



**hearts** INC  
THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER

## **VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

**Hearts Therapeutic Riding Center, Inc**  
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## **Volunteer Rules**

1. You must use lead lines on all horses at all times.
2. Wear appropriate shoes (no sandals).
3. Dress for the weather (layered clothes, gloves, boots).
4. Bring bug spray and sun screen when needed.
5. No running in the barn or around the horses.
6. No shouting or loud noises around the horses.
7. Only take a job you have been trained for and feel comfortable doing.
8. Helmets must be worn at all times while riding.
9. Volunteers must sign in and out. The information is used for grant writing, insurance purposes, etc.
10. Call the Hearts phone 609-703-9130 if you are unable to assist at your scheduled time. We will try to find a substitute.
11. The program depends on you. Please be consistent.
12. What you see here and the riders you meet here, let your conversations about them remain here.
13. If you like what you are doing, please tell your friends. If you have a problem or suggestion, please tell us!
14. No smoking, alcohol and/or illegal drug use permitted in or around barns or run-in areas.

# **Welcome Volunteers!**

We are delighted that you want to assist us in our work with children and adults with disabilities. Please read this guide for volunteers thoroughly. It is designed to be used in conjunction with your hands-on orientation and training. Hopefully, it will give you an understanding of the goals of the program and our expectations of you as a volunteer.

This booklet cannot cover everything there is to know. As you become more familiar with our riders and our methods, questions are sure to come to mind. Please, always feel free to ask.

## **Program Objectives**

HeartsTRC has three main objectives:

1. To improve posture, balance, concentration, attention, mobility and self-esteem through therapeutic horseback riding.
2. To give children and adults with disabilities the chance to learn and ride in a safe, controlled environment.
3. To teach horsemanship skills and stable management.

In order to achieve these objectives, we need the well-trained volunteers.

## **General Information**

Be prompt. Plan to arrive 15 minutes before lessons begin. Fill out your volunteer time sheet in the Hearts tack room shed.

Notify the instructor if you cannot assist in your scheduled lesson. If an emergency arises at the last minute, please try to call before 8 a.m.

Prior to lessons, while riders are warming up, volunteers may hold conversations but are urged to:

- remain aware of the rider's safety at all times
  - include the rider in conversations
  - choose appropriate topics, keeping the rider's interests in mind
- In order to avoid unnecessary distraction to the rider, volunteers are asked not to talk during lessons or use cell phones.

We value the observations of volunteers participating in lessons. Feel free to talk to the instructor after the lesson about the rider's progress. Through these observations, we can learn more about the rider. During lessons, always listen to the instructor!

## **Attire**

Wear outdoor clothes suitable for the season, including comfortable, waterproof footwear. Wear tie shoes or boots only (no sandals). No dangling jewelry. Gloves are safer than mittens for leading or sidewalking. Hats assist in sun protection. Because of the temperature variations, layering of clothing is a reasonably sure way of being comfortable. No beverage, political or distasteful branding on clothing.

## **Participation**

Our program uses volunteers in different ways. Activities include:

- direct contact with the riders and horses by serving as a leader or sidewalker
- participation in fundraising events, horse shows and publicity campaigns
- the training and schooling of horses and ponies
- assisting with administrative functions

Each activity helps to strengthen the program and allows us to operate in a coordinated and professional manner.

Regardless of the service you perform, it is your commitment that needs to be stressed. A program without strong commitment from its volunteers will not survive.

Once you have made a commitment to assist, our riders and instructors rely on you to follow through. No one is more disappointed than a rider showing up for a lesson and finding that he or she cannot ride because a volunteer didn't show up!

## **Riders**

Riders come for lessons every week. Riders with similar abilities may be grouped together or taught individually. Some of the disabilities that you may encounter include:

- mentally challenged
- physically challenged
- emotionally challenged
- socially challenged
- learning disabled

## **Leader**

A leader's first responsibility is to the horse, but you must also constantly be aware of the rider, instructor and any potential hazards in or around the ring. Consider the sidewalkers, making sure there is enough room along the fence and around obstacles for them to pass. An effective leader pays close attention to the rider's needs as well as to where the horse is going.

You should not execute an instruction for the rider before he has time to process the information and make an effort to comply. In other words, when the instructor gives the command to "walk-on" or "whoa", wait for the rider to give the command to the horse. Avoid the temptation to talk to the rider and/or sidewalker.

Walk alongside the horse, about even with his eye/shoulder. Watch where you are going and what is happening around you. Do not walk backward to look at the rider.

