



# Shelter Dogs - Training for a New Life

February 2010

➤➤➤ A Training Program for the Meriden Humane Society

## Points of Interest

- Positive methods used to teach the dogs
- Additional Workshops upcoming
- Yahoo Group formed to help the group communicate and share ideas
- Donations enabled us to buy 15 EZ Walk Harnesses and prepare training material
- Dominance based (alpha dog) training is outdated!

**Shelter dogs need more than food, water, and shelter.** They also need mental and physical stimulation to keep them from deteriorating in the stressful shelter environment and to help them be better pets when adopted.

The dogs at MHS are getting a chance to learn how to interact positively with staff, volunteers, and potential adopters. This is possible through the efforts of the dedicated people who volunteer and work at the shelter and those who donated toward equipment.

## First Training Session - A Well Attended Success!

More than thirty people came to the session held Sunday, February 21 at the shelter. The session began with a discussion and demonstration of positive training techniques. Mattie who is a former shelter dog demonstrated sit, down, stay, leave it, come when called, attention to her handler and polite leash walking.

Each participant was given a basic training manual that explains how to use positive reinforcement to work with the dogs. Positive reinforcement means rewarding good behavior at the moment the desired behavior is occurring. Behavior that is rewarded will be repeated. Negative behaviors are ignored and therefore not rewarded.

Rewards include praise, petting,

treats, toys or attention. Using positive reinforcement speeds learning and improves and deepens our relationships with dogs.

The first MHS demo dog was Lucille an exuberant and silly pit bull mix who loved to jump. In seconds, Lucille began to learn that jumping got her nothing, but sitting politely got her rewards. Lucille couldn't sit fast enough! On the new harness, she instantly was easier to walk.

The dog walkers fitted several dogs with the donated fifteen EZ Walk No-Pull Harnesses and then brought the dogs outside.

Practice and consistency will continue to improve the skills of both the dogs and dog walkers.



Very attentive shelter dog learning to sit and down. Note she is wearing her new harness.

## What About the Alpha Dog Dominance Style of Training?

Dominance-based training is damaging, and dangerous. Punishment is not the way to teach any animal. Dominance theory was based on misinterpretation of wolf behavior on the part of wolf biologists who have been trying for years to educate people that training based on dominance is outdated.

"Despite the fact that advances in behavior research have modified our understanding of social hierarchies in wolves, many animal trainers continue to base their training methods on outdated perceptions.

The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) recommends

that veterinarians not refer clients to trainers or behavior consultants who coach and advocate dominance hierarchy theory and the subsequent confrontational training that follows from it."

From AVSAB position statement. For more go to [www.AVSABonline.org](http://www.AVSABonline.org)



*Thank you to Marlena Delbianco manager at Meriden Humane for her support and enthusiasm for this program.*

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## Meriden Humane Society

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[www.petfinder.com/shelters/CT20.html](http://www.petfinder.com/shelters/CT20.html)

The workshops are designed to teach the staff members and volunteers techniques to teach the shelter dogs basic manners, self control and modify minor behavior problems. Dogs with basic manners have a better chance of being adopted and kept in their homes. Workshops will include:

- Why teach the dogs
- What to teach
- What equipment to use
- Positive reinforcement methods
- How to teach basic manners and self control
- Demos using MHS dogs
- How to be safe around dogs
- Hands on with staff members and volunteers working with MHS dogs

## Upcoming Workshops

Additional workshops will be held on Sundays with the dates and times to be announced.

If you are a dog walker at the shelter or one of the staff members, please join the Yahoo group [mhsdogtraining](#) at Yahoo Groups. The group is a moderated forum for people to discuss the training program, ask questions, and share observations and successes. Articles and links about training will be posted on the group also.

If you need help in joining the Yahoo group, please email Karen at:

[secretlakedog@comcast.net](mailto:secretlakedog@comcast.net)

## Thanks for Your Donations!

Lisa Bennett - Granby, CT  
Beth Brody - Simsbury, CT  
Judy Colligan - Hartford, CT  
Mildred Ellison - Simsbury, CT  
Nick Grbac - San Francisco, CA  
Terry Lachance - Bristol, CT  
Josie Miller - Middletown, CT  
Patrice Nelson - Simsbury, CT  
Joanne Phelan - Hamden, CT



Otto learning to lie down on command. Otto was really having fun at the workshop



Lucille learning to walk nicely on leash with one of the dog walkers. She did great!



Dean wearing his new harness and leash with his volunteer group