

CLACKAMAS COUNTY DOG SERVICES VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Volunteer levels of participation

Virtually all of the dogs in our care are strays. We have little or no knowledge of their history or behaviors except what we learn while they are with us. Thus we don't know what things they might like and not like, or what they know.

It is important that every volunteer learns to read a dog's behaviors and body language for your safety as well as the dog's safety.

Further, it is imperative that the dogs in the shelter have a unified method of training that teaches them really good presentation and stay-at-home behaviors. Clackamas County Dog Shelter uses clicker training for behavior modification and training. That way everyone that trains with the dogs uses the same sounds and techniques to help the dogs understand which behaviors are good and which won't receive treats.

Coming to the front of the run, engaging with the shelter visitors, and sitting quietly (or at least keeping all four paws on the floor quietly) is essential to their ability to make a connection with potential adopters. We are trying to help them learn "universally cute" behaviors and almost everyone can agree that a dog sitting or standing quietly waiting for you to notice them is an acceptably cute behavior.

To help all volunteers learn the timing and practice of clicker training, as well as learn to read dogs and to learn the daily routine of the shelter, there are four levels of volunteer participation. This will ensure the best quality experience for our volunteers as well as our dogs.

Level 1 -all new volunteers
You must volunteer at least 20 hours at level 1

When you have completed 20 hours, set up time to work with Staff to move to Level 2

Hand feed the dogs at the run gate

This teaches the dogs to expect good things from people. It teaches them that food and yummys come from human hands. It also brings them to the front of their run, helping them learn to act appropriately and engage with shelter visitors.

Click for silence – click for sit and good presentation –

Unfortunately, barking is a behavior that dogs in shelters learn very quickly as a means of getting attention. This is not a very good stay-at-home behavior, so we use clicker training to try to overcome this behavior.

When a dog comes to the front of the run, click and treat. When they are quiet, click and treat. If they keep all four on the floor, click and treat. We are not giving any commands or asking for specific behaviors. We are taking the behavior the dog provides and clicking and treating the right behaviors. Dogs quickly figure out how to get the treats. This is the foundation for all future clicker training, as they quickly decide the sound of the clicker is a good thing and usually means there's a treat to follow. It is essential to click and treat as reinforcement for good behaviors; therefore, sometimes just randomly click and treat when you see a dog giving good presentation.

You can check out a clicker and treat bag for use while you are at the shelter. We have a variety of treats for different dogs and activities. Just ask Staff for assistance.

Kong stuffers

We try to turn each of our guests into Kong-aholics. Kongs are an appropriate chew toy and they keep dogs from chewing things that get them into trouble. Additionally, they are good for mental stimulation. Stuffed Kongs keep dogs mentally busy trying to get the food out.

Stuffing Kongs takes time, but is so very important to the dogs. The first time you go through and hand out stuffed Kongs, you'll see many of our furry guests doing the Kong dance...the minute they see what you have they start dancing in anticipation.

We stuff our Kongs with a mixture of kibble and canned food. Most of the dogs get every little bit out, but sometimes they leave a bit. Please check every Kong to be sure that all of the food is out before dropping them in the sink for cleaning.

Every Kong must be cleaned and disinfected every day to ensure we don't transmit any diseases from dog to dog.

Level 2 -all new volunteers

You must volunteer at least 30 hours at level 2.

When you have completed 30 hours, set up time with work with Staff to move to Level 3

Level 2 -

Level 2 volunteers continue level 1 training because the basics are so very important to help the dogs connect with potential adopters. Basics also help reinforce good behaviors. This work never ends.

As you move to Level 2, you will learn to help the dogs allow us humans get in and out of runs without jumping up or trying to dodge the gate. They will learn that being calm and exhibiting good behaviors gets them treats and lets them go for walks and play.

Use the clicker and high end treats every time the dog is calm, sits, or stands calmly for both in and out. You should plan on going in and out of runs several times off and on during your time at the shelter to continue to reinforce that proper behavior gets pets and loves, and clicker with treats.

Next, work on being able to put a collar or harness & leash on dog without the dog jumping up or acting out (including no mouthing). When they sit or stand quietly, click and treat. If they try to jump up, tell them no firmly, push them off, fold your arms and completely ignore them until the MOMENT they are “four on the floor” – click and treat. They will quickly learn that jumping up gets them ignored.

When they have mastered standing or sitting calmly, move to putting on the collar or leash – again this is a process of helping the dog understand that being controlled and calm gets a click and treat and jumping or being out of control gets them completely ignored.

Take dog out of their run for short walks under control, on site, for leash training. Our goal is to try to help every dog learn to walk on a lead properly. Dogs that cannot walk on leads often are not adopted because no one likes to be pulled around. If a dog is a puller, then you can start with a sporn harness and slowly graduate to a front clip or gentle leader and hopefully a flat collar over the course of several days. Remember the MOMENT they are walking nicely click and treat prolifically so they understand and walking nicely is heavily reinforced. We can help you practice placing the treat in between your fingers so the dog learns to “target” your hand.

Take dogs to play yards for 15 minute play/touch sessions. This is relaxation zone for the dogs and you. It's a time to chase a ball, sit and be petted, sniff, potty and otherwise just hang out. It is not, however, a time for the dog to jump up or mouth you. If they are jumping or mouthing – fold your arms out of reach, tell them no sternly and then ignore them. You will need to be ready with the clicker and treat the MOMENT they stop jumping or mouthing.

Walk back into run and remove leash & collar or harness without being jumped on or the dog acting out

Level 3

You must volunteer at least 20 hours at level 3.

When you have completed 20 hours, set up time with work with Staff to move to Level 4

Level 3 -

Level 3 volunteers will continue all level 1 and level 2 training because the foundation work is so important to the dogs' ability to connect with shelter visitors and potential adopters.

In Level 3 we are expanding on obedience training using the clicker. We continue to work on teaching leash manners so that the dogs walk calmly and under control.

We are now adding training through hand luring or targeting and click & treat – sit, down, allow touching, wait and tug with rules, leave it, and out. The goal is to encourage the dog to master basic skills that permit them to interact with the owners and be in public in a controlled and controllable manner.

Level 3 volunteers can join staff at various community outreach events and help with adoption counseling.

Level 4

To move to Level 4 each volunteer must have volunteered at least 20 hours at level 3 and show the ability to accomplish skills in levels 2 and 3 in a controlled manner.

Level 4 volunteers will expand obedience training to stay, wait, leash, and other commands. You will be able to take adoptable dogs for walks outside of our campus so they learn to walk politely and follow basic commands in the real world with all of its distractions.

At this point we are teaching the dogs that when in doubt, look to the handler. We are trying to teach that any leash tug or tightening is a sign to look to their handler for instruction. This will help combat those times when things happen quickly on a walk with their new owner. When the owner tightens the leash, they might not realize they are sending anxiety down the leash to the dog.