THE PEOPLE-FIRST VOLUNTEER PROGRAM CHECKLIST

Take care of the people, and the dogs follow.

THE CHAIN

1 Training and a coordinator > **2** Volunteers come back > **3** More dogs out of the kennel > **4** Better behavior notes > **5** Better adoption matches

Skip the first box and the whole chain breaks

WHAT A VOLUNTEER SHIFT GIVES A SHELTER DOG

- Dog walker: time out of the kennel
- Kennel buddy: calm company
- Playgroup handler: play with other dogs
- Enrichment builder: puzzles and frozen toys
- Photographer: a listing that looks like the real dog
- Showing helper: a walk before the meet

GREEN FLAGS

- [ ] Hands-on training with a mentor
- [ ] Color-coded handling levels
- [ ] 1 named volunteer coordinator
- [ ] Night and weekend shifts
- [ ] Notes staff actually read
- [ ] Ideas get an answer

RED FLAGS

- [ ] A slideshow, then go grab a dog
- [ ] Every dog on day 1
- [ ] Questions vanish into an inbox
- [ ] Weekday daytime only
- [ ] What volunteers learn stays in their heads
- [ ] Suggestions never hear back

HOW TO PUSH FOR IT

Donors: restrict a gift to the volunteer program

Volunteers: track 1 problem for a month and bring the numbers

Everyone: ask who runs the volunteers when you tour

BY THE NUMBERS

15 minutes

of petting lowered shelter dog cortisol as well as 30

651 volunteers

surveyed: less voice meant less satisfaction

2+ weeks

in a shelter calls for more space, enrichment and choice

Sources: Willen et al., Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 2017; Reese, Jacobs and Grebey, Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science, 2021; Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines, 2022.

letthembedog.com/blog/animal-shelter-volunteer-program

This article shares what we have learned from our own experience. It is not medical advice, and we are not veterinarians. If you have any concerns about your dog's health, please check with your vet.