The lead line is held with the right hand 6-12 inches from the snap, allowing free motion of the horse's head. The tail end of the lead line should be looped in a figure-eight in the left hand. Use short tugs rather than steady pull to keep a lazy horse moving. A tap at the girth by the sidewalker or leader is used to encourage a change of gait.

When you halt for more than a few seconds, stand in front of the horse with your hands on the lead line or loosely hold the reins. Do not put your fingers through the snaffle bit or halter rings. If the worst happens and there is an accident, stay with the horse. Listen for the instructor's directions.

Avoid showing affection to horse during lesson. Once the rider is safely dismounted you may.

## **Sidewalker**

Sidewalkers are directly responsible for the rider. The sidewalker should help the student focus his/her attention on the instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with either the rider or other volunteers.

When the instructor gives a direction, allow your rider plenty of time to process it. It is important to maintain a position by the rider's knee.

There are two ways to hold onto the rider without interfering. The most commonly used hold is the armlock (arm over the thigh). The sidewalker grips the front of the saddle with the hand closest to the rider. Then the forearm rests gently on the rider's thigh. The other is the ankle hold. Hold the backside of the ankle.

Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider's waist. Avoid resting your elbow on the side of the horse while moving. Encourage your students to use their own trunk muscles to the best of their abilities.

When you are ready for relief for your arm, ask the leader to move into the center to stop and trade sides, one at a time, with the other sidewalker. During exercises, pay attention to your student. Do not get so competitive that your rider does not get to use his skills because you do it for him.

## **Barn Assistants**

Knowledgeable volunteers may be asked to help groom and tack the horses. Plan to arrive about 30-45 minutes before the lessons begin.

- If you are not sure if equipment is required or correctly applied, please ask.
- When the horse is ready, walk him outside (not letting him eat grass) until lesson time or put him in a stall.

After lessons, it may be necessary to cool down the horses (by sponging down and/or walking for several minutes) before returning them to stall or turnout.

Return all tack to the correct location. If any equipment needs care, let the instructor know.

## **Additional Volunteer Roles**

Hearts can also use help with fundraising, publicity and maintenance. Speak to the Director if you wish to assist in any of these activities or to learn more about our needs.

## **Overview of Job Descriptions**

**Board of Directors:** Working board. Up to 6 members. Meetings held eleven times a year.

**Executive Director:** Responsible to the Board of Directors for all activities relating to the program. Responsibilities include but not restricted to: public relations, demonstrations and presentations for public awareness, accountability for funds in/out of program, hiring/firing staff, presiding over staff meetings, designating chairpersons for fundraisers, grant writing, maintenance of program.

**Instructors:** Must hold PATH International certification or be actively working towards certification. Responsibilities include: selection of horses and equipment for riders, preparing mounts for lessons, checking for soundness of mount before use, providing safe and beneficial lessons, keeping records on each rider and attending staff meetings.

**Lesson Manager:** Provides a safe and healthy environment for horses in stabling area, to include fresh bedding, fresh water and proper feeding. If designated, oversees the cleaning of turnout/lesson areas and reports needed repairs. Responsible for grounds and facility standards.

**Volunteers:** Responsibilities include providing secure assistance for riders, providing a safe environment for horses, reporting changes in horse or rider during lessons, respecting client privacy and following instructions found in the booklet.

## **Risk Management Natural Hazards**

**Ticks and Chiggers:** Volunteers should be aware of possible contact with ticks and chiggers. Bug spray will repel them. If infested with chiggers, Nix, a head lice product should be used to kill the pest. If bitten by a tick, remove carefully and watch area for signs of Lyme's Disease.

**Cats and Dogs:** All animals on program property are friendly and enjoy your attention. However, it is recommended that you do not pick them up. Enjoy them on their level. No outside pets please.

**Deer:** At different times during the year, deer are present in the area. Make instructors aware of their presence if seen in the area.

**Fox:** Fox may be in the area. Notify instructors and ***DO NOT TOUCH THEM.***

## **Man Made Hazards**

**Green "Gator" Utility Vehicle:** May only be used with permission of property owners.

**Tractor:** May only be used by designated personnel.

**Barn:** Restricted to volunteers, instructors, staff members and clients under the care of an instructor. Rules are posted.

## **Operation of Facility and Equipment**

**Loss of electric:** In the event of loss of electric, contact Sue and Rich Adams at 927-3785. Do not turn on water as pumps will not work. If there is a short in the electric resulting in smoke, fire or exposed wire, call 911 for help.

