies across a wider population of re-homing organisations would help to overcome this.

Further Research

This study has been useful in highlighting gaps in our current knowledge. As previously mentioned, more work into organisational differences and the effect that this has on the success of adoptions is much needed. Further comparison of pre- and post- adoption expectations of the human-animal bond would also provide valuable insights into why some relationships are more successful than others.

There is also scope to expand the initial exploration of both original relinquishment and the subject of re-relinquishment. In depth, qualitative interviews could be conducted with shelter staff, retaining and relinquishing owners to gain a deeper understanding of why dogs find themselves in shelters and the impact that this has on both the humans and animals involved. A greater understanding of why some owners will tolerate and work through problems which others find totally unacceptable would be particularly enlightening in terms of investigating the human-animal bond. As very few re-relinquishing owners returned the follow up questionnaire it may be more rewarding to make direct contact with those who return dogs by approaching them at the shelter. Such an approach requires careful management and strong empathy, so as not to add to a re-relinquishing owners'

distress but successful studies using this methodology have provided rich data in previous studies considering relinquishment (Corridan, 2010, DiGiacoma et al. 1998 and Shore, 2005). Further understanding of re-relinquishment is important because it would help explore in more detail what interventions might help retain dogs in their homes.

Finally, this study suggests that greater emphasis on pre-adoption counselling or attendance at post-adoption training classes may be positive steps to promote successful adoption. However this would need to be balanced against deterring people from dog ownership.

Conclusions

This study has shown that potential owners have high expectations of dog ownership, and that they place great significance in the human-dog relationship. It is unusual for owners to admit to expecting any problems with their new dog and thus there is a suggestion that some owners may not be prepared for the challenges that may arise.

It is questionable as to whether dogs can live up to owner expectations, or how realistic these expectations are as many owners describe unexpected and unwanted experiences in their early days of ownership. However this does not appear to significantly impact on the bond that develops with their dog or their motivation to keep them. There appears to be great reluctance to consider re-relinquishment even under quite extreme circumstances.

There is perhaps a role for re-homing organisations and supporting professions, such as veterinary staff and behaviourists to support adopting owners and protect the bond with a newly re-homed dog. There may also be a role for re-homing organisations to highlight dogs with less intrinsic appeal, and to promote them as desirable pets or highlight them to suitable owners.

When a relationship with an adopted dog fails, this can have a significant negative impact on re-relinquishing owners as well as the dog and the re-homing centre staff. Directing more resources at 'matching' dogs to owners may help avoid this, but it needs to be balanced against getting dogs into homes and remembering that no adoption can be entirely predictable. Increasing the support available both pre- and immediately post- adoption may help retain dogs in the home, and there is some evidence that overcoming initial difficulties may ultimately strengthen the bond between owner and dog. However, when a dog is too challenging to remain with the owner it is likely that returning adopters will benefit from support and guidance. The effect that re-relinquishment has on the human-animal bond is a potential area for further qualitative research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Initial e-mail contact with participating organisations

'Better Luck Next Time'

Developing an understanding of the rescue-dog experience and how to promote successful canine adoption

Information for Participating Centres

Thank you for your interest in this research. The welfare of un-owned dogs is the central motivation for the project, but from the viewpoint of humans as decision makers on their behalf. We are interested in looking at why some owners form successful, lasting bonds with an adopted dog and others do not.

To achieve this, we are hoping to look at return rates across a variety of re-homing centres, and identify any trends in animals that are returned. We will also attempt to understand what factors influence potential owner's expectations and experiences, and how this information can be used to increase successful adoptions.

In addition, we would also like to consider what effect the adoption process has on re-homing centre staff.

Participating organisations would ideally be asked for the following;

- 1. Information on centre re-homing rate and return rate for (date period to be finalised)**
- 2. A visit from the researcher to discuss re-homing protocols, e.g.**
 - Pre-homing assessments of dog or potential owner
 - Matching of dog to owners
 - Post adoption support offered
- 3. Provision of basic data on dogs available for re-homing during the study period-**
- 4. Identity of dogs returned to the centre during the study period**
- 5. Distribution of questionnaires to adopting owners**

In return I will gladly share the results of any findings and hope to be able to offer insights into the factors that affect the likelihood of owners forming a successful and lasting bond with their new dog.

If you have any questions or would like further information on any part of this study, please contact me using the following details.

Many thanks for your involvement,

Miss G. Clark.

