

Background

Decisions surrounding dog acquisition affect many people each year, but little is known about how people experience the process of getting a dog.

There is an urgent need to understand how people are making decisions about dog acquisition so that appropriate strategies can be developed that promote responsible acquisition behaviours to safeguard dog welfare.

Aims

Dogs Trust are conducting a study to gather data that will allow for exploration of the factors that influence how and why people acquire dogs. These findings will help us to design tools and strategies for the effective education of prospective owners, to promote responsible acquisition practices, and to help those working in the dog rescue environment make suitable matches.

Methods

Data will be collected using an online survey and interviews with current and prospective dog owners across the UK. Quantitative data collected from the online survey will be analysed using statistical tests to explore whether outcomes differ between different groups. Semi-structured interviews will allow for the collection of in-depth qualitative data about the dog acquisition process.

Literature Review



Katrina Holland conducted a literature review, published in the journal *Animals*, that collated research investigating the motivations and behaviours of owners as they acquire dogs. The review identified research that suggests the importance of several human- and dog-related factors that are likely to impact decision-making surrounding dog acquisition.

Human-related factors include:

- Prior dog ownership;
- Age;
- Gender;
- Income;
- Education.

Dog-related factors include:

- Physical appearance;
- Temperament;
- Behaviour.

Various demographic factors, such as gender, age and income, have also been identified as potential predictors of preference or behaviour with regards to choosing where to acquire a dog from. In addition, social influences, such as trends in breed popularity, appear to influence decisions regarding which breed of dog to acquire.

The literature review is Open Access (free) and available by scanning the QR code:



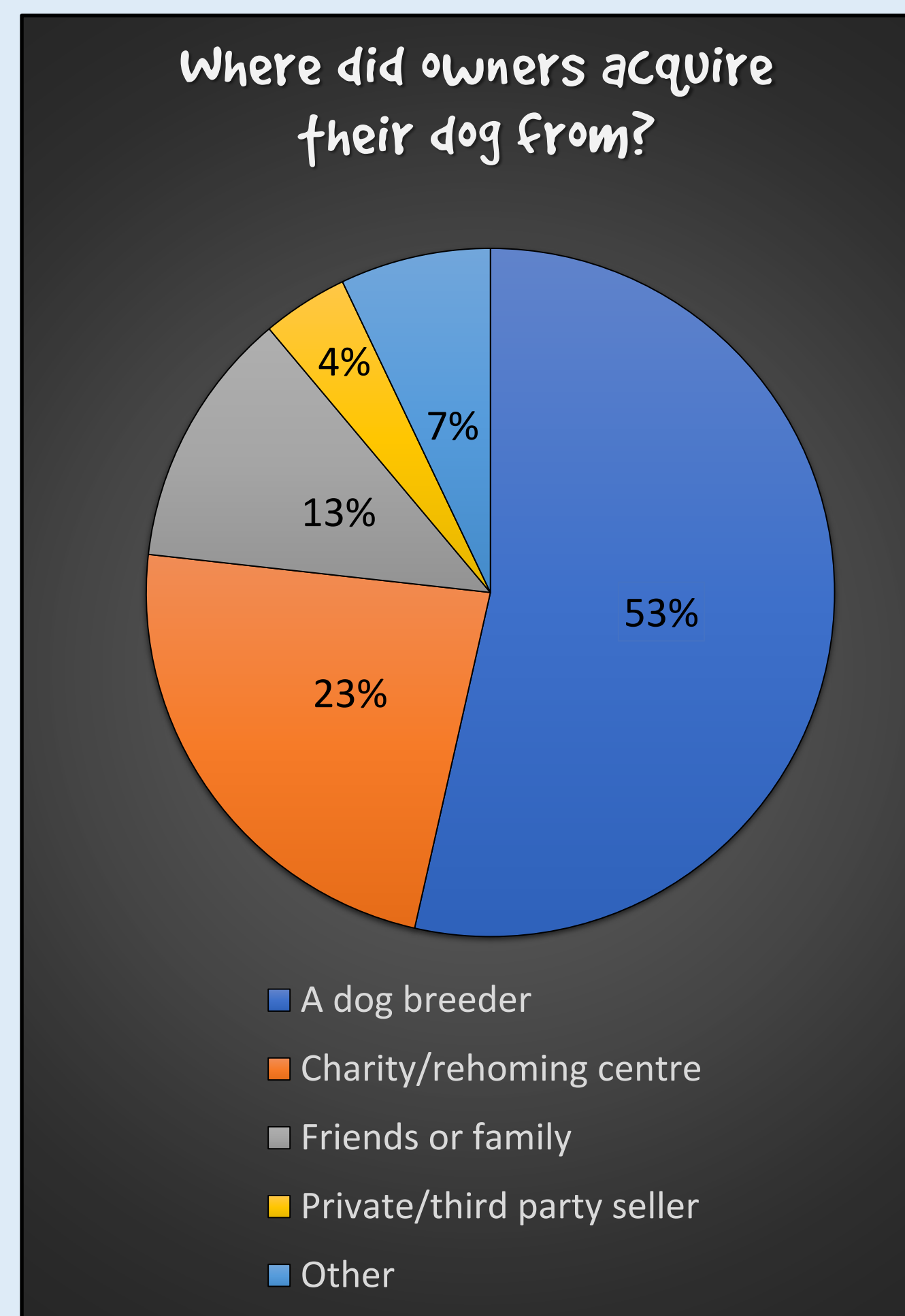
Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted throughout April-June 2019 which involved:

