

Interview with the association's head of youth, Daniela Thoring

'OUR YOUTH BRINGS US FORWARD!'

SV officer Roswitha Dannenberg talked to Daniela Thoring

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for travelling from the Westphalia federal group (LG 06) to the Hamburg/Schleswig-Holstein (LG 01) federal group's youth summer camp for this interview. It was impressive to observe how fast you managed to build a foundation of trust with the teenagers. They enthusiastically prepared non-alcoholic cocktails with the recipes and ingredients you brought along, and there was no shyness whatsoever.

But now on to the interview.

Congratulations on your election to the SV national board of management. You were voted in unanimously; that surely was a good feeling. Have you had a bit of a chance to get used to your new post? What tasks await you?

Before getting into the interview, I would like to thank my predecessor, Sylvio Grimm, for his great commitment to youth work in recent years and also for our great work together. I am very happy that he will remain a member of the youth committee as the federal group's head of youth and his knowledge will therefore not be lost to us. Now regarding the first question: with the teenagers and the dogs, nothing has changed for me. During the different tent camps, I treat the teenagers as I did before. But now I notice that I have an office which also includes other processes. I have already been asked by three teenagers about what tasks one has to do as an association's head

of youth. They had no idea what this job entails. I explained to them that the association's head of youth is responsible for carrying out the German Youth and Junior Championship (DJJM), but also supports the association's youth work. Basically, it is my responsibility to make sure that the SV will have youth work in the future, too!

What does an association have to offer in order to be interesting and attractive for teenagers?

We have to work on the children's and teenagers' interests, and not try to impose anything on them. We cannot simply go in one direction because we have always done so. If the teenagers want to do new types of sports, we have to accept that. We have to take them seriously and give them the feeling that they are important. We have to take their wishes and ideas seriously, because teenagers want to do a lot and also want to take on responsibility. We have to allow that, and give them a place for it.

In your opinion, can teenagers nowadays still become enthusiastic about dog sports?

I think they can become even more enthusiastic than before. It's the question of how I define dog sports. There are dogs in many families, and the teenagers want to do something with their dogs – spend time with them. In tent camps, I saw enthusiastic faces when the teenagers were shown, for example, rescue dog work and

protection service. As dogs are generally family members, in my opinion, it is not difficult to convince teenagers to do dog sports.

What does good youth work look like for you?

It can be quite versatile: there's not just one way, but there are basic principles. The people that do youth work should have fun doing it. Furthermore, the teenagers have to be taken seriously and appreciated. It's always well-meaning to want to do something for teenagers. But it's always better to do it with them! We have to listen more to what concerns our teenagers. Adults often forget that.

What can heads of youth in the local and federal groups do to maintain good contact with the kids? To maintain good contact with the teenagers, it is first of all important to have any contact in the first place. That means engaging with them about more than dogs, and knowing what concerns teenagers in their everyday life. It is definitely helpful to exchange opinions with other colleagues and to give each other tips.

What do you want to achieve in your time in office, and what topics will you engage in?

There are two levels: one, I would like to achieve youth work in the association not being seen as separate, but as something influenced by everything we do.

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When taking decisions, for example, in the areas of breeding or agility, we also always have to ask ourselves: ‘What does this mean for our teenagers at the moment, and also for future young members?’ It is important to awaken the awareness in our existing members that our children and teenagers are the members who will bring forward our association in the coming years.

When looking into the federal groups’ offices and the national board, we surely have a big group of people that had already joined our association as. If our local groups are open to families and have a welcoming culture, we will have won a lot. There are only a small percentage of children who come to the dog club without their parents; therefore, we have to achieve that the parents approve of their kids being there.

We have many competent local groups, trainers and breeders. I would like to help the heads of youth to prepare them for contact with young people and new members and to support them in this.

What are your aims?

I would like to give everybody interested in working with teenagers a set of tools in the form of pragmatic things, such as checklists for organising events, handicraft or play instructions, declarations of agreements as blank forms and so on. My idea is to make this information available free of charge via the SV website.

We start right away. I would like to take on board those responsible in the SV. On the federal group level, these are the federal groups’ heads of youth. We are on our way towards creating a common plan of measures for the next four years. Every single federal group’s head of youth brings strengths and know-how to move our youth work forward.

This year, we will hold a ‘future youth work in the SV’ workshop. It’s a method to develop innovative ideas together, and to initiate concrete projects. This method is also applied in management and in the pedagogical area. In using it, I am doing what I wish for my federal groups’ heads of youth to do in the future.

PROFILE



With a degree in social pedagogy, Daniela Thoring (39), works as the coordinator for youth work/youth protection in the youth welfare office of the city of Minden. Since 1989, she has been a member of the SV (among other things, since 2011 head of youth of the Westfalen federal group and overall director of the German Youth and Junior Championship in Hörstel-Riesenbeck) and has been doing dog sports since she was a child. In the meantime, she has presented dogs in competitions in the breeding area as well as in IPO sports at state and national levels. Many of the dogs bred by her (kennel name: *von Ungalant*) have been presented in supra-regional competitions.