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In Salisbury, Center for Canine Behavior Studies aims to help stem flood of dog surrenders

By John Torsiello

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SALISBURY — The Center for Canine Behavior Studies, Inc. is helping pet owners and those who work with dogs to better understand canine behavioral issues, which, unfortunately, are major reasons for the surrender of dogs to shelters. Sadly, many of these innocents are never adopted and end up being put down. People are noticing and many care deeply about the Center's work.



Dr. Nicholas Dodman, professor, section head and program director for Animal Behavior at the Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, photographed at the behavioral studies clinic in North Grafton, Mass.

*Kelvin Ma / Kelvin Ma/Tufts University
Contributed photo*

“We have had 6,000 people sign on to help us in our quest,” said CEO and Co-Founder Chris Janelli. “These members have remained with us as

loyal followers who help by participating in our studies. Our first two `mega studies' have been published in top tier peer reviewed journals and have been well received by the scientific community. Our presence and potential is gradually being recognized by academic veterinary behaviorists as a center for excellence and good work.”

The Center's first study, the “Animal Owner Interaction Study,” demonstrated for the first time the influence of owners' behavior on their dogs' behavior. “This published

study is epic,” said, Co-Founder Dr. Nicholas Dodman, the Center’s Chief Scientific Officer, “and will be the go-to study down the road for anyone interested in learning about or researching the dyad that is the human-animal bond.”

A second major study by the Center provides the most current data on the demographics of canine behavior problems. It has been hailed as a pivotal communication by many, and praised by Dr. Kathe Houpt (a noted veterinary behaviorist and Professor Emeritus at Cornell University). “Anyone pursuing any studies of canine behavior in the future will probably refer to our demographic study results up front in their publication,” said Dodman.

The Salisbury-based Center’s third major study regarding treatment of behavior problems is on the launching pad. It will inform owners of dogs that exhibit problem behavior (almost 90 percent of owners, according to the second study) who best to see and what programs to employ to get things under control and what results to expect over a designated period of time, said Dodman.

“The results of this study will save owners from going to the wrong type of behavioral professional for help regarding a particular issue and wasting valuable time and money on a fruitless course,” said Dodman. “The delay, expense and frustration that causes can lead to unnecessary surrender and loss of life.”

The Animal Owner Interaction Study examined the influence of people (owners), their personality, mood, and training methods on their dogs’ behavior. In some cases, the study found, it was difficult to separate whether it was the dog’s behavior that altered the owners’ affect and behavior toward the dog, especially in the realm of punishment. For example, the fact that depressed men are four to five times likely to use physical punishment to deal with their dog’s behavior does not necessarily mean that punishment caused the problem behavior. It may have been that the dogs misbehaved more with depressed male owners, who therefore felt the need to resort to physical punishment. “It’s a chicken and egg type question,” said Dodman.



Dr. Nicholas Dodman, of the Center for Canine Research Studies, with a small friend. Dodman and his associates hope to provide a better understanding of dog behavior so that there are less surrenders to animal shelters, and happier canines and owners.

Center for Canine Research Studies /

So why should humans care about such research and findings? “Dog owners should care about the research we are doing because it will teach them about their dog’s behavior,” observed Dr. Dodman. “The more you know, the better it is for the human-animal bond and the less likely that a relationship fails and leads to surrender. Dogs should have a home for life. Understanding what they do and why they do it is a key piece of information, as is the knowledge of who to go to for advice if things do go wrong, what behavior programs work best, and what outcome can be expected.”

And, he said, CCBS findings are not sitting on an academic bookshelf gathering dust. They are being used, for example, to leverage human-canine adoption matching, as CCBS is partnered with another Litchfield County organization called “How I Met My [Dog.com](http://www.howimetmydog.com/).” (www.howimetmydog.com/).

Dodman believes that the Center’s studies should affect the way veterinarians advise their clients on issues studied thus far. An informed veterinarian could, for example, explain that a client’s dog’s house soiling was a common problem (i.e. they are not alone and their dog is not an outlier) and that it can be easily resolved in a period of two to three weeks by engaging in a specific (now validated) behavior modification program. Janelli said the client might also be informed that their own anxiety over the issue may be contributing to the problem, so they should act calmly around the dog, especially if an accident in the house is detected.

The latest findings by the Center, entitled “Demographics and Comorbidity of Behavior Problems in Dogs,” were published in the “Journal of Veterinary Behavior.” Said Dr. Dodman, “We discovered that anxiety is the most common canine behavioral issue, affecting 44 percent of all dogs, and that it underlies most types of aggression, specific behavior problems (like separation anxiety and thunderstorm phobia) and so-called canine compulsive behavior. Some of the correlations of behavior problems confirmed other studies, but other associations we found were brand new.”

It is hoped that the Center’s findings will encourage veterinarians to further incorporate aspects of behavior problem management into their daily work. Offered Janelli, “More importantly, emerging findings from a follow up study with owners having problem dogs could make a significant impact in preventing misbehaving dogs from entering the shelter ‘system’ in the first place, and helping dogs surrendered because of behavior, escape the ‘system’ through adoption and thus avoid euthanasia.”

The Center for Canine Behavior Studies was originally co-founded by Dodman and Janelli as a division of The Simon Foundation, Inc., Connecticut’s second largest animal rescue and shelter. Dodman at the time was the longest serving professor at the Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine and is now Professor Emeritus at Tufts University. Janelli is a long-term Salisbury resident, having moved there in 1965.

In June of 2018, CCBS independently incorporated as a public 501(c)(3) for scientific research and education. CCBS, Inc. is based in Salisbury, but operates as a “virtual research organization,” utilizing the Internet to collect survey data from dog owners primarily in the U.S. and Canada, but from more than a dozen countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, Brazil and the United Kingdom said Janelli.

CCBS pursues canine behavior research that benefits both humans and canines. “We pride ourselves on educating dog owners to better understand and interact with man’s best friend,” said Janelli. “CCBS strives to be the premier resource for dog owners when their dog misbehaves. We do this because killing 800,000 dogs each year in America is too many. The Humane Society estimates that 30 to 40 percent of relinquished pets are surrendered due to behavior problems. In fact, this number could be significantly higher. CCBS research will help reduce behavior-related surrender by finding and sharing solutions that resolve canine misbehavior, maintain the human-canine bond and keep dogs in their homes for life. Our motto is ‘Never Give Up. Never Surrender.’”

CCBS is doing canine behavior research at the highest academic level at a “fraction of the cost of leading universities,” said Janelli. “One of the primary reasons for that is because we are not supporting costly brick and mortar infrastructure and operate as a ‘virtual research organization’ leveraging the Internet. With the addition of Dr. Kimberly Greer at Prairie View A&M University — part of the Texas A&M system — we now have access to ‘wet lab’ capabilities that will support canine genetic behavior study.”

The Center has an annual operating budget of less than \$200,000 a year and relies solely on the support of the public said Janelli.

Anyone is welcome to become a member, but dog owners or guardians who want to participate in studies should be 18 years old. Membership is free. Members get first review of the Center’s newsletters and can send in questions and ask for help.

Visit www.CenterForCanineBehaviorStudies.org for more information.

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