

## City-Provided Dog Training

Tarzana Neighborhood Council Meeting, March 22, 2022

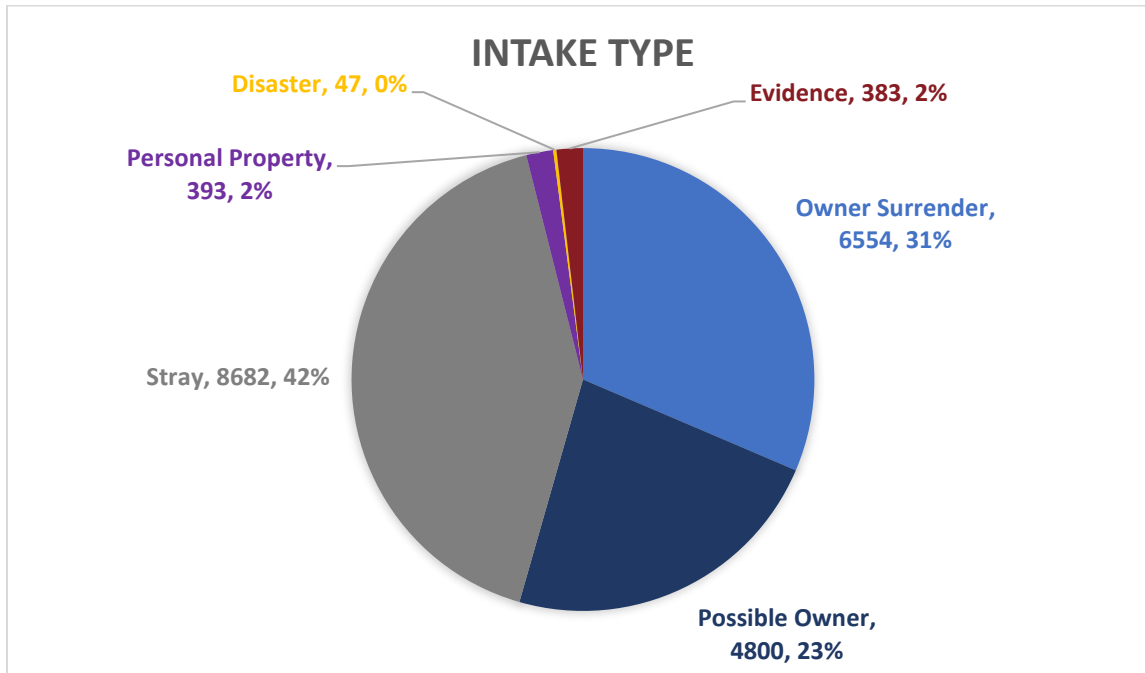
By Michelle Cornelius, Member of the Tarzana Neighborhood Council Animal Welfare Committee

We are requesting that LA Animal Services (LAAS) consider offering free dog training to people who adopt from City shelters. The money for this would come from the Animal Welfare Trust Fund (AWTF).

### Analysis of dog intake data from 2019

TOTAL LIVE INTAKES: 20,859

INTAKES BY TYPE:



For the owner surrenders where a reason was given, 19% were surrendered due to behavior problems which was the highest of any category; the next highest was “no time” at 16% (see Figure 1 at end of document for more details).

For the owner surrender **returns**,<sup>1</sup> 45% were returned for behavior problems which was the highest of any category; the second highest was “other pet” which was 13% (see Figure 2 at end of document for more details).

While small dogs are adopted more quickly than larger dogs, dogs of all sizes without negative behavioral notes are adopted more quickly than dogs with bad behavioral notes:

- For small dogs (under 20 lbs.), 92% without bad behavior notes are adopted or rescued within 14 days of becoming available for adoption; for small dogs with bad notes, 75% leave the shelter within 14 days.

<sup>1</sup> Owner surrender returns are dogs who were adopted from a City shelter and returned.

- For medium dogs (21-50 lbs.), 87% without bad behavior notes are adopted or rescued within 14 days of becoming available for adoption; for medium dogs with bad notes, 58% leave the shelter within 14 days.
- For large dogs (>51 lbs.), 59% without bad behavior notes are adopted or rescued within 14 days of becoming available for adoption; **for large dogs with bad notes, only 13% leave the shelter within 14 days.**

### **Importance of training**

According to Dr. Sophia Yin, dog training needs to be more than simply teaching a dog a few simple commands like sit, stay, lie down, and heel; it should also “help train leadership and communication in humans and impulse control in dogs” (Yin 2012). Since most dog aggression is due to fear and anxiety (Yin 2009), this type of training can help prevent dog bites by helping owners recognize fear in their dog’s body language (Yin 2011). It can also eliminate other undesirable behaviors like those associated with separation anxiety (Yin 2012).

