

# Empathy in Volunteer Programs

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

volunteers, empathy, questions, animal, ideas, keepers, incorporated, group, emily, volunteer engagement, breakout rooms, stacey, people, learning, talked, cloud, share, resources, stories, interpretive

## SPEAKERS

Ryann Stacy (Racine Zoo), Stacey Luhring (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium), Courtney Cordova (Henry Vilas Zoo), Marta Burnet, Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo)

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 00:21

Hello, everybody. Good morning or afternoon, depending on where you are joining from today. For folks who are in the meeting. Can you please let me know if you can see the screen that's being shared, it should say like incorporating empathy into volunteer departments with the ACE logo, and then a fun little like sparkly background. Awesome. Thank you, Isabel. I see a thumbs up. Amazing. Thank you, thank you. Yeah, and feel free to have, I can't see you because I'm sharing my screen. But feel free to have your cameras on or off, whatever is most comfortable to you. And you should have gotten a notification when you join the meeting. But just in case, you didn't, this meeting is being recorded and it will be posted up on the ACE for Wildlife website underneath the event recordings page for folks to access it afterwards, if they were unable to make the meeting today. So we're just going to give it a couple more minutes for folks to go ahead and trickle in before we kick off this learning group. Alright, so got a couple of folks trickling in really quick. Give it about one more minute, and then we'll go ahead and get started. Now, for everybody who is already in the room today, you may have seen my email a couple of weeks ago about how this breakout or this learning group is going to be a little bit different than how the other ones in the past have been structured. So this one's gonna be a lot more interactive, and a lot more collaborative than the other learning groups where we just kind of had a panel of, you know, three to five speakers, kind of doing a Q&A, question and answer, around a various topic. So we're going to start off today's meeting with a little collaborative activity before we kind of begin. So we have a menti word cloud that we can use here. So to access the word cloud, you can do one of two things, you can either go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com), and then enter the code 1979 3378. Or you can go ahead and scan the QR code on the screen there with your phone. And that should bring you to a menti workload where the first question is, why do you think effective empathy practices are important for volunteers? And you should be able to have three responses for that it's going to be a little word cloud so go ahead and populate your responses in there and once I see stuff coming in I'll go ahead and share my screen with that menti with everybody and we can see all everyone's responses. Let's see. Ah to show results us alright, we got some coming in. So let me move my screen over. Here we go. Alright, so we got some words coming in here: engagement, mission, community, consistency, connection, mission, messaging, interpreters and leaders. So for those

of you who just joined, we're in a menti word cloud at the moment. So you can go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code that you see at the top of the screen to enter in some responses to this first question here. Awesome. These are fantastic. Oh, I like passion, like passion a lot. And folks, feel free to use the chat as well. If for any reason the menti link isn't working for you, you can drop the responses in there as well. Alright. So, um, there should be a second option on this menti word cloud slides, I'll go ahead and stop sharing my screen really quick. And if you go to that same link, I believe it's the exact same number. Yep. So there's a second question, what are you hoping to get out of this learning group? Alright. Present, reshare my screen. Alright so, using that same code 1979 3378 at [menti.com](http://menti.com), you should be able to answer the second question, what are you hoping to get out of this learning group? Exact same structure just a word cloud. Connections, ideas, inspiration, confirmation. Yay, collaboration. Love to see it. New ideas. That like lilac purple color, this really bright one is very hard to see against the blue. So I apologize. It says inspiration and community if you're having issues reading it like I am. Community of practice, understanding, community resources. Awesome. These are wonderful. Well, I really hope that today gives you everything that you want out of this learning group. We've had a couple of people trickle in, since I kind of did the first announcement of this. But this learning group is going to look a little bit different than ones in the past. So per some of the results from the post summit survey data, we saw that a lot of folks wanted more opportunities for connection, collaboration, and brainstorming space. So we're kind of hoping to foster that in today's event. So in just a couple minutes, I'm gonna go ahead and stop sharing my screen for this word cloud. And then I'll turn it over briefly to Stacey from Point Defiance and she's gonna talk a little bit about how they've incorporated empathy into their volunteer department over there. And then we will be going into smaller group discussions for the majority of the remainder of our time here in this group, and then have a collaborative share out at the end. All right, awesome, looks at that 11 responses in this and that looks pretty solid. And I will share these menti word clouds afterwards so folks can still see the results to everybody who attended as well. And I'll try to make that purple color less hard to read on on the screen. I apologize about that. Alright. So I'm gonna go ahead and turn it over to Stacey from Point Defiance, briefly, and she's going to talk about how they've incorporated empathy at their programs over there. So thank you for offering to present for a little bit, Stacey, and I'll turn the floor over to you.

