



Volunteer Handbook

OVERVIEW:

Therapeutic horseback riding for people with disabilities is a beneficial form of physical and recreational activity that improves balance, posture, and coordination; strengthens and relaxes muscles; and helps develop self-awareness, self-confidence, self-discipline and concentration.

GREAT serves children and adults with physical, cognitive and multiple disabilities including cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, mental retardation, closed head injury, spinal cord injury, visual impairment, hearing impairment, amputation, learning disability, emotional impairment, autism, and stroke.

GREAT instructors design and monitor individualized treatment plans for each student to address their physical, emotional and social needs while they learn skills of horseback riding. Individual and class goals encourage each rider to be the best he or she can be, on and off the horse.

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS:

1. Dependable and able to make a commitment..
2. Must enjoy working with people with disabilities.
3. Must be able to work around horses.
4. Must be in good health.
5. Must be able to follow instructions and help students relate to those directions.
6. Must be 14 years of age or older.
7. Must exercise patience.

TRAINING PROVIDED:

1. Attend volunteer orientation
2. On-the-job training.
3. Must become familiar with volunteer handbook.

SPECIFIC DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Report to barn and sign in at your volunteer time.
2. Assist instructors in grooming and saddling horses before classes and remove saddle and saddle pads and groom after classes. (Instructors will always put the bridle on and take the bridle off.)
3. Assist in keeping the barn and area around barn neat and clean.
4. Assist riders in preparing for classes.
5. Serve as a sidewalker or horse leader to the riders during the class.
6. Assist instructor or class assistant with stable management classes.
7. Assist instructor during classes as needed.
8. Report to instructor and sign out.

FROM THE RIDER'S PERSPECTIVE:

Some of your new friends at GREAT have disabilities. Here are a few thoughts which might help you feel more at ease during your volunteer hours.

1. Laughter and humor make the world a richer place to live -- for ALL OF US!!

2. Patience is a virtue -- with some, it is a necessity.
3. Charity begins at home -- and pity does not belong anywhere.
4. To have a friend you have got to be a friend -- some of us may have a hard time telling you how thankful we are for your friendship, but without you, we would not be able to ride -- so THANK YOU!!
5. Faith, love and hope; but the greatest of these is love -- we can learn a lot from each other about love!!

BE SENSITIVE TO:

1. Separating a rider from his wheelchair, crutches or braces unless asked.
2. Helping a rider only when he/she requests it. When a rider falls down or has difficulty outside of the class period, allow him/her time to solve the problem him/herself before asking if he/she needs help.
3. The commitment you have made to the program. Without you, we cannot ride. If you cancel at the last minute we may have to cancel class.

A VOLUNTEER SHOULD:

1. Direct rider's attention to instructor's directions throughout lesson.
2. Reinforce instructions with riders who have hearing problems.
3. Lead horse an arm's length away from your shoulder.
4. Stay even with your horse's head when leading.
5. Do not do anything with rider without instructor's permission.
6. Be patient with the rider.
7. Notify instructor of any discomfort if the rider complains of any discomfort.
8. Become familiar with the riding equipment and its use.
9. Know where to stand while leading during exercises, mounting and dismounting.
10. Know how to assist as a Sidewalker
11. Know how to assist when rider is mounting from the ramp, block or ground.
12. Sign in each time you come.
13. Be dependable. - Instructors and riders are counting on you.
14. Dress appropriately -- WEAR CLOSE TOED SHOES / BOOTS

A VOLUNTEER SHOULD NOT:

1. Leave rider for any reason.
2. Switch sides unless asked to do so by instructor or before you tell the instructor.
3. Allow riders to mount or dismount without instructor.
4. Have conversations with other volunteers during class instructions.
5. Visit with rider during class instruction.
6. Pull on horse's head while doing exercises, mounting and dismounting.
7. Reprimand horse while the rider is mounted.

DON'T FORGET TO BE YOURSELF -- SMILE!!!!