DVM Student **School of Veterinary Medicine and Science**
The University of Nottingham.

Appendix 2: Data collection tool for use on visits to participating organisations

Date	Where & Who
Q1	INTAKE (no of new dogs) 2011 (no) (Rate) 2012 (no) (Rate)
Q2	RE-HOMING 2011 (no) (Rate) 2012 (no) (Rate)
Q3	RETURNED 2011 (no) (Rate) 2012 (no) (Rate)
Q4	CAPACITY No of kennels Group Housing? Foster Home? Total Capacity
Q5	LENGTH OF STAY Min Max Average Reason for longest stay???
Q6	SOURCE Handover Stray Stray Contract Seized Transfer Born on Site Other
Q7	FUNDING
CENTRE PROTOCOLS	
PRE ADOPTION: DOG	MEDICAL ASSESSMENT Y N
Q8	Result of Fail Euthanase Foster(Full/Part) Other.....
Q9	BEHAVIOURAL ASSESSMENT Y N Result of Fail Euthanase Foster Not for rehoming Behaviour modification plan
Q10	ATTENTION TO HISTORY (Handover Notes?)
Q11	STAFF TRAINING Y N Specific rehoming staff? Y N Formal Training Assessment?
Q12	DOG MEET Whole Family Y N Other Dogs Y N Other Pets Y N
Q13	PRE-ADOPTION ADVICE Y N Written Verbal (Group) Verbal (121) Other.....
Q14	PLANNING – WHAT IF IT GOES WRONG?

	Return to kennel SUPPORT IN HOME OTHER.....	NONE
PRE ADOPTION: OWNER Q15	How do public meet dogs	
Q16	If potential owner makes 'unsuitable choice' REFUSAL ADVISE Other.....	
Q17	Owner Questionnaire	Y N
Q18	PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO OWNER Kennel Display Y N Discussion With Staff Y N How much information is given (medical/behavioural)	
Q19	HOME CHECKS	Y N
POST ADOPTION Q20	MEDICAL SUPPORT Centre Vet Own Vet Foster	Y N
Q21	BEHAVIOURAL SUPPORT Full Counselling Y N In House / Out Sourced Training Classes Y N In House / Outsourced	Y N
Q22	FOLLOW UP Home Check Phone Call Other	Y N
Q23	FAILED ADOPTION Return Insisted Offered Refused	
Q24	Re-assessment Protocols	
Q25	Outcome for Return to kennel?	

Notes;

Appendix 3: Recruitment Questionnaire



Name of Organisation

Owner's Name

Date

Dog's Name

Breed

Thank you for agreeing to tell us about your new pet. This questionnaire is part of a study looking at why people choose to re-home a dog, and their experiences of the adoption process. Your help is much appreciated, and all information we receive will be treated in the strictest confidence. The information you provide will be stored anonymously, and your personal details will only be used for us to contact you again. They will not be shared with any other organisations.

E-mail

Telephone

Address

PLEASE TURN OVER TO COMPLETE SIX QUICK QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTING YOUR NEW DOG

Thank you very much for your time, your help is very important to us. We would really like to contact you again **at approximately 6 weeks and 6 months after you take your dog home** to follow your progress. If you are happy for us to do this, please complete your contact details. If you change your mind later, just let us know by contacting Gemma using the following details.

Gemma Clark; ntxgc7@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, The University of Nottingham

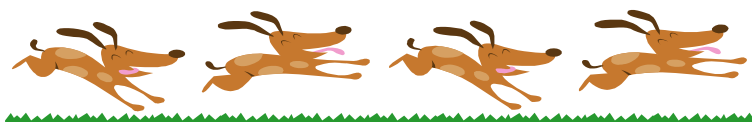
Sutton Bonington Campus, Loughborough, LE12 5RD



CENTRE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED
VETERINARY MEDICINE
Putting research into practice

Thank you and good luck with your new dog!





Please finish the answers to the following statements, there are no right or wrong answers!

- I want to adopt a dog because.....

- I have chosen to get my dog from a rescue centre because.....

- I have chosen my particular dog because.....

- How do you feel about the changes this dog will bring to your life?