## Natural Disasters

**Fire:** In the event of a fire in the barn, the instructor will be the person in charge of the situation. Only adults will assist with evacuation of the horses. Remove riders from horses and lead all to a safe area. Horses are to be taken to outside schooling areas or turnouts. Fire extinguishers are located at either end of the barn. Halters are located at either end of the barn and at each stall. Lead lines are located outside stalls. ***NO ONE IS TO RISK HUMAN LIFE.***

Each horse must be taken from the barn and walked to one of the turnouts. Do not release the animal until inside of turnout or he will more than likely run back to the barn. Send a volunteer to call 911 during the horse evacuation. Use the wall phone inside the door in the Rolling Seas Farm barn tack room or use personal cell phone. Other volunteers clear the way for fire trucks, moving cars that may interfere with trucks getting close to the barn. Be sure all younger volunteers are away from danger. They may assist riders and parents.

**Flood:** The center is not located in a flood zone.

**Tornado:** The center is not located in a tornado zone.

**Hurricane:** In the event of a hurricane, all horses are to be secured in their stalls with full water buckets (in case electric goes out). All barn doors are to be closed and locked to avoid the wind sucking them out. Use human door to exit. All lights should be turned off.

**Earthquake:** The center is not located in an earthquake area.

**Excessive Rain/Wind:** Follow same procedure as a hurricane. Periodically check on stalls for wetness, if safety permits.

**Forest Fire:** In the event of a forest fire, horses are to be trailed off grounds to designated area and turned out in ring there, if possible. Horses can also be ponied or ridden to farm if time permits. Barn should be hosed down and surrounding area should be checked for flammable materials. Move or water down if possible. ***RISK NO HUMAN LIFE.***

**Other Disasters:** The instructor will be the person in charge. Volunteers will follow directions given by the instructor.



## **Hazards Specific to the Use of Equines**

**Falls:** In the event a rider falls from the horse, the instructor is in charge of the situation. All horses should come to a halt. Volunteer should contain and restrain the loose horse. Riders may be asked to leave ring at the discretion of the instructor. Instructor will follow Red Cross First Aid procedures and call 911 if appropriate. Following safety and welfare of injured, the instructor will complete incident report to be kept on file. Instructor will notify the executive director as soon as possible regarding the incident.

**Loose Horse:** If at any time a horse should get loose, the instructor should halt lessons, have volunteers hold all horses while the loose horse is caught. The instructor will be in charge of the situation. Once the horse is caught and contained, the lessons may resume. If the horse leaves the property, other farms should be contacted while volunteers follow horse at a walk. (Running will encourage the horse to move more quickly.) If necessary, the police should be notified. If the horse is missing upon arrival to the barn, call those on the list located near the phone. If necessary, call the police.

**Horse Injuries:** Instructor should assess the situation. If necessary, follow First Aid procedures for horses and contact the vet. Restrict the horse's motion while waiting for the vet. If necessary, after evaluation by the vet, call the insurance company if horse injured is listed.

## **Conduct of Personnel and Participants**

**Inappropriate behavior of rider:** The instructor is in charge of the situation. If necessary, the rider will be removed from the horse or area of disruption. The volunteer will remove the horse from situation of abuse. Instructor will assist rider to appropriate area and discuss situation or return rider to parent or guardian. An incident report must be filed by instructor.

**Inappropriate behavior of volunteer:** Inappropriate behavior will be reported to the executive director. The executive director will contact the volunteer to discuss the situation and a solution to the problem. If an immediate response is needed, the instructor will take the volunteer aside and quietly discuss and rectify the situation. The instructor will contact the executive director and an incident report will be filed.

**Inappropriate behavior of an instructor:** If a volunteer or parent/guardian reports inappropriate behavior of an instructor, the executive director will contact the instructor for a conference to discuss the problem and a solution. The person making the complaint will be notified of follow-up.

## **Safety Regulations**

- All lessons will be conducted in a safe environment.
- Only equipment used for lessons should be in the ring
- Volunteers should be aware of their jobs
- Riders should have suitable horses and equipment
- Riders wear ASTM/SEI helmets
- Riders wear appropriate footwear when possible
- Check equipment before riders mount
- Gear lessons to riders' abilities
- DO NO HARM

## **Emergency Procedures**

**Rider Emergency:** Follow Red Cross First Aid procedures. Call 911 if necessary. Always fill out incident report and inform Executive Director.

**Horse Emergency:** Follow instructions under Risk Management for horse injuries.

**Fire Drills:** Procedure will follow as described in Risk Management section regarding barn fire. Review will be held at staff meetings each year and a designated day will be set to review at the barn. Instructors will review with volunteers. Initial drill will be during yearly volunteer orientation in March. Procedure listed in barn for review.

## **Confidentiality Policy**

Volunteers must respect the confidentiality of each client attending the program. What you see here, what you hear here, let it stay here when you leave.