



## About our Pet Help Partners Volunteers

### Who They Are

Volunteers with The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) Pet Help Partners program are very special people and are integral to our success. They come from all walks of life, sharing a common concern for companion animals and a desire to prevent shelter relinquishment. Many volunteers feel a responsibility to give back some of what they have gained from their bond with animals, and others are excited to promote animal surrender prevention in New York City through the nation's largest and most effective animal protection organization. The HSUS volunteers support our goal of creating meaningful social change for animals to create a more humane world.

We realize that volunteers have varying schedules and obligations, so your supervisor will work with you to figure out a flexible schedule. Volunteers are required to be at least 18 years of age or older, and meet the physical, mental and emotional requirements in the program's Essential Capabilities document.

### What They Do

Volunteers work with the Pet Help Partners program to provide assistance to pet owners who are considering relinquishing their pets to Animal Care & Control of NYC (AC&C) due to life crises or financial issues which affect their pets, as well as other issues they are having with their pets such as allergies, illness, or lack of pet care knowledge; they will connect these clients with programs and services that will address the issues, such as spay/neuter referrals and low cost vet care referrals.

From staffing our helpline and making adoption follow-up calls, transporting animals to and from veterinary appointments, and providing community outreach to increase pet food donations, the work of Pet Help Partners Volunteers is the true core of the HSUS' mission of Celebrating Animals and Confronting Cruelty.

By participating in our program, volunteers will not only have the opportunity to learn about animal protection issues, but will increase the HSUS' capacity to provide support to clients and their pets to ensure they are able to take advantage of the services offered by Pet Help Partners as well as help increase the capacity to expand our mission to the New York City metro area.

Volunteers develop important problem solving, communication, and customer service skills. They are better able to understand the challenges faced by animal owners and learn about common issues faced by companion animals, as well as how to resolve them. They make a huge difference in the lives of people and pets by providing them with the resources and solutions they need to stay together.

Pet Help Partners volunteers are required to receive an orientation and training specific to the role. Volunteers are provided extensive and ongoing training and support throughout the volunteer experience, as well as information and materials about The HSUS and Pet Help Partners, including a Pet Help Partners Volunteer Manual and additional materials. Volunteers join a community of people working toward the same goal of supporting New York City's pets by helping them have a good quality of life in their home and remain in their home throughout their lives. Volunteers with Pet Help Partners have the opportunity to help make a huge difference in the lives of people and pets by providing them with the resources and solutions they need to stay together.

## *Qualities of Our Volunteers*

There are certain qualities that separate GREAT volunteers from good volunteers. Our volunteers are selected because they have these qualities, and we have chosen YOU because we feel that you have them, too!

### **They Understand Their Commitment to The HSUS**

The commitment Pet Help Partners volunteers make when they come to The HSUS is to absorb the training and to work at their assigned volunteer shifts. A properly trained volunteer force is critical to the smooth running of our work, and volunteers can do their part by mastering all required training.

We rely on you to be on time during your shifts. This means potential volunteers need to make an assessment of their lives and their availability to determine whether or not the time is right to commit. Trained and approved volunteers let us know their preferences for their availability. This means that if you are not working when scheduled, The HSUS will miss out on an opportunity to help the people of New York City and their companion animals. Volunteers who agree to volunteer are making commitments to these people and their animals and are expected to follow through.

If volunteers are unable to make it to their shift, they must notify their supervisor so staff has enough time to line up a sub. Factors to consider when deciding to volunteer: Are you moving soon? Changing jobs? Changing responsibilities in your current job? All of these things could potentially impact your availability as a volunteer and should be taken into account. There are sometimes issues that arise that were completely unforeseen and unanticipated, things that affect a volunteer's ability to continue. When such things arise, they should be discussed

immediately with the volunteer's supervisor so that arrangements can be made. Also, it's very important you keep your supervisor updated on any change in your contact information, including mailing address, phone number and email address.

### **They Support HSUS Policy**

When a volunteer makes the commitment to volunteer for The HSUS, they are also committing to following our policies, procedures and protocols. The HSUS has been in existence for many years, and has become America's mainstream force against cruelty, exploitation and neglect, as well as the most trusted voice extolling the human-animal bond. In addition, we follow nonprofit-industry standards and are drawing on a vast wealth of knowledge in making our policies.

It is imperative that volunteers understand and support the policies we employ at The HSUS so they can be successful in performing their volunteer work and can represent these policies accurately to the public. Our goal is not to convince every volunteer that we're right for them; rather, our goal is to inform you of our policies and allow you to determine whether or not this organization is one of which you'd like to be a part. We train our volunteers in HSUS policy and philosophy so they are able to best represent our organization.

### **They're Responsible**

Pet Help Partners volunteers are an integral part of our program and are relied upon to work during their scheduled dates/times. The volunteer schedule is designed to ensure we have full coverage during each shift. Volunteers should only schedule to work shifts they feel entirely confident they'll be able to consistently attend; once someone is on the schedule, we assume the shift is covered, barring some unforeseen emergency or illness. Last-minute absences (without advanced notice) are a cause for concern. The only acceptable circumstances in which volunteers should be reporting a last minute absence is due to illness or a family emergency. While getting sick is practically unavoidable, absences in which a replacement must be found at the last minute should be kept to a minimum. In the event of an unanticipated circumstance, we ask our volunteers to communicate any schedule changes in a timely manner with their supervisor in order to find a replacement. If there is a time when a volunteer simply cannot call, an exception may be made, but we will follow up by phone or email from their supervisor. After the second occurrence, we may excuse the person from service. When we are short a volunteer, it impacts the work of all of the volunteers on that shift as well as the staff, and ultimately the animals and the people they rely upon.