5

### Stacey Luhring (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium 09:10

Right, you're welcome. Thank you, Emily. And before I kind of talk about what we have or have not done, because that's also good to learn about is that I was just curious to know who was in the room. And so if you could put in the chat, what your sort of role is in relation to volunteers, whether you're, you know, manage the overall volunteer engagement or if you're a supervisor in a department and just drop that in the chat. I'll let that process through. And so we kind of know who's in the room so I have a better idea of people's experiences. And while that is happening, I'll tell you a little bit about me. So, once again, my name is Stacy Lorraine, I use she/her pronouns and I'm the Volunteer Engagement Coordinator here at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and have been here for as the Coordinator for 21 years. So it's been an ever evolving change in my role and how things happen in Volunteer Administration. So and I'm always, even though I've been here a long time and doing this job, I'm continuously learning so today, it will be a learning opportunity for me as well. Right, it looks like combination between supervisors and coordinators. Most people it looks like oversee volunteers, or volunteer engagement as a big picture is what I'm looking at. Some supervisors, so great. Thank you guys for adding that to the chat. Just adding that in. So a little bit about us here at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, we're out in the Pacific Northwest, so Tacoma, Washington. If you don't know where we are, I

know, some of you are farther east. And we have been involved with empathy work for quite a while now, um, as long as the network has been going, and maybe a little even a little bit before that. And so we've had our ups and downs with empathy, sort of integration with volunteers. It is not I can just say right now that it is, is starting to be empathy is starting to be more of an organizational priority. It is part of our strategic plan now, and we just redid our strategic plan this last year. But when we started, it wasn't really an organizational push, it was more of within our department, which is conservation, engagement. And we're focusing with a couple of grants and we're focusing more on integrating empathy into programmatic pieces versus as much into volunteers. But we started with a little bit of doing staff trainings, we did one for volunteers as well, kind of on what is empathy. But it was just too hard to sustain. And because we didn't have the sort of accountability from the organizational side, we didn't have the capacity to continue to do it and doing it consistently. But that doesn't mean that empathy hasn't been thought of and incorporated into a lot of what we do. It is something that we think about all the time. And it's, it's not so much. It is an intentional thing, but not so much of like, okay, we're doing this section on empathy today, or we are, you know, focusing training on empathy in that sense. We have incorporated it mostly into our volunteer interpretive trainings. So we use some of those best practices and highlight it in regards to those. But other than that, part of why I said I would be willing to kind of spearhead this discussion was so that I could brainstorm with all of you to figure out ways to make it a little more intentional, but also more fluid within my organization, and to kind of see how it fits well, into onboarding of volunteers and incorporating that as well. So what I thought we could do today, and Emily, I'm just going to kind of jump in on this, hopefully, you're okay with that is that we do kind of like a think pair share sort of process. Except for we won't be in pairs, we'll be in groups. So what I would like everybody to do is just take a few minutes, and to and I don't have these typed out so I can't like put them in the chat. I can try to type them or if Emily can type faster than I can. And just to think about two questions for yourself, and then we'll use these questions to start our conversations in our breakout rooms. And so the two questions are in terms of empathy and empathy practices. Is it an organizational initiative? So everybody around the organization is doing it? Or is it a department? Or is it not happening at all? Kind of think about where, how, how much of this empathy practices is integrated into your normal operations? Right? Not that this is like a this is a one time project kind of "here let's try it and see how it goes". So that's question one. And then question two is actually I'm gonna do three questions. Question two is what are your barriers for trying to continue or to incorporate empathy practices into your operations. And then third one is if you have done it and have successes, what are those successes? And where do you see that? And thank you, Emily, for typing as quick as you can, because I am not a typist.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 15:23

Absolutely, no worries.

