



Humane Society of Weld County

6/22 - 6/26/20 "Texas"

Goals for session

- 1) Meeting new people
- 2) Novel experiences
- 3) Resource guarding
- 4) Body handling

Initial Impressions:

Texas was tough to get into the car, she was fearful once she got in and didn't take treats the entire ride. She took a little bit to warm up to me, didn't start taking treats from me until we got in the house. We did intros with the dogs right away, she did great meeting them. After an hour or two she warmed up to me, was taking treats and playful.

Training:

Meeting new people

The first person Texas met was my male partner, Chris. During the first day, I made sure that Texas was on the other side of a baby gate or Xpen from Chris, and each time he passed by her, he tossed high value treats. It took 4-5 hours for her to stop barking and charging each time she saw him and instead get soft and wiggly. Once her body language looked good, I opened the Xpen and allowed her to access him while he was seated on the couch. She went up and said hello, he gave her a few treats and she was fine with him after that. On day 3, he went camping and was gone for 24 hours. When he came back, we had to do the process all over again, but it only took an hour or so for her to become OK with him in the house again.

Texas met and was successful with 6 different people during her 4 days with me, men and women. I am defining successful as did not bite, and was eventually relaxed and comfortable around them. During each interaction the new person tossed treats to her EVEN THOUGH she was barking and lunging. This is extremely important in Counter Conditioning and very difficult for the untrained person to understand. Most people think they are rewarding the barking, and so do not treat and cause the dog to take much, much longer to feel safe with the new person. I stress this because it is difficult to get across to a potential adopter, and crucial to Texas "coming around" in an amount of time a lay person would deem acceptable. Pairing a strange person with yummy food short circuits the pattern recognition in her brain and fast tracks a positive assessment of the new person.

I do not believe Texas intends to make contact with her charging, I believe she is trying to make the unfamiliar person go away. My father in law walked into the backyard, surprising us both and Texas charged him. He did not have treats on him, he turned his back and pulled up his arms at my instruction. Texas got close enough to bark up his leg and still chose not to bite him.

Texas was substantially better meeting new people when there were also new dogs present, also she did better in a new space. She was better off leash, but I still would recommend a barrier of some kind to keep the person feeling safe while Texas is eating treats and deciding that they are OK.

Novel Experiences

Texas is definitely very timid in new environments. We went to 3 different hiking spots and parks and 2 “new” homes and yards. Texas did much better (became comfortable sooner) when another confident dog was with her. All in all, I would consider her fear level medium, she definitely became more and more confident over the 4 days. I am confident that she would continue to come out of her shell and gain confidence with more exposure (paired with HVT’s!) to novel places. She went from refusing to get in the car at all to jumping right in by day 4. However, when putting her in the car without another dog on day 5, she would not get in on her own.

Although Texas was clearly under socialized, she has a good little personality and a baseline curiosity that seems to win out over her fear most of the time.

Body Handling

Texas showed absolutely no issues with me handling her. She let me pick her up, touch her paws, feel her back end and tail, all with no issues. Chris did not handle her to the extent that I did, but once she was comfortable with him he was able to pet her, roughhouse with her and rub her belly without issue.

Resource Guarding

Texas is a substantial resource guarder with other dogs. She will charge and snark if another dog approaches food and sometimes a toy if it is close to her. This behavior started a snarking match with both of my dogs several times, she has great bite inhibition and has settled each argument without starting a fight. She does not signal, however, she goes straight for the open mouth charge. This maneuver, although very normal dog-dog communication, could certainly get her into trouble with a dog who has a hairpin trigger for fighting. She exhibited this behavior with all 5 of the dogs she interacted with while with me, all 5 were able to navigate, either argue with her or back off the resource without incident. My male aussie mix asserted himself right away and she did substantially less resource guarding against him than my docile female. Just something to note, she did take a hint and cool it, rather than starting fights with him.

I did implement a time out protocol for the RG when she got over the top with it. I would warn her with “that’s enough!” then, if she quit, lots of praise, if she snarked again she got the cue

"Too Bad!" and hauled off into the bathroom. I also implemented this with barking but did not have enough time to modify either behavior.

Barrier Reactivity

Texas did not show any barrier reactivity with the dogs behind any of our fences. I simulated barrier reactivity with strangers using the Xpen. We were able to modify her behavior within minutes of treat tossing. I suspect that the majority of her reactivity is an artifact of being in the shelter.

Training Suggestions:

I absolutely recommend that Texas continue to have positive experiences meeting new people. This is perhaps the single most important thing to reduce recidivism for her. This can be done in the shelter, with new or unfamiliar people stopping in front of her kennel and tossing treats. It could also be done in the play yard, with new people on the other side of a fence, or with Texas on a leash a safe distance. On the leash, her handler will likely have to be the person who feeds her to begin with, then, once she's more relaxed, have the stranger toss.

Texas is a very mouthy, barky, playful puppy. I recommend that while in the shelter, she get reinforced for sitting quietly. If she is barking or jumping, ask her to sit (use treat if needed) before she gets attention, door opened, leashed up, etc.

It would be a good idea for Texas to establish a positive association with a vet. Set up sessions where she meets the vet and techs in the parking lot, gets lots of treats from them, then leaves. Work towards the techs and the vet taking the leash and walking her, eventually kneeling down and touching her. This can be done in short, 5 minute sessions. The end goal would be for the techs to be able to walk her into the building and into the exam room. Otherwise, inter muscular sedation wouldn't be a bad option for emergency vetting.

Adoption Suggestions:

Texas would do best in an adult or older kid, active home. She would do great with another confident dog who would put up with her resource guarding, or give her a little what for when she does it. Just be sure this dog does not have a history of dog fights or severe RG issues themselves. I strongly suggest having any potential adopter come to the shelter a couple times to meet and hang with Texas before bringing her home. A good relationship where this person can pet and play with her in the play yard would be preferable. This is mostly because she will have to be picked up to be put in the car, so getting fully comfortable with any lay person before they do that is ideal.

The most important thing for Texas's adopter to adhere to is the new people protocol. Be sure that they understand that she will bark and lunge, but to treat her anyway! They can either meet new people outside and walk, or behind a barrier and toss treats. Texas is also reactive on

leash, especially to bicycles. She is very trainable however, and started improving with me with just a couple of sessions. We worked on sit/stay while things passed. She is a puppy through and through, goofy, playful, alert and lot of fun. I have no doubt she will be a great addition for someone who can work with her stranger protocol.