### **How training can help LAAS**

Everyone benefits when dogs and their owners complete training classes. The dog is more well behaved resulting in a less stressful home environment, making it less likely that a dog will be returned or surrendered due to behavior issues.

We are requesting that the City provide vouchers to adopters and rescues to cover the cost of dog training. The vouchers could be paid for using donations from the Animal Welfare Trust Fund so it would not affect the City’s General Fund. Due to limited resources (both financial and staff), it is likely that vouchers would initially be given to people who adopt dogs with behavior issues and owners who are considering returning or surrendering their dog due to behavior problems. (If the program is successful and there is enough money in the AWTF, then the program can be expanded to offer vouchers to everyone who adopts a dog from LAAS.)

Amount of unrestricted funds in the AWTF as of December 2021: \$2.4 million.

### **Importance of using positive reinforcement training**

According to the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, the most effective and humane training is rewards-based (positive reinforcement); adverse training has negative long-term effects, is less effective and harms the dog-human relationship. Therefore, any approved trainers should only be using rewards-based training.<sup>2</sup>

### **Benefits:**

Overall, the goal of this proposal is to reduce owner surrenders, adoption returns, and dog bites. Fewer animals in the shelter makes it less stressful for staff, volunteers, and the animals. Dogs who have more opportunities for exercise will likely be calmer when in their kennels which will help them get adopted. Additionally, if fewer animals are in the shelter it allows for more time to network animals with medical or behavioral issues; when the shelters are at capacity, these animals are at very high risk of being

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<sup>2</sup> Aversive techniques are things like shock collars and physical punishment; simply telling a dog “no” is not considered an aversive technique.

euthanized. Furthermore, if staff are overwhelmed and exhausted, they have less time to provide service to the public and they may be at higher risk for workplace injuries.

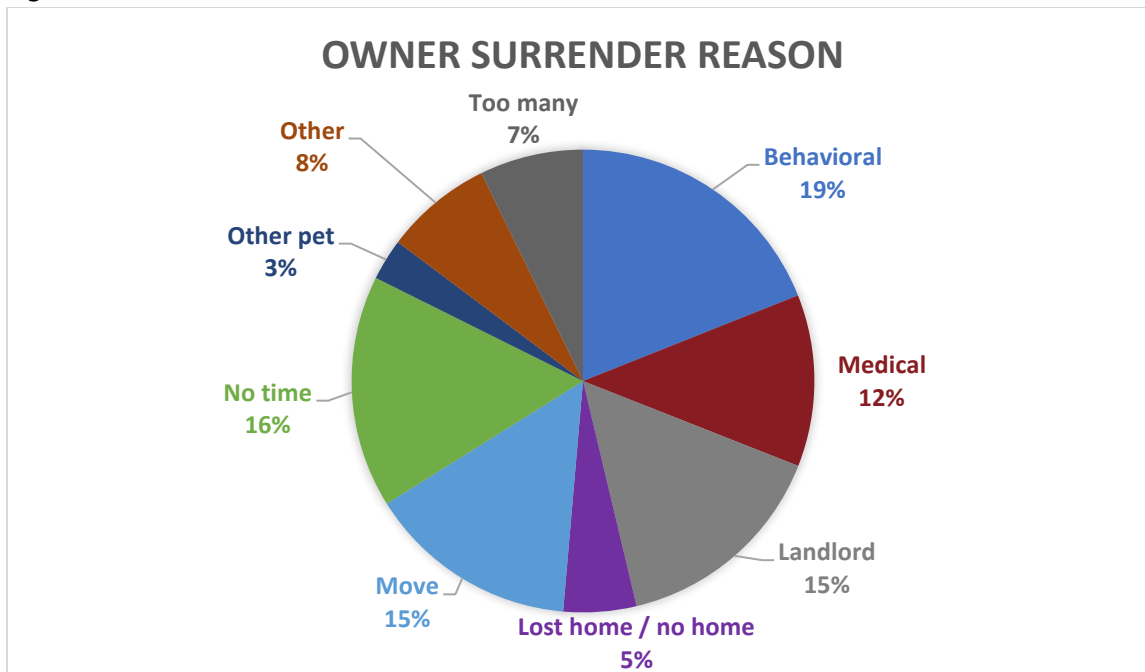
**Cost:**

Six-week group classes at some of the large pet stores range from \$139-149 and four hours of private training is \$219.<sup>3</sup> Some trainers may be willing to provide bulk discounts to LAAS.