- Please list any worries you have, or any possible problems you anticipate with your new dog:

Please tick the boxes below to identify all possible sources of information you have used regarding the re-homing process:

Previous Experience	Friends and/ or Family advise	Re-homing Centre staff or documents	Veterinary Staff	Dog Trainers and / or Behaviourists
Re-homing Centre Website	General Internet Research	Reading Books	Television Documentaries	Other (please list)

When you have completed the information overleaf please return your form



The Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine (CEVM), based at the University of Nottingham Vet School are working together with (name of organisation) to learn more about the experience of re-homing a dog. To do this we need to look at the choices people make when deciding to get a new dog, and what happens when they take their new pet home. The information is very important to us and by working together we can build on our knowledge of what happens to dog's who find themselves in need of a new home.

If you decide to re-home a dog today, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire about why you visited today and the dog you have chosen. We will also request permission to contact you in the future so we can see how your dog settled into his or her new home. All information we received will be treated in the strictest confidence. Although we have asked for your name and contact details, this will only be used for us to find you again. All results will be anonymous, no personal information will be shared with any other organisations, and no individual will be identifiable in any results or publications.

If you do not wish to be included in this study, there is no obligation to complete a questionnaire. If you are happy to complete the questionnaire, but would rather not leave your contact details then the anonymous information is still very useful to us. If you later change your mind about allowing us to contact you again and you wish to withdraw from the study, you can do this at any time by contacting Gemma at the Centre for

**Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine: ntxgc7@nottingham.ac.uk
School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, The University of Nottingham
Sutton Bonington Campus, Loughborough, LE12 5RD**



Appendix 5: Letter of recruitment for participating organisations



Information for Shelters
Nottingham Veterinary School MPhil Project
Primary contact; Gemma Clark
ntxgc7@nottingham.ac.uk



Alternative Contact;
cevm@nottingham.ac.uk

Thank you very much for your interest in helping me with my study. The information you have supplied today has been really helpful.

As the project progresses, there are two areas that I will need your ongoing help with.

- 1) Distributing questionnaires to adopting owners (a sample questionnaire is enclosed) and returning completed questionnaires to me via pre-paid postage.
- 2) Providing information on any dogs that are returned to you throughout the course of the study through the route we have discussed.

Near the end of the project, I may also ask for your permission to talk to staff and volunteers about their experiences of re-homing dogs to new owners.

Please contact me using the above details if you have any questions or concerns at any stage of the project.

Many thanks for your involvement and I look forward to working with you!

Action plan from today:

Ways to collect adoption and return data

Supply (and return) of owner questionnaire

Concerns of shelter....



Appendix 6: Paper version of follow up questionnaire



Thank you for helping with our project to look at your experience of adopting a rescue dog. Your help is very much appreciated. All information you provide will be stored safely, and your personal details will only be used for us to contact you again if you agree to this. They will not be shared with any other organisations.

The survey should not take long to fill in and remember that there are no right or wrong answers. We just want to understand you experience of your dog.

Thank you.

- Background

- 1) About you

- Your name

- Your gender: Male
 Female

- Your age: Under 18
 18-24
 25-34
 35-54
 55+

- Which environment best describes where you live?
Rural
Village
Town or city

- Number of children in your household?
Under 5 years
5-11 years
12-16 years
Over 16 years

2) About your dog

- Name of your adopted dog

- Age of your adopted dog (as stated by re-homing centre)

- Breed of your adopted dog

- 3) Please tell me about any dogs that you have owned previously, if you have had more than 5 please list only the most recent.

Breed	How old were they when you got them?	Where were they from?	What happened to them?

- Reasons for choosing a dog

4) Please tick any of the following reasons that describe why you got this dog?
Please add any that have been missed

As a friend or companion for you
As a friend or companion for another animal
As a reason to be more active
As a reason to enjoy the countryside
As a protector
For my children
For another relative
As a part of the family
To make the dog's life better / offer a good home
As a working dog
To take part in dog related activities e.g. showing or competitions
To breed from
Other _____

- Your experience with this dog

5) Do you still own your recently adopted dog? Yes
No

If you no longer have your dog, please indicate what happened to them, but please also answer the rest of the questionnaire if you feel able to. Your experience is very important to us.

Returned to re-homing centre

Privately re-homed

Strayed or missing

Died due to ill health or old age

Died due to accident or injury

Put to sleep due to ill health or old age

Put to sleep due to behaviour problem

Other _____

- How your dog settled in

Please indicate on the following scales

- 6) How well you expected your dog to behave when you first got them home

Very Badly _____ Perfectly

How well your dog *did* behave when you first got them home

Very Badly _____ Perfectly

How well you expected your dog to behave once they had settled in

Very Badly _____ Perfectly

- 7) Please indicate how well you felt you knew your dog prior to adoption

Not at all _____ Very well

- 8) Please indicate how likely it is that you would adopt another rescue dog if you wanted another dog in the future

Never again _____ Definitely

- 9) Please indicate anything else that has happened with your new dog that you did not expect

--

- Avenues of support

10) Have you contacted the re-homing centre for help or advice since adopting your dog?

