



Volunteer Handbook

Mailing Address:

Therapy & Learning Center
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Riding Location:

James K. Taylor Memorial Arena
200 Frays Lane
Huron, TN 38345

Staff Resources:

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Hippotherapy & Therapeutic Riding

The Rein-bow Riding Academy is a place of promise, where individuals with varying abilities receive innovative therapy while riding a horse. The movement of a horse can facilitate activation of postural control, balance, motor and sensory systems. Other benefits may occur as well, such as improved communication and social interaction.

The term **hippotherapy** comes from the Greek word "hippos" meaning horse; thus the term literally means treatment with the help of a horse. During a hippotherapy session, a specially trained therapist (physical, occupational or speech therapist) uses the horse as a therapeutic tool to achieve the client's therapy goals. **Therapeutic riding** is another form of equine therapy that allows patients to increase their emotional and social well being while the rider learns to control the horse on his/her own.

Hippotherapy benefits individuals with a variety of medical conditions such as:

- Cerebral Palsy
- Down syndrome
- Abnormal muscle tone
- Sensory Integration Disorders
- Impaired coordination
- Traumatic brain injury or stroke
- Decreased mobility
- Developmental delays
- Impaired communication
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Impaired balance responses

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers are the heart and soul of the Rein-Bow Riding Academy program. Without volunteers available to safely assist the riders during their sessions, they would be unable to ride. No special skills are required for volunteers as each person is trained by the program staff. Volunteers must be at least 14 years of age and come with an enthusiastic, energetic spirit ready to improve the lives of children with special needs.

Volunteer opportunities include the following:

- **Horse Leader** - The leader is responsible for starting, guiding, and stopping the horse during the session while allowing the rider to do as much of the handling as possible. This volunteer should be at least 16 years of age with prior horse experience and be able to walk or jog intermittently during the 30 minute lesson.
- **Sidewalker** - The sidewalker walks alongside the rider during a lesson and is responsible for the rider's safety. The degree of assistance will vary among riders with some requiring multiple sidewalkers. This volunteer must be at least 14 years old and be able to walk briskly beside a horse for 30 minutes.

- **Ring and Arena Assistant** - The assistant helps with preparation of the ring and equipment for the lesson, fits helmets on the riders, grooms horses, and supervises riders during grooming as well as before and after the lesson.
- **Horse Care** – Assistance is provided to bring the horses from pasture, groom and tack them, and return them to pasture at the end of the riding sessions. Horses also need activity and attention prior to the sessions and at other times to help them work at their best.
- **Special Events** – Volunteers are needed to help with fundraising activities. The program currently is able to scholarship all riders so there is no cost to families. In order to do this, we must raise funds to pay the program expenses. Fundraising events are held throughout the year, and we welcome volunteers to assist with planning, set up, event activities, and clean up.

Schedule Information

Riding sessions are held on Tuesdays between 4:00 pm and 8:00 pm. Each session is 30 minutes in length. Up to three instructors lead separate sessions during each 30-minute period. The riding season begins on March 8 and ends on October 25.

Rules and Reminders

1. Make sure you have fully completed your volunteer packet before you begin your volunteer experience. Volunteers under age 14 must have their parent/guardian sign the forms too. If your forms are not turned in, you can attend orientation but cannot begin hands-on volunteer work. Adult volunteers must pass a background check as well.
2. Parking is available in a small lot at the drive entrance and along Frays Lane. Volunteers are asked to leave the parking area by the barn free for families participating in the program. It is difficult for some of the riders to maneuver far on the uneven ground, and reduced traffic by the barn is also important for their safety.
3. Sign in and out each day in the volunteer log. This is how we will keep track of your volunteer hours. The log is sent to the Guest Services dept. at Jackson-Madison County General Hospital, and they can provide documentation of your volunteer hours for you when needed.
4. Sign up to volunteer on the White Board each night. The riders' schedules will be posted, and three volunteers are needed per session. This will help ensure we can quickly identify volunteers helping with each student.
5. The number of volunteers at the barn at any given time is difficult to predict. There may be times that you come to the barn and there is not as much to do. Please know that this doesn't mean we don't need your help!
6. Please dress appropriately. Open-toed shoes are not acceptable; we want you to be safe. Please refrain from wearing revealing clothing, large/dangling jewelry or anything that might get in the way. We want you to be comfortable and safe, and also represent our center well.
7. This is a non-smoking facility. Please do not smoke on the property.

8. Drinks and light snacks will be provided. You are welcome to bring your own food/drinks as well.
9. When helping in classes, please refrain from excessive talking to staff or other volunteers.
10. Cell phones should be turned to silent or vibrating functions.
11. Volunteers may be asked to help in a variety of ways. Please speak up if you are asked to do anything that you do not know how to do or are uncomfortable with.
12. Please be sure that we have a current phone number to contact you in the event that a session is cancelled. We don't want anyone to make an unnecessary trip.
13. Be mindful that when you are in the arena and waiting to participate in a session, you are always being seen or heard by our children and their families. Please be aware of this when choosing topics of conversation, etc.