PREPARING FOR CLASS:

1. Record your hours on the sign-in sheet and check with the instructor for assignments.
2. SAFETY RULES:
 - a. Do NOT go under the neck of a tied horse. Safety first, go around.
 - b. When going around a horse place hand on rump and walk closely behind the horse, that puts you out of "kicking range."
 - c. Do NOT kneel around a horse, it's hard to get out of the way quickly.
 - d. When bringing a wheelchair toward the horse, approach from the front SLOWLY!
3. GROOM THE HORSE IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER:
 - a. Rubber curry comb - use in a circular motion on neck and body to loosen dirt and stimulate skin. Do not use on face and legs.
 - b. Stiff body brush - use long, sweeping strokes on neck, body, and legs to remove loosened debris.
 - c. Soft brush - use short strokes to polish coat. Use on body, legs, and face.
 - d. Mane and tail brush (or comb) - stand to the side when brushing the tail to avoid being kicked. Start at

the bottom and work up. Brush tail carefully to avoid pulling out long hairs.

e. Hoof pick - clean dirt from hooves, especially in the grooves.

4. **TACK THE HORSE IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER:**

a. Saddle pads - place over the withers and slide back into place. (Use 1 pads unless instructed otherwise by the instructor.)

b. Saddle - position over pads and adjust to fit properly.

c. Girth for the English saddle - attach non-elastic end to the right side of saddle, then go around and tighten only to the point of keeping the saddle in place. Girths should be re-tightened just before class time.

NOTE: To aid the instructor at mounting, please adjust the girth more on the right to allow for final adjustment on the left.

d. Girth for Western saddle - check girth so center of girth is in center of horse's belly. Tighten girth so saddle will stay on. Girths should be re-tightened just before class. Instructor will check girth before student mounts.

5. **REPORT TO INSTRUCTOR FOR CLASS ASSIGNMENTS.**

6. **AT CLASS TIME:**

a. Leaders - check to make sure your horse is properly tacked and re-tighten the girth if necessary. Proceed to the mounting area as directed by the instructor.

b. Sidewalkers - check to see that your rider is prepared to ride. All riders must wear a safety helmet.

c. Helmets will be fitted to each rider the first day of class and sizes recorded on the class schedule. Gait belts are also worn by some riders. If your rider is required by the instructor to wear a gait belt, make sure it fits properly on the outside of jackets. Sidewalkers are to stay with their riders while the horses are led to the mounting area.

LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Takes charge of the horse.
2. Assists the rider's control of the horse as necessary.

HOW TO LEAD:

1. Hold lead rope 4" to 6" from the clasp to allow for the natural motion of the horse's head.
2. Hold extra rope in left hand. Never wrap it around your hand, use butterfly loops.
3. Make sure the lead rope is between the reins, not over them.
4. Stay even with the horse's head, not behind or in front.
5. Wait until rider initiates actions. **DO NOT** give student any more support than needed.
6. Look up and forward. Focus attention on the lesson. Glance occasionally at the rider to make sure he/she is safe.
7. Keep a minimum of 3-4 horse lengths distance between your horse and the horse in front of you.
8. Do not let the horse's head get too low to the ground -- this may upset the rider's balance.
9. Adjust your steps to the horse -- be careful not to get too far ahead, behind or far away.
10. Short tugs work better than a steady pull on a slow horse.
11. Make turns wide. Allow room for sidewalkers when next to a fence or obstacle.
12. If your rider has a sidewalker, allow them to give any necessary verbal cues to avoid confusing the rider.
13. Only one person should give instructions.
14. If the horse stops and is hard to move, push to the left or right with lead rope, instead of pulling straight ahead.

SIDEWALKER RESPONSIBILITIES:

A SIDEWALKER

1. Assists the rider in maintaining balance. One or two sidewalkers may be assigned according to the rider's needs. Some riders do not require sidewalkers.
2. Reinforce instructor's directions. Some riders need a sidewalker to help them understand what to do.

