

# **USA HELPER PROGRAM**

**Presentation by Dennis Vander Linde  
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## **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of the USA Helper Program is to educate and increase the number of trial helpers that can properly and safely execute the protection exercises performed at USA events. The objectives are to provide standardized education that complies with the USA Rulebook, increase the number of trial helpers, promote membership involvement and participation in the Helper Program, facilitate USA's objectives in preserving the German Shepherd Dog as a working dog, and address USA membership interests as they relate to helpers and trial helper work.

## **Helper Committee Members**

The Helper Committee consists of eight members. First is the USA President, who is a required member of all committees per USA rules. Second is the USA Director of Judges, who insures the program complies with the VDH trial regulations in the USA Rulebook and also insures there is representation of judges' interests as they relate to trial helper work. Third is the Helper Program Director, who insures the development and implementation of the management of the Helper Program and assists regional training directors in the selection of teaching helpers and scheduling helper seminars. The Helper Program Director reports to the Executive Board. There are two USA teaching helpers who insure education of the helpers in safe and correct helper work and classify helpers using helper evaluations. There are three members appointed by the USA President who represent USA membership interests as they relate to helpers and trial helper work, whether done the local, regional, or national level.

## **Role of Regional Training Directors**

Per the USA Regional Policy, the duties of the regional training director are "To promote proper and safe training for trial helpers, training helpers, and handlers throughout their region by the use of required educational seminars and organized fun matches." It is the role of the regional training director to make sure trial helpers and training helpers get trained. Obviously, the Helper Program needs the regional training director as a major component in the program. The regional training director, through the USA Regional Policy, receives direction from the Helper Committee with regard to the required educational Helper Program. The regional training director is very important in the implementation of the Helper Program per the USA Regional Policy. The regional training director is responsible for soliciting the regional membership to determine the needs of regionally-sponsored helper seminars. The region needs to sponsor one regional seminar per year, and it is the role of the regional training director to make sure that is completed and to report the results of the seminar to the Helper Program Director.

## **Helper Program Curriculum**

The helper curriculum was taken verbatim from the current USA Rulebook. It defines what is proper and correct helper work to be performed at any USA event. It helps the judges make a proper evaluation so we insure that our dog is a working dog. A defined curriculum provides a standardized course material that can be taught at helper seminars, so there should not be any differentiation between what is taught at different seminars. While we recognize there are style differences, the technical aspect of what the helpers do should be pretty much the same. It then gives the basis with which to evaluate helpers for the purpose of classification. It gives any person a consistent basis with which to look at what is correct and what is incorrect. It stresses safety for the dog, the helper, and the judge. It also provides the judge with an optimal opportunity to judge all dogs under the same conditions; which then promotes fairness for every handler involved, whether at the local, regional, or national level.

Because we need standardized education and the regional training director is responsible for training helpers, this program does not address training helper work. That is the responsibility of the regional training director. He/she should be scheduling those seminars with whatever flavor individual they like, because protection training of dogs varies widely.

## **Helper Seminars and Colleges**

Helper seminars can be hosted by a local club or region, are not limited to one per year, and can be scheduled when desired. The seminars are open to any USA member who has been issued a trial helper record book and is a current member of USA, and they are presided over by teaching helpers. They have to be sanctioned by USA through the Helper Program. They are official and are recorded so the trial helper record helper books have integrity. They are separate events from helper evaluations; which means you can have a seminar one day, a helper evaluation the next day, you can have a seminar and no evaluation, or you can just have an evaluation.

The National Helper College will be hosted by the hosting club of the GSD National Championship and is presided over by the Helper Committee.

## **Helper Evaluation**

Evaluations are a test to make sure the helpers attain the skills necessary to properly and safely perform trial helper work at the club, regional, or national level. Helper evaluations give us the mechanism to identify those helpers that need more education prior to working a trial. They also give us the ability to find the helpers who are *very* good and should be invited to try out for regional and national events. This program puts the mechanism in place to do that so pre-selection may have some merit in the future. It records the helper's advancement through the helper program so we can look at an evaluation and watch somebody enter the program green and come out at whatever level they desire. There is going to be a record of how they obtained their success, at whatever level. Helpers do not have to participate in a helper seminar prior to participating in a helper evaluation. If they have the skills and have been doing this for several years, they can get evaluated. Helper evaluations are presided over by teaching helpers from USA. The evaluations must be sanctioned through the Helper Program Director, can be hosted by a club or region, and can be held as many times as you want.

