

**Developing Volunteers as Life-Long Learners
PATH Intl. Region II Conference 2017
Karen Brittle**

Today's Presentation...

- Based on practical experience managing volunteers at 3 PATH Intl. PAC
- Relevant THEORY of adult and adolescent education
- Proven STRATEGIES for developing volunteers as life-long learners
- Practical APPLICATION to volunteer program management (Recruit, Train, Retain)

Characteristics & Needs of Adult & Adolescent Learners

Adult Learners

Young adult (20 – 39) and middle adult (40 – 64)

Characteristics:

- Motivated and self-directed
- Bring life experience & knowledge
- Are goal-oriented
- Ask themselves: "How is this relevant?"

Needs:

- The learning experience to "make sense"
- Acknowledgement of existing skills and knowledge
- To try something out before accepting it
- Material to seem timely, practical and necessary
- Results

Adult Learners 65+

Same learning needs as other adults, plus...

Characteristics:

- Learning capacity remains at efficient level well into the 80s
- Often experiencing major life changes or losses
- Physical strength, coordination, balance, stamina may begin to decline

Needs:

- May require different pace or learning scenario

Adolescent Learners

Characteristics:

- Intense pursuit of various interests, may be short-term
- High achievement when challenged and engaged
- Ability to be self-reflective and self-directed
- Demand relevance in learning
- Tendency to seek approval of peers with attention-getting behaviors
- Sensitive to (perceived) ridicule, embarrassment, rejection

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Needs:

- Active learning experiences
- Peer/social interaction
- A sense of belonging
- Appropriate responsibility and independence
- Adult role models

Principles of Experiential Learning

- Experiential learning is the process of learning through experience
- “Learning through *reflection* on doing”
- Similar to hands-on learning but emphasizes reflection element of the individual learner’s experience

Experiential learning requires adult and adolescent learners to:

- Reference their existing knowledge
- Question and process their experiences
- Accept new knowledge and continue learning with awareness

The Connection ~ EAAT Volunteers are required to:

- Reference and apply existing knowledge
- Process their environment/hands-on task
- Make decisions that affect the safety and well-being of others
- Accept program norms
- Continue learning on the job

Practical Application ~ Recruit, Train, Retain

Recruitment - Learning Goals

Volunteers develop understanding for:

- Mission and services
- How volunteers contribute and commitment required
- PATH Intl. standards/center polies related to volunteer training
- To strengthen intention and foster reflection
- This phase also sets tone for standards of communication

Learner-Centered Recruitment

Adults:

- May appreciate you coming to them
- May want to understand how this can fit into already busy schedule
- May have specific ideas about how they want to give/spend time
- May like to utilize an existing skill

Adults 65+

- May want/need to be informed about range of volunteer options
- May appreciate a few extra minutes of initial conversation
- Learner-Centered Recruitment

Adolescents:

- May like to first come out with a familiar group

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- May respond well to peer recruitment efforts
- May have requirements to fulfill for school or church
- May rely on others for transportation

Practical Application

- Believe it's possible!
- Standardize inquiry process [Appendix A]
- Design Volunteer Application Form to acquire necessary practical info
- Make personal connection and invite reflection with questions and conversation
- Foster Reflection during Inquiry [Appendix A]

Training - Learning Goals

- Reinforce mission and core values
- Familiarize with services provided and their benefits
- Familiarize with facility
- Prepare for basic role through authentic hands-on experience
- Practice emergency response
- To instill motivation and commitment
- To promote reflection on experience

Moving onto Training

- By the time a potential volunteer arrives for Orientation, it is ideal to have:
- All practical information/initial paperwork
- A sense of where he/she might fit as volunteer
- An understanding of his/her intention/reasons for volunteering

Learner-Centered Training

Adults:

- Like efficiency/relevance
- Appreciate acknowledgement of existing skills
- May have a wider range of learning styles

Adults 65+

- May need to try out role to see if physically appropriate
- Will appreciate individualized training if they are not going to volunteer specifically in program

Adolescents:

- May focus better if paired with adult for hands-on training
- Respond well to "doing" role
- Respond well to specific, genuine praise
- Demand relevance

Practical Application

- Distinguish "Orientation" from "Training"
- Separate training for diverse roles - sidewalker, horse leader, barn, outreach/development
- Tiered levels of training for key roles - transparency!

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- Hands-on with reflection and feedback whenever possible

Foster Reflection during Training

- Enough staff or experienced volunteers
- “Show of Hands” introduction or “Meet Your Neighbor”
- As much hands-on practice with applicable skills as possible
- Leave time to reflect – even if also done by Q&A to group; small group meetings or in partners
- Follow up personal conversation, even if short
- Collect feedback on training

Scheduling for Continuous Improvement

- Practical considerations – commitment, safety
- Main reason/ goal for volunteering?
- Can be scheduled in relation to goal?
- Physical, mental, emotional, skill demands of role?
- Set up for initial success? Set up for continuous growth?