Yes

No

If you answered yes, how well did the advice the re-homing centre gave match your needs?

Not at all _____ Problem resolved

11) Please indicate anyone or anything else that has helped with any aspect of your dog's care after adoption (e.g. health and behaviour matters or routine care)

Vet

Vet Nurse

Dog training class at re-homing centre

Dog training class – private

Behaviourist at re-homing centre

Behaviourist – private

Breeder

Friends or relatives

Personal research – internet

Personal research – books

Personal research – television

Boarding kennel staff

Dog groomer

Petshop

Previous experience

None

Other _____

12) If you still own this dog please anyone or anything else that you anticipate helping with any aspect of your dog's care in the future (e.g. health and behaviour matters or routine care)

Not applicable, I no longer own this dog OR

Vet

Vet Nurse

Dog training class at re-homing centre

Dog training class – private

Behaviourist at re-homing centre

Behaviourist – private

Breeder

Friends or relatives

Personal research – internet

Personal research – books

Personal research – television

Boarding kennel staff

Dog groomer

Petshop

Previous experience

None

Other _____

- Decision making

13) Which of the following options have you considered since adopting your dog?

Returning the dog to the re-homing centre

Privately re-homing the dog

Having the dog euthanased

None

Other _____

If you ticked any box aside from 'None' please describe in a little more detail the circumstances that prompted this

--

- Possible future outcomes

14) If you still own this dog, please indicate which of the following options you might consider in the future and if so- under what circumstances this may apply. If we have forgotten a scenario you would like included, please complete it in the empty box at the end of the table and tick which action you might take as a result. Please tell us anything further you would like us to know in the comments box.

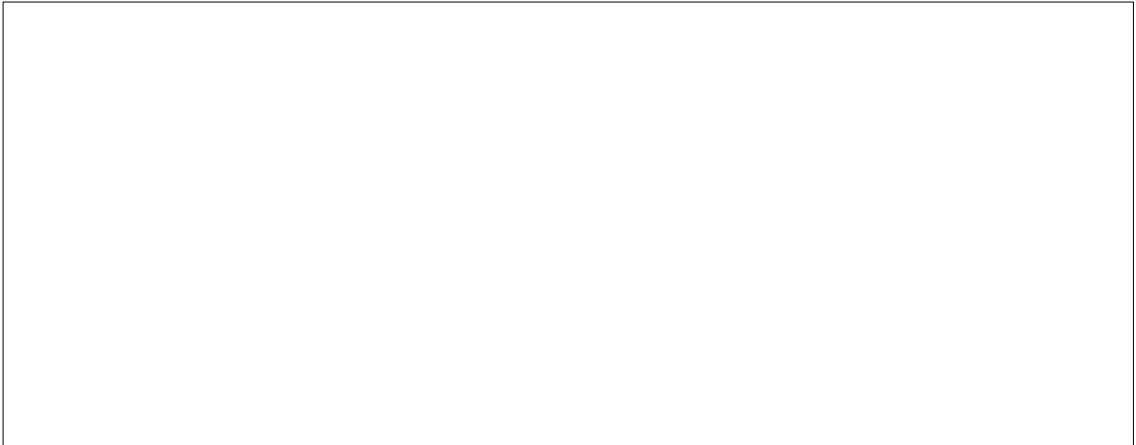
Not applicable, I no longer own this dog OR

	Returning the dog to the re-homing centre	Privately re-homing the dog	Having the dog euthanased	Keeping the dog
Change in personal circumstances (e.g. moving home or change in working hours)				
Change in financial commitment (e.g. loss of job, cost of veterinary care)				
Change in time commitment (e.g. illness of pet, unexpected behaviour problems)				
Aggression towards household members				
Aggression towards strange animals				
Other				