## **Helper Evaluation Participation Requirements**

Helpers must be evaluated within two years of this program going into effect (by November 2006). Helpers must be evaluated once every two years after that. The Helper Committee thought it was extremely important to allow a grace period for these new requirements to become effective. We need to give members a chance to adapt to the new program and to recognize the merits that go with it. To reiterate, helpers do not have to participate in a helper seminar to be evaluated. Helpers must meet the prerequisites for the classification in which they want to be evaluated. They will need the new trial helper record book. The Helper Program defines an exchange program in which the old helper books are marked "obsolete" and the new trial helper record books take over and allow us to record the helpers' participation in seminars, evaluations from the judges, classifications, and progress through the classification rankings.

## **Helper Evaluation Criteria and Exercises**

The helper curriculum makes sure the helpers comply with the rulebook. Obviously, safety is paramount. The helper must be under control at all times and must be able to take direction from the protection judge. The protection judge is in charge of what happens on the field. The helper by name and by definition is there to help—he is there to help evaluate the dogs. The evaluation is going to be based on the SchH3 exercises performed under simulated trial conditions. When helpers go through the helper evaluation, they will be judged on each of the exercises and will be given either Pass or Fail on each exercise. To make sure the helpers are doing what they are supposed to be doing between helper evaluations, there will be an evaluation by the protection judges. The protection judge evaluation, which will be conducted at every trial, is the mechanism to rate the helper's performance under actual trial conditions and during those two-year periods between helper evaluations. The judges will give four ratings:

- Excellent – Well above the standard.
- Very Good – Above the standard.
- Good – Defines correct and safe helper work for what the judge considers essential to be able to properly evaluate a dog's performance.
- Unsatisfactory – Below the standard.

The judge's rating of the helper work in a trial will be recorded in the trial helper record book. One addition is that instead of just being recorded in the trial helper record book, the rating will also be recorded on the trial paperwork. One recent change was the recording of the names of helpers who worked an event, which are now published in the magazine. There is no desire to publish the helper's rating as a part of that.

The ratings will only be recorded at the USA Office for use later in the program in order to be able to categorically track if a helper had an unsatisfactory rating when it comes time for their next helper evaluation.

## **Helper Classifications**

There are six helper classifications. Here are the definitions and how they are utilized:

- Entry Level – They have not attended a seminar and never worked a trial, but have a helper book.
- Basic Level – They have attended at least one seminar and have been classified at that level. They have some understanding and education, and have been reviewed by a teaching helper who thinks they have the skills to work a club trial.
- Club Level – They have attended at least one seminar and have been classified at that level. They desire to work club trials and are encouraged to try out for a regional championship. They do *not* need to be at the regional level to try out for a regional championship.
- Regional Level – They have attended at least two seminars and have been classified at that level. They have worked club trials and regional championships, and hopefully are trying out at national events. They do *not* need to be at the national level to try out for national championships.
- National Level – They have gone to three helper seminars and have been classified at that level. They work all types of events for USA, including the Sieger Show, HOT Championship, etc. The next level for the National Level is eligibility for pre-selection of helpers for national events if that occurs after 2007. We need to get a mechanism in place to classify helpers who should be included in whatever pre-selection process is defined. That, along with education, is one of the main goals of the Helper Program. That is why we have given the program two years to take effect. If we wanted to put pre-election in place tomorrow, there would be a lot of arguing about who should be on that list. With the Helper Program in place, it gives a very consistent basis to evaluate helpers who should and should not be National Level.
- Teaching Helpers – They are responsible for helper education and implementation of the Helper Program. The teaching helpers can work all USA events.

To maintain or advance from a classification, a helper cannot receive an unsatisfactory rating from a protection judge. If helpers receive a failing grade during the helper evaluation, they are not going to be able to maintain or advance from that level.

## **Disciplinary Action**

Disciplinary action regarding helper work means the trial helper record book could be suspended for the following reasons:

- Improper or unsportsmanlike conduct.
- Failure to take direction from the protection judge
- Conduct which, in the opinion of the Helper Committee, is detrimental to USA.