S

Stacey Luhring (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium) 15:25

So, so we'll give you everybody a few minutes to kind of think about those questions, jot those down ideas down. And I will stop talking.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 15:38

Awesome. Thank you so much Stacey for giving us those kinds of questions for thought. So it's currently 10:15. So while you all are kind of thinking and brainstorming these questions that Stacey had, I'll give us the next set of directions. So for this think pair share portion of the learning group, I'm going to go ahead and create some breakout rooms for everybody. We'll be in these breakout rooms for about 20 - 25 minutes. And they'll just be randomly assigned. We'll be in them with about four or five other people, so large enough for some collaboration to happen. But if you also just kind of want to sit back and listen and get some ideas, these should be big enough sizes for that to be able to happen. So we have 22 folks with us in the meeting right now. So I'm gonna go ahead and assign five breakout rooms. And I'll go ahead and be bouncing between all of them if anybody has any questions. So does anybody have any questions about this portion of the learning group before I go ahead and open up those rooms?

S

Stacey Luhring (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium) 16:47

Just to add Emily as we break into our small groups, please introduce everybody to each other. So you kind of know who's in the room and where your experiences are at. It'll be helpful in terms of sharing out your answers to your questions.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 17:01

Awesome. Yes. Thank you for that reminder, Stacey. Alright. I'm gonna go ahead and open the room. And I hope you guys have some fruitful and great conversations and I will message everybody with a warning before they close as well. Alright. Hello, everybody. Welcome back. Hello, Ryann on her second device.

R

Ryann Stacy (Racine Zoo) 18:08

Hello.

S

Stacey Luhring (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium) 18:11

Ryann in stereo.

R

Ryann Stacy (Racine Zoo) 18:18

This is what I get for moving to a new bigger desk. I have a bigger desk but my computer doesn't have a mic or a camera. So,

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 18:25

Oh, oh, no!

R

Ryann Stacy (Racine Zoo) 18:27

It's a given a take. It's okay. Bigger, more desk space is much more valuable to me.

E

Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 18:31

That's fair. All right, I think everybody should be getting dropped off here. Awesome. Let me change my view so I can see all of your faces. Amazing. Awesome. So we've got about 15 minutes left in the learning group. And I kind of wanted to use that time for all of the individual breakout rooms to kind of have some cross pollination and share some of the things that you talked about some challenges that you might have run into some like light bulbs might have gone off, or ideas that came up and have everybody kind of have one large breakout room together for the last couple of minutes that were here. So I think I made it to almost every breakout room as I was bouncing around. It sounded like y'all had some great conversations. So who would like to kind of share what they talked about and started going through.

S

Stacey Luhring (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium) 19:46

Okay, I will go with our group. Somebody's got to start. So we actually all three of us were sort of very different sort of realms and where we were at in terms of our positions. But all of us really focused on were that we've kind of incorporated empathy is becoming a cultural or organizational priority. But that's just in the beginning stages of it. But that a lot of our interpretive pieces for volunteers already have some of that in there and working in there. But all of us to the group had grants that were also helping them to do that. And we're really looking at like, trying to make it more intentional and actually calling out say empathy, in terms of when you're onboarding new volunteers to do maybe an empathy section that talks to like introducing empathy and how it looks like for a volunteer, as they're out there. And, and whether that's in the onboarding process, or maybe it's just with the interpretive volunteers kind of where it is but we we did feel like it needed to be for everybody, but depending on you know, where it is, and where you're at in your organization, it may have to start as in one section, so whether it's interpretive section or husbandry section, whatever might work best. And then some of our, the barriers we were sort of talking about. So the first ones that always came up were like, time and capacity and staffing, and we sort of talked about, okay, well, those things are based on where your priority sit, and where are your organizational or where your work plan, you know, priorities sit. And so if it is something that's important to you, or your department or organization, then that time and staff capacity should be able to be worked in there. So that's a little bit of a barrier and a solution. And then one of the other barriers that we talked about was evaluating whether incorporating all this empathy is really doing its job. Are volunteers, you know, learning about it, are they incorporating it, things like that. So trying to figure out how to evaluate volunteers and their level of empathy and empathy for wildlife and delivery about empathy, best practices. That was our group.