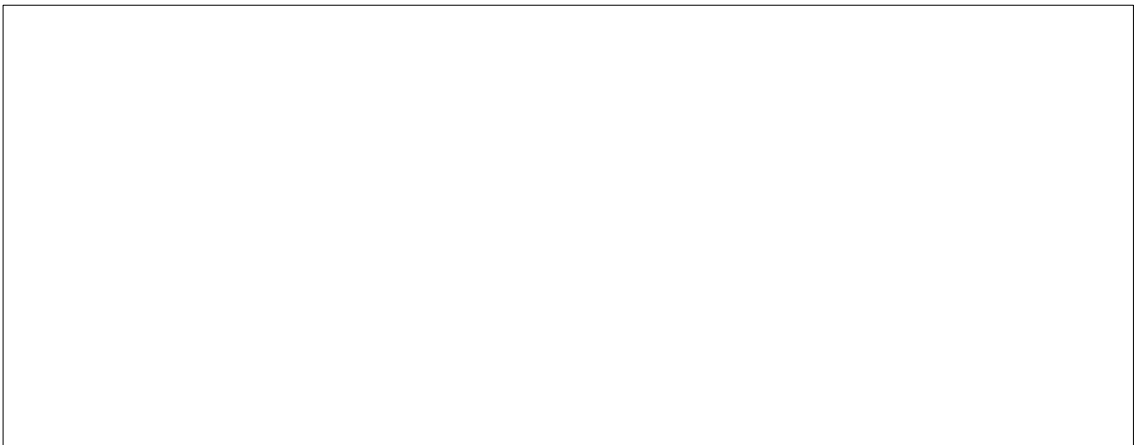
Comments

- Life with your new dog

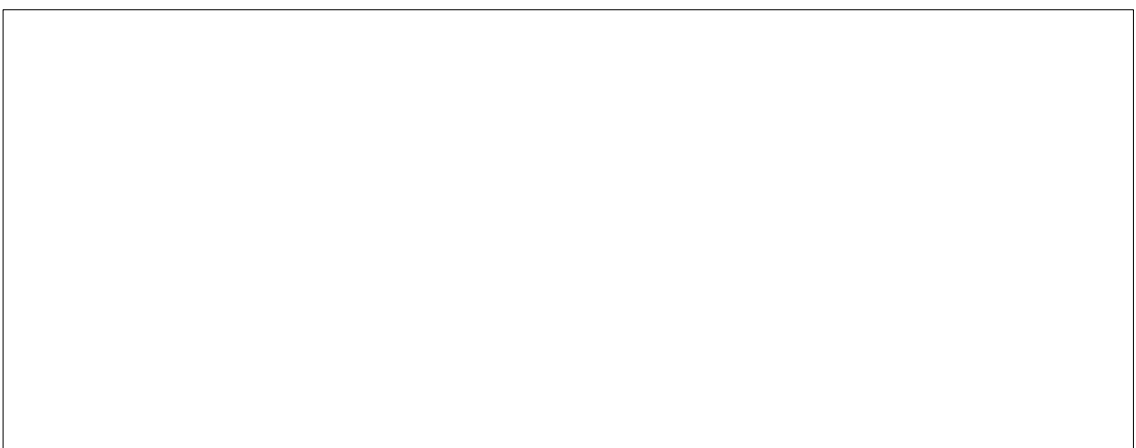
15) Please describe your dog's character in your own words

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to question 15.

16) Please describe your dog's favourite things

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to question 16.

17) Please describe any particular dislikes that your dog had or has.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to question 17.

18) Please indicate how often you engage or engaged in the following activities with your dog. Please add anything we have forgotten in the box at the end.

	More than once daily	Daily	Between daily and weekly	Between weekly and monthly	Less than monthly	Never
Walking						
Grooming						
Feeding treats or providing food outside of meal times (e.g. in a food ball)						
Playing (with humans)						
Petting or fussing						
Training at home						
Training classes						
Competing						
Working						
Other:						

- Your relationship with your dog

19) Please indicate how well the following statements apply or applied to you and your dog

- I enjoy stroking, fussing and being in contact with my dog

Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

- I celebrate significant dates with my dog (e.g. adoption date, birthday)

Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

- I talk to my dog

Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

- My dog sleeps close to me

Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

- I buy my dog present to make them happy

Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

- I enjoy spending time with my dog

Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

- My dog cheers me up if I am feeling down

Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

- I have a close relationship with my dog

Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

- I miss my dog when we are apart

Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

○ My dog understands me
Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

○ I consider my dog as a member of the family
Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

○ I talk about my dog to other people
Strongly Disagree _____ Strongly Agree

- Final comments

20) Please add any final comments you would like to make here

Thank you for taking the time to answer our survey. Your response is very helpful to us.

