

KiwiDogAgility

THE VOLUNTEERS - Thank You

The opportunity to volunteer in agility is vast. An agility event cannot go ahead without a number of people putting up their hands, both before and on the day. In some cases there are things to do after the event is over! Without these volunteers we would need to pay people to do these jobs, and the cost of entering agility classes would skyrocket. So when you go to look at the call board, don't forget that the person there is a volunteer and needs to be asked nicely, and thanked for moving your dog on the board. The person picking up poles saves the judge's legs makes the day run smoother. At our agility Clubs volunteering is essential!! Committees to help run the club, instructors to set up the training programme and keep everyone busy, working bees to keep the gear safe and looking good, and so on. If it wasn't for these people who give freely of their time, our sport would be so very different.

So, to all those volunteers out there—THANKYOU!!!

Many overseas organisations have an organised method of recruiting volunteers for their events, and the rewards are numerous and variable. They might be – free lunches, or free entry to the next competition. However, the rewards don't need to be immense for a volunteer to feel good about it - I have been at an event where the club gave out lollies to all the helpers – and that sure did sweeten everyone up ! A “thankyou for helping” is a nice recognition of the effort put in, and doesn't cost a lot!

What are the benefits of being a volunteer?

You will learn more about agility.

Agility students and those dog owners interested in learning about agility should consider attending and volunteering at an agility event. For one thing, you can't beat the up-close-and-personal view of the action by sitting on the sideline of an agility ring! If you never plan to compete in agility, you will have a ton of fun watching the wide variety of dogs performing at all levels! If you plan on competing yourself sometime, working a class or two at an event really helps to calm many of the nerves you might have when you imagine yourself in the ring. Seeing experienced competitors in the Senior ring perform flawlessly is inspiring. Seeing them make mistakes is comforting. But, it is also



valuable to watch young dogs start their agility careers in the Novice ring. It can give you a realistic idea of what to expect from your own dog when your team enters your first event in the future.

The event will run faster if people volunteer.

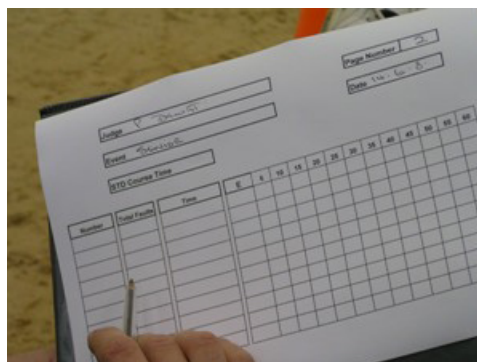
Everyone loves going to agility events and everyone LOVES to get home early on Sunday – so why not help the event run faster! If the judge has to walk over to pick up a pole the class slows down. If lots of people rush in at a height change that will speed up the event compared with if it is just the judge and the scrimmer doing it.

Getting to know the people that share the same interests as you.

If you act as the Call steward you get to know the names of the people and dogs who have entered the class. The running order boards include handler and dog name so you can call out names and not just numbers! It is a good way to get to know the faces of the names you may only otherwise see in print.

A longer view of the course you may be running later.

If you help set up the course you get better view of the course, with all its angles and spaces. This can assist greatly when it comes time for the official course walk, particularly if that time is restricted or if you are running a dog in another ring.





Keep costs down.

Entry costs are \$5/class in NZ. Overseas you can pay three times

this amount!! These events may pay people to bring equipment, put it up, pay the judges, and pay other helpers as well. In NZ this is all voluntary, which helps keep costs down and ensures the sport is affordable for most.

What jobs can you volunteer for?

There are certain jobs at agility events that are easier than others. If you are a first-timer, or you are recruiting helpers from your beginners class, let them settle in and watch the first class or so. That way they can have a low-stress, fun introduction to helping at agility events. They can then get a feel for how things work. Then ask them to help set up the next course (making sure you give them lots of support and direction), and roster them on to lead running, pole picker, tunnel straightening, and scribesheet running.

If you run multiple dogs you may not be able to give up large spaces of time, but you can assist by helping set up courses, by putting up knocked rails etc. There might be tasks you can do before the event. You can also help the volunteers by ensuring you come to the ring and report on time and ready to run when your number comes up on the call board. Don't take up copious amounts of time in the ring practising, and make sure you thank all the volunteers!

Some of the newbie-friendly, easier jobs at agility trials are:-

Pole picker, tunnel straightener.

Each ring needs 2 ring volunteers who are responsible for resetting bars if a dog knocks one off and straightening the tunnel after each dog goes through it. Additionally, they change the heights of the jumps, long jump, hoop and often the timers when the jump height changes. You sit on a chair close to the ring and watch each dog run. If a dog knocks a bar or otherwise displaces an obstacle, you wait until the dog is no longer running in your area of the course, and then go and fix the obstacle.