R

Ryann Stacy (Racine Zoo) 22:37

In our group, we kind of touched on something similar. Lynne brought up a really good point that in Milwaukee, they begin by pointing out recognizing and pointing out the empathy practices that volunteers are already doing. Which struck me as really, really great, I feel like if you can start off on a high note and be like, "You guys are already doing this", I can kind of set

them up with the confidence that they need to then kind of embrace the new learning and then more complex empathy, empathy concepts, and we also kind of touched on Henry violences. Those amazing famous fact sheets from the summit, whoo, and how they have those awesome, like those empathy building blocks, and that's something that I actually chose to incorporate in our write ups for all of our summer camp curriculum this year. Was just remember your empathy building blocks. So that way, they kind of have like, just a few bullet points that they can reference that if they have like a mind fart, and they just blank out, being able to like, okay, what are these building blocks that can kind of give you that framework to fall back on. I don't know if anybody else from my group wants to chat we talked about a lot.

M

Marta Burnet 23:44

Yeah, another thing that we talked about, and I was in the same group, as Ryann, is the idea of like, how to build some of those stories that and one idea that I think that Lynn was talking about that Milwaukee does is have volunteers write up what they the story is that they know about an animal and, and questions and things that could ask and then give that to the keeper. So they're just sort of proof proofing that or and then correcting any misconceptions or so that there's taking a little bit of that effort off of the of the keepers. Another idea that Catherine brought up was like doing voice memos, like just recording the keepers like those stories and then being able to transcribe those. So just trying to find ways to get those stories so that making it easier for the volunteers to be able to share those things if they have access to great stories. I think then that you know, that will help them be able to kind of take on more of that empathy role.

U

25:04

Ah, I'll jump in, because that relates to what Marta was just talking about relates to some things we chatted about in our group. We spend a lot of time talking about just like, resources for volunteers. And making sure you know, because I think one thing we all know is that volunteers have all of the stories and so much historic knowledge that just gets passed down and passed down verbally. And then what happens when those volunteers that have all those fun stories leave, and then it's all new people, and they don't know those. So I really like the idea that you said it was Lynn, that you do this where you collect the that information from volunteers, and then kind of fact check it with the keepers, because that's another thing we were talking about is like, how do we make sure that information is the actual story. And I kind of have a question to throw out for you all like, what what how do you put that into a physical resource for the volunteers? Do you do like online like computer resources, your do like physically print out something that like is a resource volunteers can have with them? Like conveniently when they're on zoo grounds. Like what do you all, how do you all physically have that resource available?

R

Ryann Stacy (Racine Zoo) 26:32

With that kind of seems to bounce back to something we chatted about in our group. We talked about sort of how overwhelming having the creating empathy factsheets for every single animal in the zoo could be and how that went. And I kind of both faced that barrier and sort of had to narrow it down to okay, what animals do we get our volunteers interpret the most. And

then moving out from there, we kind of had the idea of sort of an in between like little I believe Marta used the word it was in my pocket guides that Marta and Tara mentioned have just like a little cards that just have like, quick clips of like species, name, birthday, and the food, the you know, food they eat in general things about natural history, written in an empathy focused way. And that would be really cool. I envision like a like an O ring, and just have like laminated cards that the people, the volunteers could flip through but as it's ongoing, I feel like having a shared Google doc would be cool that volunteers could put stuff in and then your volunteer coordinator, or whomever can maybe make it into a more cohesive document that can be passed down over time. Because I think you bring up a good point of like, we have generations of volunteers, we don't want to lose those awesome stories and experiences that they have and want those to keep being passed down.