You can find more details about the centre for evidence based veterinary medicine at www.nottingham.ac.uk/cevm/

If you would like to contact us about any aspect of the study please contact Gemma using the following details:

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Thank you – we look forward to receiving your response.

Appendix 7: Closing comments from responses to follow up questionnaire

NB: ***** represents anonymised name of dog

Best thing that happened to me in recent times. Got him as a companion due to my illness.

Best thing we ever did :)

*Best thing we've ever done is adopt our ***** 🐶*

****** has fitted in well and a great addition to the family.*

I feel very fortunate to be a foster parent to my rescue dog

****** is quite simply the best thing that has happened to me in a long time*

Love my dog :)

****** has enriched my life and having her to care for and come home to means so very much.*

****** HAS BECOME A VALUED MEMBER OF OUR FAMILY AND WILL BE WITH US FOR A LOT OF YEARS TO COME.*

She is an absolute pleasure and has added something really special to my family

Some of these questions i.e. the last ones are difficult to rate. 0 ???

*Think some of the final questions are difficult to answer when I have only had ***** 3weeks.*

This dog has given me so much a friend a great companion as I live a very solitary life

This is a fabulous dog and I am very privileged to have her.

We would encourage others to adopt a rescue dog when they lose their existing doggy companion

*My life would not be complete without my ******

None

Would not do without him

*Adopting ***** was a positive experience even though we went through this process sooner than we thought we would as had not long lost our other dog. ***** is a totally different character to (previous dog) in every way and so the joy of owning and being with another dog continues but just in a different guise.*

*I have only had ***** for two and a half weeks and he was only at the rescue centre for a few days, where behavioural issues did not really come up. He was an abandoned dog, so we are working in the dark. My guess is that he belonged to a male who taught him to play aggressively etc. He is still getting over his neutering. Maybe an elderly female was not the best choice of owner, but I always go that extra mile for my dog. I only hope I can make it with him as his outside behaviour is already making me even more isolated. I realise how lucky I have been in the past with all my rescue dogs and I do think*

*that, with time and patience, ***** will be as great a companion as he initially promised to be. I do wish more people generally would be understanding of the special needs of traumatised rescue dogs and not be so quick to judge and make village gossip. There is no time or place here when I can avoid encounters. I only hope a few of the locals will be willing to give ***** a chance.*

Rescue dogs are hard work but ultimately very rewarding. From past experience some of the traits they have been given in the past remain with them and as an owner you have to be aware of exactly how to handle them so the dog does not feel threatened.

(Organisation G) were very slick and supportive throughout the whole process. I feel I could ask them for help at any time. Thank you

Love him to bits; he's been camping and to sports matches with me. We are willing to work on the issues!!

Rescue dogs are more rewarding especially if you are aware that you can provide a better life than they had before.

Some of the questions are difficult to answer given that my pup is only 17 weeks old and has only been with us 4 weeks!

My thanks to (Organisation B) for their kindness during the adoption process. I feel very lucky to have adopted such a lovely natured little dog.

*I love my dog. Many thanks to all at (Organisation G), especially (Physiotherapist) and Consultant Orthopaedic Vet. Also vet nurse who offered to take ***** for her appointment. Much appreciated but I needed to be there. My puppy! Thank you everyone!*

The dog gives me a reason to get up early every morning and get going, in the past I have suffered from clinical depression and having a dog companion certainly helps me

*I love my rescue dog *****. We have a very strong bond and I would never part with him. He has been on a tempestuous journey but is with me for life now. Always and forever!*

Rescue centres must make sure potential owners really understand what they are getting into. We can see why adoptions fail. You have to be completely committed to wanting it to work. Breed type is critical

*It is still very early days with ***** but, with hard work, we shall get there. Others can see a great and positive difference in behaviour in a short time. I am learning about him every day and I shall not give up. As he is becoming more secure, his behaviour is improving. I adopted him while still feeling great grief for my last dog, whom I nursed through cancer, so ***** is also watching changes in me and we are growing together.*

Adoption is a fantastic thing to do but you have to be sure that you have the skills and the time/determination to make it work. You need to understand the sort of dog that will fit into your life/family and not be swayed by just a pretty face.

(Organisation F) matched us perfectly; this dog is sheer joy to own. I consider myself very fortunate.

We have been exceptionally lucky with this dog. She was re-homed as opposed to rescued and this may have made the transition easier.