### **They're Good Listeners Who Follow Directions**

Following direction is of paramount importance. We do things a certain way because we have found things that work. From deciding which events we want to be a part of and determining which issues we want represented, to determining how we answer helpline calls and transport

animals and care supplies, to deciphering how we present those issues to the public, there are procedures that need to be followed. Our volunteers accept direction from their supervisors regardless of higher personal qualification or past experience, and they don't eliminate steps or employ a different technique without consulting us. We are open to suggestions, and if yours sounds like a good one, we may want to try it. But please, no experimenting on your own.

### **They're Communicative**

Clear communication between volunteers and the Pet Help Partners staff is essential. Volunteers must be willing to work independently, take direction from their supervisor, and provide updates on activities in a timely manner. Their supervisor coordinates the coverage volunteers provide, so if a volunteer is unable to continue volunteering for any reason or requires a change in schedule, he or she must be in touch with their supervisor. A part of the commitment volunteers make is to communicate if ever there is a conflict, concern or question so that it can be handled promptly and professionally.

Our volunteers are responsive to communication from staff and on-site supervisors, and are open about any questions or concerns regarding their volunteer work. Talking to us about what you like and don't like about the volunteer position will help us to improve it. As in any position, there may be things or people with you are not comfortable. We encourage you to communicate with us about any problems should they arise, rather than to simply be unhappy and possibly leave because of them. We want each volunteer to have a rewarding and satisfying experience and we will always be willing to listen to ideas and suggestions in an effort to make improvements.

If your commitment to volunteering should need to change due to a change in your time or availability, we ask that you provide at least one month's notice prior to ending your volunteer position. It can take up to one month to find a replacement volunteer, and the supervisor needs that amount of time to recruit and train someone to cover vacant shifts. Any failure to provide adequate notice will be regarded as a breach of commitment and will be noted for future reference.

### **They're Professional**

As ambassadors for The HSUS, it's imperative that Pet Help Partners volunteers are seen to be professional, courteous and helpful at all times. Volunteers should do their best to answer questions from the public, but always defer to staff if there are questions they are not qualified to answer. Interactions with the public should be positive and friendly, even when confronted with a critic, or a person with an argumentative approach.

If a volunteer is seen behaving in an inappropriate manner, s/he will be advised on the proper policies to follow. If the behavior continues, or if the infraction is egregious in nature, the

volunteer may be asked to discontinue service with The HSUS. If a volunteer is injured on the job, s/he must report the injury to a supervisor immediately.

### **They're Receptive to Feedback**

We ask that volunteers be receptive to feedback from staff. Pet Help Partners staff strives to provide support to volunteers and encourages them to welcome new information and ideas and to keep an open mind. Review the feedback you receive thoroughly, envision how you may incorporate it into the work you are doing, and communicate with Pet Help Partners staff to help set goals for yourself to facilitate the progression in your role.

### **They're Sensitive**

We encourage volunteers to be sensitive to everyone including fellow volunteers, HSUS staff, the public, and our clients. We ask volunteers to be sensitive to the needs of our clients and attempt to understand what they might be experiencing. The work we do can be difficult and emotionally trying. Our volunteers are able to balance their productivity with providing support and encouragement to their colleagues. We rely on the public and their willingness to strengthen their connection to animals through the work of The HSUS. We are not serving ourselves or the animals well if we show a lack of compassion to the people we serve.

### **They're Calm and Collected**

The nature of some of the issues The HSUS works on may be emotionally difficult. It's perfectly natural to feel sad that, despite our best efforts, sometimes we are not able to prevent an animal from being surrendered to the shelter—we all experience this stress. To be effective in our work, we must not allow our emotions to dissuade us from the important work we can do for the animals now. Our volunteers know to seek out their supervisor if they are having a difficult time with any aspect of their volunteer work so they can discuss the issue and develop a plan for moving forward.

### **They Possess Common Sense**

If you think about something before you do it, you will most likely figure out what is right. Our volunteers think before they act. They pay attention, focus on the situation at hand and employ their training. Using common sense also means knowing your limitations. If our volunteers have not been trained to do something, they do not attempt to do it on their own. If someone asks a question and you are not certain of the answer, please do not try to answer it. Instead, ask your supervisor. Common sense also means asking questions anytime they're unsure of a policy or procedure, so even after you've been trained, ask ask ask!

### **They're Self-Motivated, Resourceful, and Detail-Oriented**

Once you know the ropes, you will be expected to work with a minimum amount of supervision. Being able to follow directions from staff and retain what you learn and pay attention to detail are vital. Of course, we don't expect you to learn every piece of information but we expect you to be resourceful and utilize the training manual you received to figure out the appropriate way to solve problems. Your questions are always welcome but we ask that you first try to come up with the answer you think makes the most sense, based upon the learning materials you've received and your previous knowledge, and then share your thoughts with your supervisor to discuss the situation at hand. We believe learning by doing is the best way to retain information. Dedication to the people and animals we serve is imperative. Following through on tasks and completing your work accurately ensures that people and their animals are receiving the best information and resources possible.