HOW TO SIDEWALK:

1. Different methods are used with individual riders, depending on their needs. For example:
 - a. Place your arm closest to the rider across the rider's thigh and grasp the front edge of the saddle.
 - b. Walk beside rider's leg to assist when needed. (i.e., at the trot or to reinforce directions.)
2. If a rider has a leader and one sidewalker, walk on the opposite side of the horse.
3. If a rider has a leader and two sidewalkers, designate only one sidewalker to verbally reinforce instructions.
4. Too much input can confuse a rider.
5. Focus student's attention on the instructor.
6. Do not give student any more support than needed.
7. Reinforce instructor's directions after giving rider time to process. For example, if the instructor says "turn right" and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say "right."
8. Use little strokes and tickles on shoulders/back to encourage good posture, if verbal cues are not working.
9. Do not rest your elbow on the horse's back. It hurts the horse.
10. If you tire, raise a hand, come to the center of the ring to prevent a traffic jam, stop and change sides one at a time.
11. The sidewalker who drops behind the rider's thigh on corners is in an unsafe position.
12. **DURING CLASS, TALKING BETWEEN RIDERS AND VOLUNTEERS SHOULD BE MINIMAL. IF A RIDER INITIATES CONVERSATION, DIRECT RIDER'S ATTENTION BACK TO INSTRUCTOR. CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN VOLUNTEERS SHOULD BE RESERVED FOR BEFORE AND AFTER CLASS.**

MOUNTING PROCEDURES:

REMEMBER - Leaders remain in front of their horses during mounting, stirrup adjustments, or any time the horse stops for more than a minute. Stay alert during mounting. Listen to instructor talking to rider.

AT THE MOUNTING RAMP:

1. **LEADER** is responsible for - positioning horse in the ramp - keeping the horse quiet and still.
 - a. Approach the ramp from the end walking slowly backward between the ramps.
 - b. Position horse close to the side from which mounting will take place.
 - c. Face the front of the horse's head.
 - d. Do not put pressure on the lead rope; this may cause the horse to back up. If the horse should back up, do not pull on the lead rope - simply release pressure on the lead rope and go with him - he will stop.
 - e. Allow the horse to relax - hold the lead rope quietly, trying not to restrict his head.
 - f. Once the rider is mounted and the cue is given by the instructor for the rider to "walk on" guide the horse out of the ramp slowly and quietly, while still facing the horse. Once the horse is clear of the steps, stop and wait for the instructor to adjust the stirrups.
 - g. Take the position on the left side of the horse once the stirrups have been adjusted and the rider has told the horse to "walk on."
2. **SIDEWALKERS**
 - a. Position yourself on the ramp opposite the rider while mounting is taking place.
 - b. Follow instructor's directions concerning assistance -- helping the rider's leg over the neck of the horse, etc.
 - c. Keep rider's feet forward and up -- this prevents injuries if the horse steps to the side. As the horse walks out of the ramp gradually lower the leg.

MOUNTING FROM THE GROUND:

1. **LEADER**
 - a. Face the front of the horse.
 - b. Stay alert.
 - c. Keep the horse quiet and still during mounting.
2. **SIDEWALKER**
 - a. Instructor will provide directions concerning help you should give -- helping the rider's leg over the rump, putting weight in the stirrup to keep the saddle from slipping, etc.

VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES DURING CLASS:

AT THE HALT (STOP):

1. LEADER - Step in front and face the horse to keep him from moving. This is one of the most important jobs of the leader, especially during mounting and exercises. Try not to hold the horse's head too tight -- this is a good time for the horse to relax.
2. SIDEWALKER - Remain at the rider's side.

AT THE WALK:

1. LEADER
 - a. adjust your step to the horse's walk.
 - b. Stay attentive to the instructor and horse.
 - c. Allow enough room for sidewalkers on both sides of the horse.
 - d. Keep a safe distance, 3-4 horse lengths from the horse in front of you and from horses on either side of you. If you are getting too close and the rider is unable to slow down, you may stop or slow the horse, or make a large circle - make sure the rider and sidewalkers know beforehand. A quick turn or circle may unseat the rider.
2. SIDEWALKER
 - a. Adjust your step to the horse's walk.
 - b. Stay next to your rider's side! A sidewalker should never leave their rider unless requested to do so by the instructor.
 - c. The sidewalker who drops behind the rider's thigh on corners is in an unsafe position.