Getting a rescue dog is rewarding, can be challenging but satisfying. I would certainly recommend anybody to consider adoption if wanting a dog.

*Still getting to know *****. Rescue dogs take time and patience, they may have been through a lot of upheaval in their lives and unfortunately they cannot talk and tell us what the problems have been. We can only observe and with patience try to get them to lead a normal "doggy" life.*

*I am so pleased that ***** is part of our family and that we can give her the loving home she so deserves.*

In my experience, it takes 3-6 months for a rescued dog to settle down. I thoroughly recommend training classes- This has given me a measure of control over my dog, which has resulted in a very rewarding relationship

Not quite the dog I expected, should have had more time with him before adoption, but will keep him for life whatever the situation. Not as loving as previous dog but still bonding, so need more time

We have been very lucky to adopt such a gentle loving dog. She is everything we want in a dog and we are so very pleased she found us

It is exhausting having a rescue dog as they take a lot of patience and training "teaching an old dog new tricks", but very rewarding. Absolutely no regrets.

****** has fitted in perfectly and seems a very easy to please dog. She is probably the easiest rescue dog we have ever owned.*

*When we adopted ***** we expected there to be a few hiccups for the first few days or maybe a week but he has settled in perfectly he's a very laid back dog but does like to play and loves a fussing so glad we have him*

With hindsight I would have got to know her better before adoption as she is a challenge and my first dog but have no regrets after the slight wobble!

Each family member (and extended family) commit to having a rescue dog and the time and effort it takes to help them to settle and feel part of the family. All of which unites us and gives us enormous benefits.

*Rescuing and adopting ***** has been the best thing we have ever done and I'm so glad that she picked us.*

The people at (Organisation G) were very helpful all the way through the adoption process. I would certainly think of adopting another dog from there if anything were to happen to this one.

*We think ***** was mistreated before being rescued she is nervous of some people gaining her trust will take time she is also a bit of an escaper she is harder work than our previous dogs but worth it*

We are working towards building a close relationship but like any other it takes some time to build and grow very strong.

(Organisation A) has always supported me and the dogs I have had from them. Can't recommend them enough. All the rescues I have had have turned out well with a bit of work on my part and advice from the centre.

Our rescue dog has some quirks and issues that need working on - but we expected that to be the case. She is also very typical of a Border collie in temperament, which is a challenge for anyone, but one which I sought and welcome. She's already a part of the family and we wouldn't swap her. We were also very impressed with (Organisation A) and feel very secure knowing that they are there for advice, should we need it. I would not hesitate to adopt another collie from them in the future.

The reason we would never consider another adoption is because we are already in our mid 60's and would be far too old! Also, although we have no children in the household, we have several grandchildren who are here a lot so the dog has this vital contact too.

*Adopting ***** has been great for us and I think (Organisation G) did a fantastic job in preparing ***** and us for what to expect and have offered continued support if needed.*

*The whole experience of adopting through the (Organisation G) was a pleasure. It was simple, friendly, a great choice of dogs and a very caring and professional environment. I have had rescue dogs before and was surprised at how calm ***** is, considering his age as well as the fact he has been rehomed. He's a great lad and he's not just won my heart, my friends and family love him, as do some of my fellow villagers, who melt when he insists on saying hello and stopping for a cuddle in the street. ***** is zen calm, very loving and a complete joy.*

I have had dogs since I was a small child, life without a dog is unthinkable and I would never contemplate it.

It's quite difficult to be precise with many answers. I feel we are still getting to know this dog. We have had him 4 weeks. The questionnaire seems to probe most areas of ownership.

I would strongly recommend a dog as a companion to anyone but the dog MUST be a suitable breed for one's individual environment. A puppy is a responsibility like a child. Don't take one on unless you are prepared for anything! They are very hard work but the end result is always worth it.

*As we have only had ***** a few weeks, there is still much to learn on both sides; however, we feel very happy with her and hope she feels the same.*

As it is still early days, we are still learning from each other, but the dog has settled well with my grandsons who we see every weekend.

*Things didn't turn out how we hoped, it was a difficult and sad decision to return *****. He will make a wonderful dog for the right home, probably needs a more experienced, rural environment with lots of time to help him adjust. He just wanted to feel loved and secure and I'm so sorry we ended up being unable to provide that for him.*

I never expect any dog to be perfect let alone a rescue dog. We enjoy training him and are understanding of his background and patient with him!