Basic Emergency Information

In order for an effective emergency procedure plan to be implemented, it is critical that every volunteer is aware of the location of the following items:

Emergency Telephone:

A landline is not available at the barn. All staff will have cell phones available.

Emergency Contact Numbers:

Emergency contact numbers are posted on the cabinet in the hippotherapy storage area.

Human First Aid Kit:

Kit is located in the metal cabinet near the barn entrance.

Fire Extinguisher:

A fire extinguisher is located in the metal cabinet near the barn entrance.

In the event of an emergency, a staff member will have access to forms that provide details for emergency contacts, insurance, preferred healthcare provider, and consent/non-consent information.

If an incident occurs (no matter how small), an occurrence report must be completed by staff. Even if someone does not appear to be seriously injured at the time, a form should be completed so that a record of the incident can be kept. Please see a staff member if you witness anyone sustaining an injury.

Emergency Procedures

The following is to provide you with a guide about how to handle emergency situations. Please remember, as a volunteer, you will never be expected to perform a task that is outside of your level of knowledge or experience. Always refer to a staff member in the event of an emergency.

Rider Falls or Jumps Off Horse

- If the rider appears off balance or about to fall or jump, immediately instruct the horse leader to stop and inform the instructor.
- If a rider has fallen, horse leader must move the horse away from the fallen rider while the sidewalkers stay with the fallen student until the instructor comes over.
- The fallen rider will be kept down where he is, and the instructor will assess for signs of injury.
- The instructor will determine if the rider has signs of injury that need further attention, or if the rider can remount and finish the session.
- If the rider remounts, he/she will be given time to rebuild confidence.
- No one is permitted in the area if an accident occurs unless summoned by the instructor.
- All horses in the arena must halt with the horse leader facing the mount; volunteers will remain with their horses and riders.
- The instructor will determine if lessons can continue, or if the lessons will be discontinued.

Runaway Horse

- If a horse is loose in the arena, be aware of the loose horse. Keep calm while sidewalkers reassure the rider. If the horse is difficult to control, the rider may need to be dismounted.
- If a horse is loose outside of the arena, do not chase it as it may cause the horse to run. Allow an instructor or other staff member to tend to the loose horse with assistance from the volunteers if necessary.

Horse Steps on a Person's Foot

- Lean into the horse and push to get his weight off of the foot. Pulling away can make the horse step harder.
- Remove shoe and check for signs of injury.

Severe Weather

We are very concerned about the health and safety of our riders, volunteers, staff, and horses. Therefore, if the "feels like" temperature is forecasted to be above 94° degrees or under 40° degrees during the riding sessions, the sessions will be cancelled. If threat of severe thunderstorms or lightning activity occur, classes may also be cancelled. Every effort will be made to contact volunteers in the event that cancellations are made.

Tornado Watches/Warnings

In the event of a tornado watch in the immediate area, staff will closely monitor weather reports. If a tornado is sighted or reported in the immediate area, all riders will be dismounted and accompany volunteers to cover. Take shelter in a low lying area.

Fire in the Barn

Emergency services should immediately be contacted by calling 911. Volunteers and riders should congregate in the area in front of the cabin adjacent to the barn. Staff will immediately inform the Stanfill family. A fire extinguisher is located in the metal cabinet by the entrance.

Emergency Dismount Procedures

In the event that a rider must be dismounted for safety, the horse leader will be responsible for handling the horse. The sidewalkers will dismount the rider. The sidewalker closest to the outside of the arena will support the weight of the upper body of the rider and pull him/her toward himself, off of the horse. The second sidewalker will immediately help to support the rider's weight during the dismount. The horse leader will then move the horse away from the rider/sidewalkers.

Lesson Procedures

During a lesson, you will have a primary role as either a horse leader or sidewalker.

Horse Leader

The role of a horse leader is to handle the horse under the direction of the instructor. Your primary responsibility is the horse. If you are working without a sidewalker, you must constantly be aware of the rider too. If you are working with sidewalkers, they will take care of the rider and you can focus on taking care of the horse.

Handling - The proper position for the horse leader is to walk on the left side of the horse between his head and shoulder. A good guideline is to hold the lead line in your right hand about 6 inches from the buckle, and hold the excess line in your left hand. Do not allow the excess lead line to drag on the ground.

NEVER WRAP THE LEAD LINE AROUND YOUR HAND OR ANY OTHER PLACE!

Mounting – When the instructor is ready, lead the horse to the mounting ramp. Be sure you have the horse as close to the ramp as possible. Stand in front, slightly off to the side, facing the horse while the student is mounted. When the instructor is ready, the rider will ask the horse to walk on. It is important to bring the horse forward slowly, and proceed into the arena.

Sidewalker

Sidewalkers work hands-on with the riders and are responsible for their safety. In the arena, sidewalkers should help a rider focus his/her attention on the instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with the instructor, riders or other volunteers. The instructor may ask for your involvement during an activity. Be aware that sometimes too many people providing input and instructions can be overwhelming and confusing. Please take direction from the instructor as each child's needs may be different.