Retention – Learning Goals

- Reinforce mission and core values
- Continuous improvement within role
- Growth to new role/responsibility
- Acknowledgement for skills and competencies gained
- Foster reflection on learning experiences

Moving on to Retention

- Within 2 weeks of attending Orientation/Training, it is ideal to have:
- All paperwork/admin complete
- Volunteer scheduled into role
- Volunteer set up to receive all relevant correspondence
- Practicalities in place – name badge, sign in sheet, etc.
- Thanked for attending training, completing paperwork, etc.
- Perhaps identified a step for continuous growth

Learner-Centered Retention

Adults:

- Will appreciate acknowledgements of milestones and the time they give
- Free “swag”
- Enjoy a few moments of personalized conversation
- Goals may change as they get more invested in center activity
- May appreciate opportunity to include children, spouse

Adults 65+

- May especially appreciate opportunity to diversify role
- May appreciate milestone recognition
- May appreciate parties/social gatherings
- May appreciate opportunities to mentor, guide, share life knowledge

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Adolescents:

- May appreciate increased responsibility/privilege/independence as skills are gained
- Free “swag,” raffles, gifts cards
- Opportunities to “be rider” for volunteer trainings
- Opportunities to volunteer with or even mentor other youth vols.

All ages:

Need to know the impact they have made on the lives of others, horses they care for, your program, etc.!

Practical Application

- Retention events are often learning opportunities
- Planned or spontaneous individual meetings with volunteer to reflect and set goals
- Formal and informal acknowledgement
- Seek volunteer input about participant, horse, program
- Regularly seek feedback on volunteer experience
- Acknowledge milestones (10 hours – T-shirt; 100 hour pin)
- Continuing education is a win-win!

In-Service Trainings...

- Address authentic situations
- May be hands-on or classroom-based
- Are creative
- Allow for volunteers to be main focus
- Are based on volunteer interest/feedback
- Are based on program needs
- Often become more experiential (learning with reflection on doing) as skills become more specialized/advanced

The “Teach-able Moment” (A.K.A.: Remembering the Volunteer as Learner during Challenging Times)

- **Crucial Conversations are timely, private and refer to mission and core values!**

Tips:

- Begin with positive
- Ask questions
- Provide specific, necessary feedback
- Acknowledging feelings that the person has about your decision... even if it doesn't change the outcome
- Conclude with positive

Helpful Reference Points in Times of Conflict:

- Safety and dignity for all humans and equines as a #1 priority
- Promoting participant's success
- Fostering positive learning environment for all
- Open communication
- Shared love for horses

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- Shared commitment to those we serve
- Importance of consistency
- Mission statement - executing/furthering
- PATH Intl. Standards
- Organization "Chain of Command"

Bringing It Together for Volunteers in EAAT Programs

Recognize the learner:

- Characteristics
- Needs
- ALSO: *Who is this person?*

Employ good practices to foster experiential learning:

- Recruitment & "Well-oiled" Administrative Processes
- Initial Training & Scheduling
- Retention & On-going Training

Thank you for attending!

Presenter Bio & Contact Information:

Karen Brittle, M.A., is passionate about sharing her love for horses and teaching with others. She is a PATH Intl. Advanced Instructor, as well as a trained Mentor and Evaluator. Karen is currently the Program Director at Great and Small Therapeutic Riding in Boyds, MD and can be reached at kbrittle@greatandsmallride.org.

Sources & Recommended Reading

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many more current resources available through a quick web search!)

APPENDIX A

Process for Volunteer Inquiry Response

1. By phone – collect first and last name, date of call, email address and phone number. Indicate that Volunteer Manager will be in touch via email to follow up.
By email – collect first and last name, date of call, email address and phone number and reply.
2. Email **“Tweak-able” Response** to establish connection and provide basic information about volunteering.
3. (A) Received reply that they are interested and will fill out application.
(B) No email response received within a few days – follow up with phone call to determine interest/best way to send application.
4. Application received. File by last name. Call to “fill in gaps” if any information is missing, chat for a few minutes, answer questions and register for training. Refer to **Inquiry Log Sheet and complete**. (If telephone is not convenient, this step can be done via email.)
5. Follow up email confirming training registration.
6. Reminder email 2 days before training registration.

“Tweakable” Email Response to Volunteer Inquiry

Hello Izzy,

Thank you so much for your inquiry about volunteering with Horses on the Move (HOM). With the support of dedicated volunteers, HOM provides the benefits of Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies to more than 80 individuals with disabilities each year. **Thanks, too, for mentioning that you’re a rider yourself – volunteers with horse experience like yours can often fill a variety of important program roles!** We can’t wait to meet you soon!

The first step towards getting involved as a volunteer is to complete the attached Volunteer Application and send it back to us via email, fax or regular mail. You’ll find all the numbers/contact information at the top of the form. Once we have received your application, a staff member will be in touch to schedule you for a Volunteer Orientation & Training, which is required to get started.

If you’d like, you can save-the-date for our next Orientation & Training, May 6, 2017, but note that we can’t officially sign you up for training until we receive your completed application. Trainings tend to fill up quickly this time of year, so please get your application back as soon as possible if you’re interested in attending!

Please feel free to email me at any time if you have questions about the form and/or give me a call at 843-559-6040.

Thank you again for your interest in volunteering and I look forward to receiving your application!

Sincerely,

Sally Smith

Volunteer Coordinator & PATH Intl. Certified Instructor

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Inquiry Log Sheet

Name: _____ Date of Inquiry: _____

How did you hear about us?

Schedule/Availability: _____ Age: _____ Height: _____

Please tell me about:

Reason for volunteering at this time? _____

Experience with horses?

Experience with individuals with special needs? _____

- Informed about background check process (over 18)
- Application received

Registered for Orientation & Training

Orientation Date: _____