In any case where there is disciplinary action, a case must be presented to the Helper Committee. If the case warrants disciplinary action, the Helper Committee is required to file charges with the USA Board of Inquiry. No suspension of a trial helper record book could occur until the BOI issues its findings, so there are safeguards from the Helper Committee being able to say you lose your trial helper record book. We have utilized the existing USA process to make sure that cannot happen.

## **Trial Helper Record Book**

The trial helper record books record the helpers' classification history, seminar attendance, events worked, and, very importantly, the judges' ratings of their performance. In the section for judges' performance evaluation comments, it states that, if a helper is excused from a trial, the judge has to give a reason to make it very clear to the Helper Program Director why that happened. The new books replace the old books specifically because the old books don't have places to record all of the information. To get a trial helper record book, a helper must be a USA member in good standing, be at least 18 years old, and pass the written helper examination which is very similar to a BH exam. The helpers need to sign the helper release form.

## **Teaching Helper**

Their job is to teach the helper curriculum, which is defined now by the Helper Program, at helper seminars and to classify the trial helpers at helper evaluations. A teaching helper is required to conduct one helper seminar every two years and two helper evaluations every two years. If we are successful with our helper seminars, we will need more evaluations than seminars. Their job is to promote camaraderie and sportsmanship in the organization. They are also there to assist the helpers selected for regional and national

events with any needs they may have at those events. To maintain their teaching helper classification, they are required to maintain USA membership and attend and participate in a minimum of one National Helper College every two years. They may not advertise their teaching helper classification for monetary gain. They need to be sportsmanlike, adhere to the USA code of ethics, and may not hold office or official designation in WDA.

We have received 33 teaching helper applications to date and that number is growing. We think it is very important to have an initial set of teaching helpers grandfathered in to minimize the expenses of helpers to attend the seminars and evaluations. The Helper Committee has undertaken a massive recruiting campaign of the people who have the skills to do this. They are listed by region and you should see some very prominent names on this list:

- Mid-Central – Dean Calderon, Al Govednik, Mark Przybylski
- Mid-Eastern – Mark Scarberry, Nick Blackford, Bill Szentmiklosi, Lyle Roetemeyer, James Laney
- New England – Frank Phillips, Lance Woodley
- North Central – Jerrold Gray
- Northeastern – Jim Hill, Armin Winkler, T. Floyd, Doug Wendling
- Northwestern – Martin Vollrath, David Deleissegues, Gary Park
- Pacific Northwest – Les Flores, Jim Elder.
- Rocky Mountain/Great Plains – Mark Chaffin
- South Central – Rob Dunn, Randall Hoadley, Arturo Barajas, Danny Grayson.
- Southeastern – Ivan Balabanov, Arthur Collins, Martin Gnyp, Tracy Betenbaugh, Dennis Vander Linde
- Southwestern – Uwe Doose, Craig Groh, Nathaniel Roque

The last part of the helper application gives the reason they want to be a part of the program, and it was moving to read many of them. They want to educate, and they want to preserve the German Shepherd Dog. It made me realize there are a lot of people who want to help USA grow, and helper work is one of the places requiring the most dedication.

After the initial 30 or 40 teaching helpers are grandfathered in to get the program moving, we will have an apprenticeship program for the remaining teaching helpers. They will be required to have attained at least regional level classification and to have handled, owned, and trained at least one dog to SchH3/VP3. Make note of the parenthesis statement in the Helper Program document: “The Helper Committee may make an exception to this requirement if the applicant is currently training a dog towards that goal and has shown extensive and exceptional abilities in the areas of leadership, teaching skills, and knowledge of event helper work.” They will be required to be an active training and trial helper in a local club, have been a member of USA for three years, not hold an office in WDA, and attend two helper seminars and one helper college in a two-year period. They will need a letter of recommendation from their local club and two letters of recommendation from any of the following: USA regional director, USA judge, member of the USA Executive Board, or USA teaching helper. They will then go through an apprenticeship process where they work side by side with three different teaching helpers at one helper seminar, one helper college, and two helper evaluations. They must complete their apprenticeship process within two years.

