

Beyond Fences Philosophy 101:



How to be a Beyond Fences Volunteer

Thank you for your commitment to serving people and pets in under-served areas by volunteering with Beyond Fences. Working with Beyond Fences is an unusually gratifying volunteer experience. With regularity, we see the results of our work in the bright faces and playful body language of the unchained dogs as we release them into their newly fenced yards. We are also rewarded by the gratitude of their humans, and by knowing that the dog/human relationship will be enhanced because we've given them a space in which to enjoy each other's company.

Beyond Fences' volunteers are warmly welcomed in the neighborhoods in which we work. We establish lasting relationships with the people we provide services to and we have earned a good reputation in the community. Our volunteers communicate with our clients and their neighbors in ways that instill trust in the organization -- and in some cases result in friendships developing between clients and volunteers.

Our reputation and effectiveness are in large part due to the fact that our volunteers operate under a very simple philosophy:

We are non-judgmental and we treat all clients, their property, their neighbors and other Beyond Fences' volunteers with respect and kindness. Period.

In practice, this philosophy manifests itself in many ways, including these:

--We do not make negative assumptions about people based on the fact that they do not have access to resources they want and need for their pets.

--We believe it is counter-productive and disrespectful, to give unsolicited advice. There are many steps involved in our work: outreach, spay/neuter, medical care, post-hole digging, fence building, follow-up, seasonal visits to add tarps or straw. During each step, our volunteers are providing support without criticizing or lecturing.

-- Lori Hensley serves as the Director of Operations for Beyond Fences. She and Founder, Amanda Arrington, are the only people authorized to disseminate information and make the offer of services to clients for their pets. Lori is very familiar with the dog's humans and has a relaxed, ongoing dialogue with families.

-- Volunteers should not make comments to anyone at the work site about a pet's condition. For example, if a dog is skinny, has no food in his bowl or that he has knocked over his water. We always leave a large water bucket, which is difficult to knock over, for every dog. We are very unlikely to be there at the dog's feeding time, so an empty food bowl is to be expected. The dog may be skinny because he had worms. Skinny dogs put on weight after they've been unchained because, before the fence-build date, they have been neutered and de-wormed. In addition, once the dogs are off their chains, the resulting reduction in stress contributes to weight gain.

--The only Beyond Fences' members who should approach people about participation in our program are Lori and Amanda. They bear the burdens of presenting our program in a way that is non-judgmental and getting all the information we need to effectively serve people and their pets. With only the official outreach person doing outreach, we know exactly how it is being done, and we avoid accidentally insulting people and/or turning them off to our services. Our efforts suffer if our great reputation in the community becomes compromised by unintentionally inappropriate or counter-productive words or actions.

--Beyond Fences exists and thrives because of our volunteers; everyone brings strengths to the group and some people are better than others at certain tasks. Not everyone can do spay/neuter transport, not everyone can create a website and not everyone can do outreach. Only the designated outreach coordinators are authorized to do outreach and be the spokespeople for Beyond Fences in this capacity. If you have a concern about a dog or a family, please share your concern with Lori or Amanda.

--We know that we cannot make every situation perfect. We are satisfied knowing that we provide a service that ALWAYS makes a difference for people and their pets.

--We do not make disparaging remarks about Beyond Fences' clients (past or present) to anyone. Likewise, we do not make disparaging remarks about any race or class or category of people. Beyond Fences takes its non-discrimination policy very seriously. We operate under the assumption and expectation that our representatives and volunteers believe in the right of everyone to be treated with kindness and respect, as well as to be given equal treatment under the law. Therefore, in all of our activities, we will never discriminate based on race, gender, religious beliefs or lack thereof, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age, veteran status or any category protected by law. In addition, if Beyond Fences determines that any volunteer or representative has engaged in verbal or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility toward an individual or group because of race, gender, income level, religious beliefs or lack thereof, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age, veteran status or any legally protected category, appropriate action will be taken against the offending individual. This action could include exclusion from all present and future activities.

--We do not offer to take a client's pets off of their hand nor do we offer to take pets from the neighborhoods that we work in. In addition to not wanting people to get the impression that we are out to take people's pets away, we try to think of the larger picture. The person will probably get another dog at some point in their lives, as will their children. We believe a greater good comes from providing support and increasing access to resources.