**Summary:**

Many adopters do not realize how important dog training is and may only understand its value once they have completed the program. By offering training for free, more owners will take their dog to training classes. City-provided training could help shelters place dogs with behavioral issues as well as reduce the number of dogs returned or surrendered to the shelter due to behavior issues.

Figure 1.



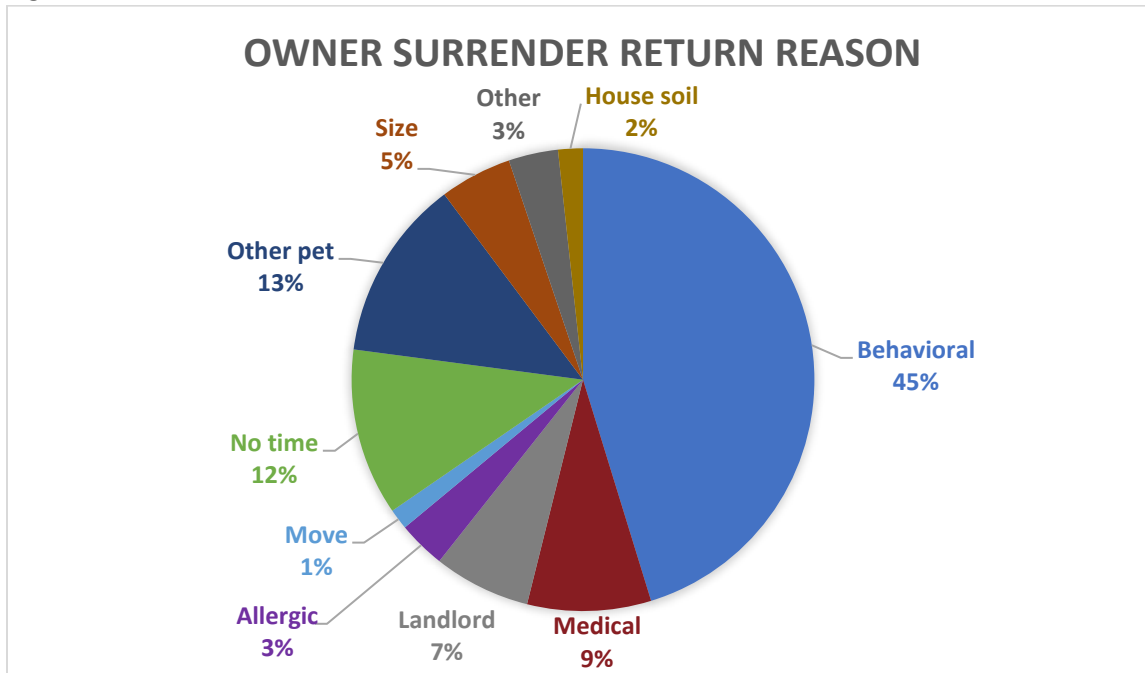
**Behavioral** = aggressive towards people, children or other animals, destructive, escapes, hyper, timid, and vocal (It is important to stress that we are not advocating that training be provided for dogs deemed dangerous to people, especially children, in lieu of bringing them into the shelter. For dog owners who are concerned about aggressive behavior, a determination should be made on a case-by-case basis as to whether training is an appropriate alternative to surrendering their animal.)

**Medical** = cost of medical, ill, injured

**Other** = Age, allergic, died, divorce, house soil, investigation, new baby, no protect, owner died, sheds, wrong sex, size

<sup>3</sup> Private training may be needed for dogs who do not get along with other dogs.

Figure 2.



There were 769 owner surrender returns in 2019; no reason was given for 75 of them.

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**Medical** = cost of medical, ill, injured

**Other** = age, new baby, no protect, lost home / no home, sheds, too many, wrong sex

#### References:

American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, 2021. "[Position Statement on Human Dog Training](#)"

Yin, Sophia [Preventing Dog Bites – Dr. Sophia Yin \(drsophiayin.com\)](#) May 17, 2009.

Yin, Sophia. [Preventing Dog Bites: Stop Dog Aggression Before It Starts – Dr. Sophia Yin \(drsophiayin.com\)](#) August 14, 2011.

Yin, Sophia. [The Learn to Earn Program: Developing Leadership in Humans and Impulse Control in Dogs – Dr. Sophia Yin \(drsophiayin.com\)](#) Date: February 5, 2012

Yin, Sophia. [Dog Training Classes Can and Should Be More than Sit, Stay, Stand – Dr. Sophia Yin \(drsophiayin.com\)](#) April 6, 2012.

Yin, Sophia. [Separation Anxiety – Canine Style – Dr. Sophia Yin \(drsophiayin.com\)](#) June 18, 2012.