### **Helper Selection at National Events**

According to USA policy, the USA General Board approves the selection process for helpers at national events. For 2004, the selection was made under the approved policy as it currently stands and was performed by the Director of Judges, one member of the Helper Committee, and the regional director of the hosting region. Under the proposed new Helper Program, the helpers would be required to perform the complete SchH3 exercises under simulated trial conditions including direction from the protection judge. The evaluation is broken into two sections. During the initial evaluation, the helper will work a dog they are familiar with. During the final evaluation, the helper will work a dog they are not familiar with. It will show how the helper adjusts to the changing conditions in a trial with a dog they do not know. The helper selected for an event should not work dogs entered in that event after their selection.

For 2005 and 2006, helpers are required to have a trial helper record book *or* an old helper book. The new trial helper record book will not be required until November 2006, so if you have an old helper book you can still try out. Helpers are required to be a USA member for more than one year, have been classified to any level, and may not have received an unsatisfactory rating from a judge. Selection for the North American Championship and H.O.T. Championship would occur after the Helper College at the GSD National Championship. Selection for the GSD National Championship would occur at the North American Championship, the Judges’ College, or a helper seminar; but, in any case, no less than four

months before the event. Selection would be made by a minimum of three members of the Helper Committee. The Helper Committee is considering amending that to “three members of the Helper Committee and two teaching helpers,” who could be selected from any of the teaching helpers at the event. Four helpers would be picked, and they would be announced one week after the tryout. Final tryout would occur at the national event to determine the front half, back half, and alternate assignments.

For 2007 and beyond, helpers would be required to have the new trial record helper book, be a member of USA for more than one year, have been classified at the regional or national level, and may not have been given an unsatisfactory rating from a judge. The location and timing of tryouts, number of helpers selected, timing of the announcements, and final selection would be the same as for 2005 and 2006. We are also considering the same amendment to the program mentioned under 2005 and 2006. If pre-selection of helpers is *not* approved and is warranted because we have 20 national-level helpers in this program by 2006, the 2007 requirements in the Helper Program document would be obsolete. There would be a whole different section about pre-selection, and that would be its own topic of discussion if this program is successful.

### **Expense Reimbursement**

When teaching helpers conduct seminars or evaluations, they would be reimbursed at the per diem rate given a USA judge. One of the fundamental reasons for corporate sponsorship to USA is to help offset some of those expenses through the educational fund to help provide standardized education for the helpers. We have also implemented expense reimbursement for the four helpers who are selected for a national event. One of the biggest inhibitors to helpers trying out for a national event is that they fly to the event, wherever it is held, and only four are selected. They end up footing the whole bill for travel and hotel expenses, etc. This is an attempt to help compensate them, get helpers to participate in the program, and try out for these national events. The four helpers selected for a national event would be reimbursed for their travel, accommodations, and per diem. In no case, however, would helpers get more than \$500 for their expenses, and they would be limited to a maximum of \$2,000 for the event. They would also get a little perk of two banquet passes and stadium passes.

### **Awards Program**

An awards program is included so we can recognize USA members for past efforts at building a strong foundation for safe and proper helper work. The previous committee deserves some of the first awards. They started this process and gave us the foundation to build on. The present committee used a lot of their work and went forward with it. We could also look at the efforts of others who were very instrumental in making the Helper Program what it is today. There will be another section that addresses individual awards that could be presented at a regional or national level to recognize helpers who have shown outstanding advancement and/or service to the Helper Program.

### **Summary**

The Helper Program is about *education* through teaching of a standard helper curriculum based on the helper regulations in the current rulebook. Through it we will be able to evaluate and classify a helper's ability to safely and fairly assist judges in assessing and testing the working abilities of our dogs. The program gives us the mechanism for identification of helpers who have attained (or not attained) or continue to maintain the skills necessary to perform trial helper work at the club, regional, or national level. It provides a mechanism for accountability of the Helper Committee through the Executive Board. It gives a defined process for selection of helpers at our national events, and gives us the time to evaluate the pros and cons of pre-selection of helpers for national events by 2007. It implements an expense reimbursement for the first time for the helpers selected for national events. There are 33 plus teaching helper applications already received from some very prominent people who can help this program get moving in the right direction. We expect at least 40. This program minimizes expenses on helpers to participate in the program.

(Based on USA Helper Program draft Issue 3.0 dated September 24, 2004.)