--Regarding the client's property: We refrain from sitting on their cars or putting our stuff on their cars. If we need to move something out of our way while building a fence, we ask the client where they'd like us to put it. Apart from moving things that need to be moved, we do not touch anything that does not belong to us. We take all of our trash with us when we leave. We park in the street, not the driveway. We leave the premises to find a restroom.

--Regarding the property of the client's neighbors: We do not enter their yards or touch anything that does not belong to us in front of their houses. We try to be as unobtrusive as possible while in the neighborhood.

--When volunteers listen to music while working, they do so through ear buds or headphones. We do not play music through speakers for all to hear. The client and/or their neighbors may not be in the mood to hear music (especially of someone else's choosing) at that time.

--We do not drink alcohol or indulge in recreational drugs at the worksite.

--We ask the owner if the dog is friendly before trying to pet him. We generally don't give treats to dogs, especially in multiple dog yards because it could cause a fight between the dogs. In any case, we ask the owner's permission before giving the dog anything.

--Experience has taught us that dogs can become overwhelmed or over-stimulated if volunteers are inside the fence with them as we release the dogs into their new yard. So, we try to resist the urge to stay inside the fence with them. This is especially important in multiple dog households because over-stimulation or anxiety caused by too much excitement can sometimes cause the dogs to fight. Generally, only a videographer should be inside the fence in multiple dog households. In single dog households, one other volunteer can be inside the fence to initiate play.

--Volunteers leave their own dogs at home. Bringing dogs to the work site can add unnecessary chaos and upset (or put into danger) the dogs we are building the fence for and/or their humans.

--Minor-aged volunteers should be old enough to follow directions well, and should be closely supervised at all times by the adult who brought them to the fence build.

--We don't generally offer pet owners or their children free items that is unrelated to the fence (e.g., clothing, toys, bicycles, etc). This sort of charity (although motivated by compassion) can make the client feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or insulted. It could be inferred that you believe that they can't (or don't know how to) take care of themselves or their children.

--We do not qualify clients by income or any other arbitrary measure.

--We do our best to leave our egos at home. Every volunteer appreciates every other volunteer. We are all working to serve people and pets in our community. We all contribute as much as we can, and do not judge others who may have less time to spare because of other responsibilities. We try to be kind, patient and respectful toward one another.

--Amanda Arrington, as the founder and executive director, is the spokesperson for the group as a whole. To insure consistency in our message, when reporters approach us, we direct them to Amanda or to Lori or Robert Hensley. Also, before speaking (or writing) in a public forum on behalf of the Beyond Fences, it is good to run ideas past Amanda or Lori.

--When you wear a t-shirt or other attire with the Beyond Fences logo on it, you will be viewed as representing Beyond Fences. For this reason, please refrain from wearing Beyond Fences attire when attending political rallies, public hearings, demonstrations, etc. If a reporter quotes or videotapes a Beyond Fences volunteer's opinion and reports that opinion as belonging to Beyond Fences it can cause misconceptions and confusion.

--There are volunteers, including some who come to fences, who help in other ways: grant- writing, fundraising, bookkeeping, digging post holes, transporting dogs, designing tools, distributing posters, doing interviews, designing web pages and brochures, making videos, helping people start groups in other areas of the country, buying and organizing tools and materials, doing outreach, organizing and training volunteers, writing thank you notes, press releases and various other documents, reclaiming materials when fence recipients move – and the list goes on and on. In all of these activities, we remember that the way we present ourselves reflects on Beyond Fences as a whole and is important to our success.

--Volunteers are encouraged to have an open line of communication with Lori regarding problems or concerns. But if problems arise that are not being addressed, or if there are policies outlined in this Beyond Fences Philosophy document which are not being adhered to, please contact: Amanda Arrington at director@beyondfences.org.

To reiterate, Beyond Fences takes a very unique approach to serving our community. It is this unique approach that has made us successful and as a volunteer we ask for your respect of and cooperation in adhering to this approach.

Thank you for your interest and giving your time and talents to Beyond Fences.

Amanda Arrington and Lori Hensley