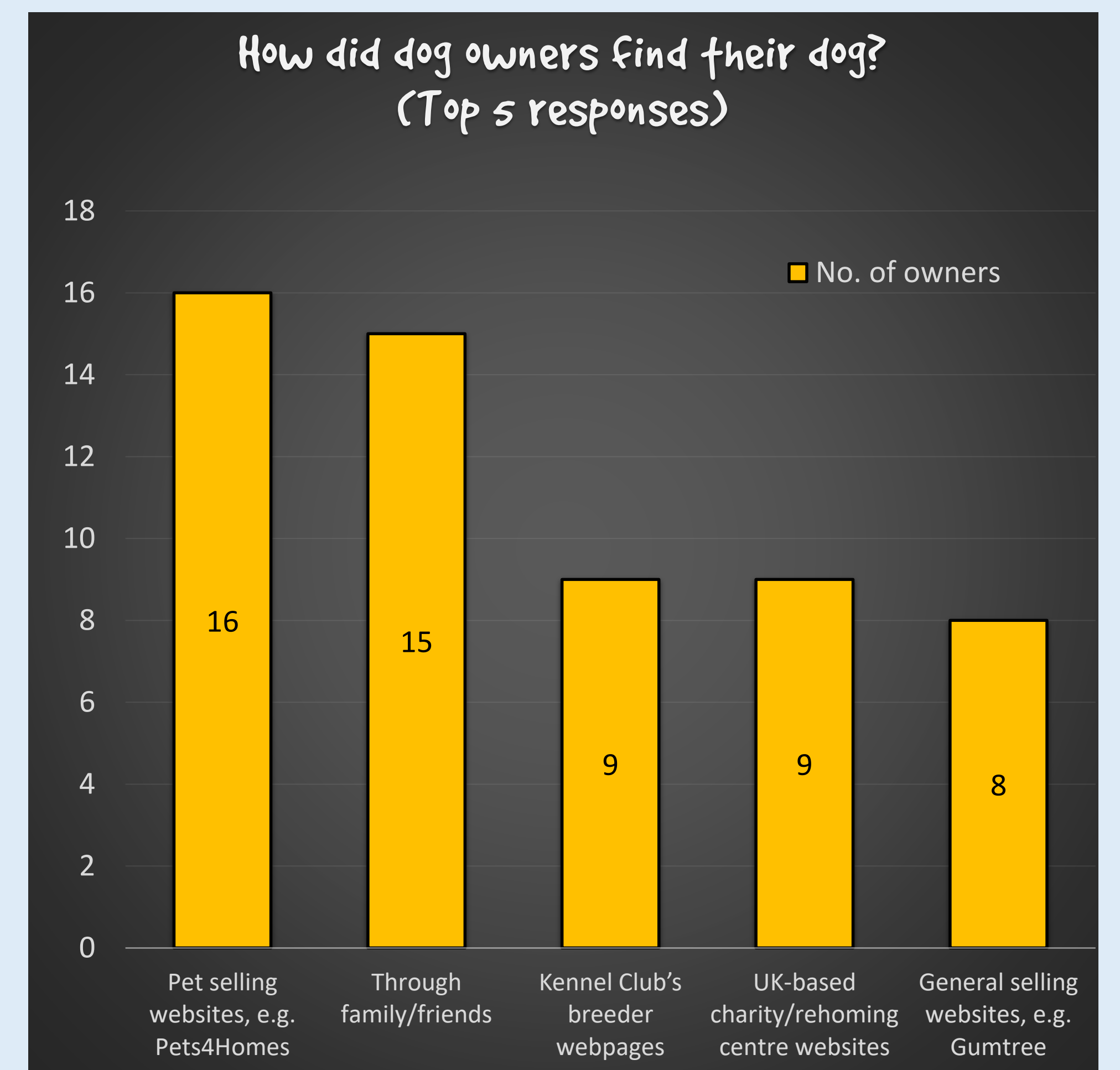
- An online survey of dog owners (n=102)
- A qualitative study using interviews to collect data about dog owners (n=26) conducted in a variety of formats:
 - Group and individual;
 - Face-to-face and remote (e.g. telephone);
 - Pre-arranged and ad-hoc (at Dogs Trust Responsible Dog Ownership events in London).

The survey found that 53% of owners acquired their dog from a breeder. The most frequently reported way that owners found their dog was through pet selling websites. The most popular reason for wanting to get a dog was companionship for the owner. Previous experience of dog ownership was the factor most commonly reported as important in influencing the owner's decision to get a dog.

