Helpful Headstart Tips

-**Take the time to prepare.**  Make sure to read all the notes from other HS volunteers and dog walkers in the books and the behavior boards.  Use the equipment stated for the dog.  Have plenty of small, high value treats in an easily accessible treat pouch and a small toy in your pocket or apron.  Check for any special instructions such as closing other dogs in, using a lickimat for leashing, play yard or exercise restrictions, etc.

-**Have a plan – but be flexible**.  Review the HS pages to see what exercises are recommended for the dog, and what others have been working on.  Have an idea what your goals for the session are, but work where the dog is at.  If they are having an “off” day, or the trail and shelter are particularly busy, don’t be afraid to adjust expectations, or to even just end the session.

-**Be proactive and set the dog up for success**.  Monitor the environment and the dog’s reactions and body languages.  Reward the dog for “being right” rather than reacting to undesired behaviors.  Don’t let problematic behavior chains happen – if things aren’t going well, end the session and try again later with a new plan.

-**Get to know the dog.**  When working with a dog for the first time, ease into the relationship gradually.  Keep the session shorter, and work on easy skills.  Initially stick to the back, and then the front trails, until you are confident that you know the dog’s potential triggers and behaviors, and are able to handle them.

-**Communicate with others**.  Let others know how your sessions went, what you worked, and anything you learned that worked or didn’t.  Remember to use objective language, and describe observable behavior and body language.

-**Review your resources.**  Don’t forget that the Head Start manual is available with training ideas and links to videos.  You can also review the Zoom training video recording as well.  Feel free at any point to reach out to the Behavior Team if you have any questions or want guidance with a particular dog or behavior issue.

-**Have fun!**  Training is a great way to communicate and bond with our canine friends.  Make training an enjoyable game that everyone involved looks forward to!