M

Marta Burnet 27:50

Yeah, like we have the we have a pot, we have the animal Pocket Guide at Woodland Park, but it is right now just names and birthdays. So like figuring out incorporating more empathy resources into that without it becoming overwhelming because right now we update it quarterly, because there's so many changes. So I'm always going back and forth between how do I make this a resource that people can use, also wanting to conserve resources, because printing and laminating and making these official guides on like a monthly basis is a lot.

S

Stacey Luhring (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium) 28:28

I one suggestion for you Cathy, is that we just do the list of the animal and their their name. And we actually do wait sometimes, for birthdays but um, I always tell volunteers to rely on a lot of our graphics. So if your graphics are up to date, they share all the information of like, what they eat, and all that kind of stuff. You just need to like, direct them to use the graphics to help them interpret if they're out on grounds. And that sense and if your if your organization is getting more empathy built into their graphics, then that would also be involved into your graphics as well. I know some are are starting to do that. But then you don't have to worry about trying to you're only updating for us we just do like a small like business card that we just have to update every so often. And that's more just when animals change versus all of the details because it is I I know it's labor intensive.

C

Courtney Cordova (Henry Vilas Zoo) 29:26

Yeah, remember, so we've been updating our fact sheets that we showed at the conference, and they are definitely like, take a lot of time. So we've been kind of doing it based off of our conservation awareness days. It's kind of given us a natural like, okay, these three animals are gonna be the next important ones to have. So, you know, if we just did a rainforest days, and then we did orangutans and lemurs and then we are having a bird day so then we're doing flamingoes, like we're just kind of doing it it's kind of month by month but it also gives us a very specific deadline, which is really nice because they're so time intensive like it's really helpful for me like, Okay, I need that done by next week to push myself to make sure that I'm getting those done in time. And then they all kind of come out as drafts. And then we, we just leave them out on the keepers like lunchroom table so that they could take a look at them and write down any comments that they have any feedback. And then when we are ready to say that's

the final draft we have there about like this big, so maybe like half sheet of paper size, and they're on a little ring. And we leave those down in our volunteer central area, as well as have them on better impact so that people can download them and look at them on their own time.



30:36

One of the things that we've been doing on our enclosure talks, we just went through a series of school tours. And besides having a pretty good size sheet with all the information on the animals and the empathy facts, which Emily made for us before she left, we also have a picture, an 8 by 10 picture of the animals with the volunteers. Because every once in a while, as the groups come around, the animals aren't really visible, they might be laying down. And so it's always nice when you're giving the information out to have a picture of the animal there. And that way, especially small children can identify with the animal. And if they don't have a chance to see it in person, it actually increases their interest in coming back to see it at a future time. So we found that pictures are very useful during our enclosure talks.



Emily Bernhardt (Woodland Park Zoo) 31:45

Awesome, thank you for sharing everybody. I hope that the small groups and kind of having that space to have this discussion and then kind of coming all back together at the end was a beneficial kind of way to have this event. Oh, my computer's doing things. So in order to kind of get your input on whether or not this was helpful, and kind of your thoughts on the structure of this event. I'm dropping a link to the survey in the chat. And I'll also send an email to everybody who attended as well with this survey and any the ideas that were dropped in the chat and the menti word clouds as well. But on your own time, if you can go ahead and take that survey and just give your input on how you felt this event went and if it kind of met the needs that you came into this event hoping to kind of get out of that. That would be great. So that way we know kind of how to structure these events in the future to make them more useful to everybody who joins. But with about a minute left. Does anybody have any questions or comments or anything that they would like to say before we get. Oh you're welcome, Dave, thank you. Awesome. Okay. Well, I hope that you all had some fruitful conversation, and were able to get some ideas going and your gears turning. But otherwise, I hope you have a wonderful rest of your week and have a great rest of your day. Thank you for coming. Bye, everybody.