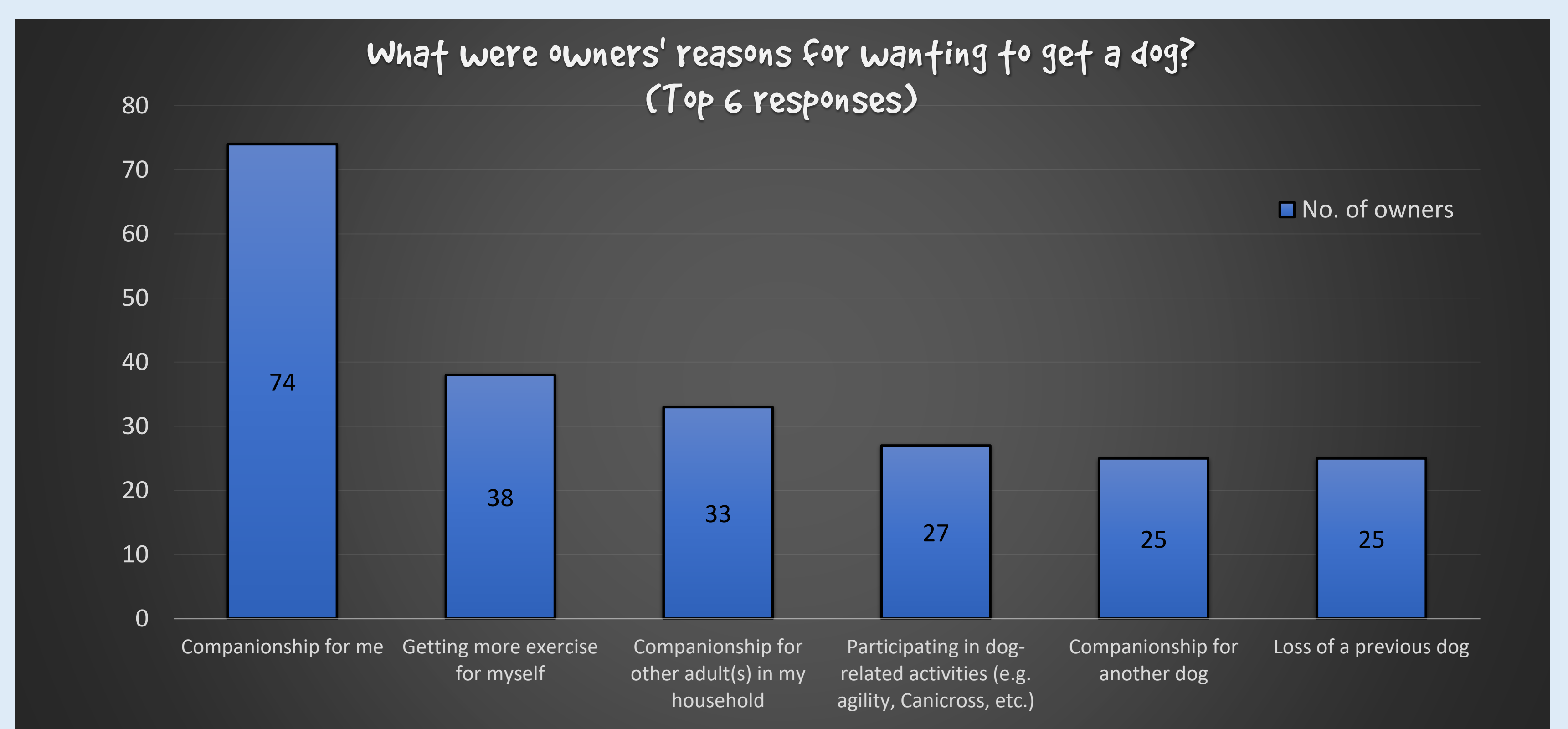
Where did owners acquire their dog from?



How did dog owners find their dog? (Top 5 responses)



What were owners' reasons for wanting to get a dog? (Top 6 responses)



Pilot interviews were conducted to help develop the final interview schedules to be used for large-scale data collection. Several interesting themes emerged from this data.

For some owners, the choice of breed acquired was tied to the dog's appearance.

"I'm embarrassed to say it, but we really did like dogs that are Northern looking...aesthetics played a huge part in our decision-making for sure."

Most owners spoke about their desire to get a dog being tied to their love of dogs.

"For me, maybe it's having that responsibility. I don't have kids, so maybe it ticks that box of just having something that relies on you."

"I just literally love dogs so much, I just can't explain it anymore! That's literally it! So I was just like, I want one!"

For some owners who did not have children, the idea of having a 'furbaby' or being a 'pet parent' was appealing.

The importance of a 'support network' when making the decision to get a dog was mentioned by several owners.

"I had to obviously make sure I had that support network with my parents and stuff as I couldn't afford having a dog walker come in and things. I knew it was a big responsibility."

"And then I saw him, and he was perfect."

For many, the first moment of meeting their future dog appeared crucial in their decision to acquire their specific dog, with owners 'just knowing' that the dog was 'the one'.