AT THE TROT:

1. LEADER
 - a. Make sure the rider is prepared to trot, according to the instructor's directions.
 - b. At the rider's command, begin a slow steady trot, looking up and forward. After trotting, allow the rider to bring the horse to a walk unless they have two hands on the horn or pommel. In that case, bring the horse to a walk smoothly while remaining in a straight line.
2. SIDEWALKER
 - a. Make sure the rider is positioned correctly and centered in the saddle.
 - b. Make sure the rider is prepared to trot, according to the instructor's instructions.
 - c. Support the rider, if directed, by placing your arm across the rider's thigh and grasping the front of the saddle.
 - d. Stay next to the rider's leg as the horse is trotting. Try not to drop behind.
 - e. Communicate to the leader if problems arise (i.e., rider becomes unbalanced). Stop the horse and make adjustments.

DURING EXERCISES:

1. LEADER
 - a. Face the front of the horse if horse is stopped.
 - b. Stay alert to the horse, rider, and instructor.
 - c. Allow the horse to relax.
2. SIDEWALKER
 - a. Responsible for the safety and balance of rider.
 - b. Reinforce directions only if needed.

DURING GAMES:

1. LEADER
 - a. Be attentive to the horse and rider's safety.
 - b. Control the horse only when needed to provide safety to the rider.
 - c. Allow rider to use acquired skills to execute games and to provide problem-solving opportunities.
2. SIDEWALKER
 - a. Responsible for the safety and balance of the rider.
 - b. Reinforce and praise all riders with applause and/or positive reinforcement.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL PROCEDURES:

Plan 1: Major Injury

1. The instructor appoints someone to:
 - a. Telephone the emergency number (911) and read the directions to the arena that are by the telephone.
 - b. Remain in the arena area to direct emergency vehicles and reassure people in the area.
 - c. Get the rider's Emergency Medical Release form from the files and give it to the instructor.
2. The instructor appoints a volunteer to:
 - a. Go to the road and wait for the emergency vehicle.
 - b. Stop the driver and have the lights and siren turned off so the horses will not be frightened.
 - c. Tell driver where the accident is and how to get there.
3. Instructor will decide who will remain with the grounded rider and who will take the class to the safest confined area from the accident.
4. Horse leaders should take all horses a safe distance from the injured party. The instructor will tell other volunteers if the riders should be dismounted.

Plan 2: Minor Injury

1. The needs of the individual should be met, i.e., Band-Aids, ice, taken in out of the heat, etc.
2. If the injured person is a rider, take the horse to its stall or to the "tacking" area.
3. If the injured person should not walk, have a car driven into the arena.
4. The rest of the class should continue in an orderly manner, when directed to do so by the instructor.

Plan 3: Horse is injured or becomes sick

1. If time allows, notify instructor, if not, sidewalker should dismount client and remove client from arena.
2. Observing your horse closely can prevent the necessity of a dismount. When the horse turns its head and looks at its stomach repeatedly, this can be an indication the horse has a "stomach ache" and may lay down.

AFTER CLASS

1. Leader
 - a. Check with the instructor to see if the horse will be used again; if not, please remove saddle, pads, and groom the saddle area. **THE INSTRUCTOR WILL REMOVE THE BRIDLE.**
 - b. Bridles are to be hung in the tack room according to the horse's name tag. Please make sure bridles are hung properly and reins are not knotted.
 - c. Saddles are stored on racks - Match up the numbers or letters under pommels with numbers or letters on the end of the saddle racks.
2. Sidewalker
 - a. After the instructor dismounts the rider, take your rider back to the helmet area to put away helmet.
***HELMETS MUST REMAIN ON THE RIDER'S HEAD UNTIL THE RIDER IS COMPLETELY OUT OF THE ARENA.**
 - b. Return rider to parents or responsible party.
 - c. Assist in untacking the horse.

SAFETY STANDARDS:

- **Observe and obey all safety signs posted.**
- **Mounted persons must wear helmets at all times.**
- **Riders can only mount and dismount when the instructor is present.**
- **Horses must be tacked properly with all safety equipment. Instructor is responsible for checking equipment.**
- **All children should be supervised by an adult when on the premises.**
- **Unauthorized personnel are not allowed in the fields.**
- **Only experienced horse handlers should enter corrals when the horses are not in their stalls.**