When a rider is preparing for a lesson, the sidewalker may assist with putting on a helmet and belt. The helmet should fit snugly; different sizes are available. The belt should also be snug but not too tight.

When mounting with two sidewalkers, the sidewalkers may assist with mounting or dismounting under the direction of the instructor. It is important to allow the rider to do as much mounting/dismounting as possible, only helping when the instructor says it is needed. As a sidewalker, you are there for safety in case a rider needs help.

During the session, you will be asked to walk along the rider and horse. Slow, intermittent jogging may be included. If you become tired or your arm fatigues, please inform the instructor.

Forms of Support/Holds Used:

1. Belt – Each rider will wear a safety belt around his/her waist with attached straps. A sidewalker may hold onto a strap without providing additional support. This will help ensure the rider's safety in the event that he/she loses balance.
2. Over thigh – sidewalker rests the inside arm over the rider's thigh and lightly holds onto the saddle/tack with their hand
3. Over knee – sidewalker rests the inside forearm over the rider's knee
4. Cuff/Ankle hold – sidewalker uses the inside hand to hold the rider's ankle steady
5. Spotter – sidewalker does not have physical contact with the rider but is instead closely watching the rider and intervening if help is needed. This is used for riders who are learning independence with skills.

Horse-Related Safety

General Precautions:

- Approach a horse from the side/shoulder area whenever possible. Horses have a blind spot directly in front and directly behind them.
- If you must walk around the rear of a horse, keep a hand on the horse and stay close to him.
- Never walk under the lead rope of a tied horse; always walk around.
- Always speak in low voices around a horse. Do not shout or use a loud voice.
- If a horse seems nervous, use a quiet, calm voice when speaking to him.
- Keep the reins and lead lines off of the ground.
- Never wrap the lead line or rein around your hand or body.
- Lead a horse from the left side, and walk beside the horse (rather than ahead or behind).
- Never squat or kneel by a horse.
- Do not go alone when turning out or bringing in horses.
- Once a horse/rider enters the arena, the gate must be closed.
- Always tie a horse with a safety-release knot.
- Never tighten the girth or make unnecessary changes at the mounting ramp.
- If you notice a cut, scratch, wound, injury, etc, on a horse, inform an instructor immediately.
- If you feel uncomfortable leading a particular horse, inform the instructor. We don't want volunteers to do anything that they do not feel experienced enough to do.

Things to Remember When Working with People with Disabilities

- Be yourself when you meet someone who has a disability. Be friendly and respectful.
- Talk to the person with the disability, not "about" them.
- Please do not talk about the rider or ask questions in front of him/her. Be sensitive to the fact that someone may not be able to communicate well with you, but they may clearly understand what you are communicating.
- Information about the riders' disability is confidential and will be shared on a need to know basis.
- Use frequent, very specific praise. For example, instead of saying "good job," you could say, "I like the way you're sitting up so tall!"
- Allow the rider to do as much by him/herself as possible. Lend a hand if asked or you see a dangerous situation arising.
- Be patient!
- Interact with the person in a way that is appropriate for his/her age.
- Have fun! This is a wonderful, enjoyable, social activity for everyone.

Additional Information

The Rein-Bow Riding Academy is a service of the Therapy & Learning Center. The program is affiliated with West Tennessee Healthcare (WTH). Important information is listed below.

WTH Mission Statement - High Quality Compassionate Healthcare

WTH Culture Statement - Love and Respect for People

WTH Vision Statement - To be the Leading Healthcare Provider in West Tennessee

Harassment - WTH has a no harassment policy that applies to employees and non-employees. Volunteers must sign an acknowledgement that they have read and understood the policy.

Confidentiality

WTH has a policy related to patient confidentiality that applies to employees and non-employees. Volunteers must sign an acknowledgement that they have read and understand the policy provided.

Infection Control

Volunteers should not participate in the program if they have symptoms of any infectious illnesses. Many of our riders are very susceptible to illness. Hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of illness. Hand sanitizer is available at the barn and should be used regularly.

Patient Rights/Ethical Issues/Cultural Diversity

Clients have the right to be treated with dignity and to express themselves regarding their care. We must approach everyone with respect, and be aware that there are many different cultures represented among clients, staff, families, and volunteers. While awareness of cultural difference is very important, each person must be treated as an individual without the assumption that he/she fits the generalizations of his/her culture.

Quality +/Guest Excellence

Volunteers must abide by WTH's Quality + Principles and Guest Excellence Creeds. In summary, volunteers are asked to be team players, to smile and listen to clients, to be considerate of guests and treat them with dignity and respect, and to project a caring attitude while treating guests with the care you would give a friend or family member.

Code of Conduct/Ethics of Volunteers

Volunteers are provided with the WTH Code of Conduct, and must sign an acknowledgement that it was received and reviewed.