Lead Running

A great starter job! It's simple, it's good exercise, and you get to see each dog's run from start to finish. As the lead runner, you are expected to pick up the dog's lead once they have started the course, and drop it off at a pre-determined spot near the exit so it is waiting for the competitor as they finish their run. Your goal as a volunteer is to be as unobtrusive as possible. Some handlers will hand you their dog's leash, others will throw it towards you (stay alert, leash clips can be painful!), and many just drop it behind them. It is important to wait until after the dog has begun running to pick up their lead, as you want to avoid inadvertently distracting the dog. You should also keep an eye on the dog while it is running in case something happens to terminate the run, such as the dog eliminating in the ring or the handler deciding to leave the ring.



In those cases, you will want to bring the lead directly to the competitor or meet them right by the exit.

Some Clubs use buckets, and handlers may want a variety of things placed at the finish such as food containers and toys (also sunhats, sunglasses, clothing etc!)

Scribe Sheet Running

This task is a bit easier on your body than leash running is — you get to sit for much of the time. Each dog's faults and time (the score) are written down on a piece of paper by a scribe. This piece of paper needs to make its way from the table in the ring to the wherever the event secretary/scoring area is set-up, and that's where you come in! You get to stand/sit near the scrimer. They watch the judge and make sure the timing equipment is running properly, and record all of the data for each dog. After each run (or a series of runs), the scrimer/assistant scribe will pass you that dog's score sheet. You take these score sheets from the ring to the event secretary so the dogs score can be processed. This allows the results to be processed as they happen, not all together at the end of the class, making final results available to the competitors much sooner.

What if you get it wrong?

It takes a lot of workers to make an event go smoothly. Don't think you need to have special skills or vast experience to be a good volunteer. Most jobs require only "on the job training" and some can be done by people who have never competed in agility. Volunteering can seem a little daunting, and new competitors often cry, "What if I mess something up!" but remember, it's agility, not a life-or-death scenario. Let the event manager/ring manager or judge know that you're new to this, and he or she will be sure to explain the job, help you get started, and provide assistance if you need help. Even very experienced people make mistakes or get distracted and forget to reset a jump properly. Your fellow volunteers will always assist.

Find out how to adjust the timers. Altering these and checking that they are still working can take quite a bit of time if everyone leaves it to the judge!

What can clubs do to attract volunteers?

Set up helping rosters so that people can share a job.

If the club allow people to share jobs with a friend, or sign up for small blocks of time they could get more people who would jump in. People with more time could sign up for multiple slots. This can be true for many jobs. No-one minds if workers leave and enter the ring unobtrusively as long as they know what is going on. Eg. If Novice is split you can run your maxi and then help with small and midi.

Stay flexible.

Ideally if someone has 5 minutes free and feels like helping you should take advantage of their help.



Hire people for the really big jobs such as scriming and Event secretary.

That really takes the load off of the volunteers. The volunteers need never get “locked in” to volunteering for a long time period. This means volunteers can easily share jobs such as leash running, bar setting and tunnel straightening.

Organise troops of people to build courses.

This is something people with multiple dogs can do most easily. It is a defined, relatively short task that most people know how to do. It will go better if you have a couple of people who are great at following plans and setting out courses. Using obstacle markers or multiple course plans also will help ensure a quick course setup.

Thank your volunteers!

This is really important. People don't expect lots of money or rewards for helping but everyone likes to be thanked personally. You can organise simple things like drinks at ringside for the helpers at each ring, lollies etc. Make sure everyone knows that they are there so they can help themselves and everyone who helps gets one. A kind word and a smile go a long way to making people feel appreciated. Particularly thank the people who come along that do not do agility such as the friends and family of a club member – treat them like a precious metal!!

Clubs that are organised, flexible and thankful for their volunteers will have the most successful events with competitors and volunteers happy to come to their next event.

As a competitor and guest of the Club how can you help at an event?

The people who are running the event are volunteers, so how can you make their day/weekend go smoothly?

1. read any information about the event and observe rules regarding parking, toileting your dogs, tethering your dogs, etc ... if you bend the rules a committee member has to note that and (perhaps) do something about it.
2. notice the status of toilet paper in the toilets, or bottled water available to judges/scribes/timekeepers, and offer to replace and refill supplies.
3. say “thank you” when services are rendered to you, whether it's the event secretary posting the results on the wall, the person moving your dog on the call board, or the volunteer cleaning up after lunch ... knowing their work is appreciated is often the only compensation coming to the event committee.

If exhibitors become more aware, engaged, and attentive, we can enhance the experience for the club committee. If the experience is enhanced for the Club's committee they'll offer us more opportunities to run our dogs!

Volunteers are crucial to our sport - without them, events cannot run. We hope to see you volunteering at an upcoming event!. You will be glad you did!

By Karen de Wit

Acknowledgements

www.agilitynerd.com who organised an annual Blog action day on volunteering, and all those bloggers who contributed.