

***THE THERAPEUTIC EQUESTRIAN CENTER
(TEC)***

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



**The Therapeutic Equestrian Center
537 Northampton Street
Holyoke, Massachusetts 01040
(413) 532-1462
E-mail: tec5321462@cs.com**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Purpose & Welcome

Introduction to NARHA

Volunteer Opportunities

Rider Population: History and Benefits of Therapeutic Riding

Volunteer Training—Purpose, Policies & Guidelines

Program Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

Risk Management – Policies & Procedures

Volunteer Job Descriptions

Horses: The Spirit of our Program ♥

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center Mission Statement

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) approved agency founded in 1982 for the purpose of promoting and enhancing, through the use of horseback riding, the abilities of each participant to reach his or her highest potential and to promote to the general public and understanding of the needs and abilities of people with disabilities.

NARHA Center

As a North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA), The Therapeutic Equestrian Center adheres to NARHA standards and guidelines to promote a safe, quality therapeutic riding program.

Session Cancellations

Should lessons be cancelled for any reason, The Therapeutic Equestrian Center will attempt to contact riders and volunteers in advance and a message will be posted at the main number (413) 532-1462.

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center Welcomes You!

***Thank you** for your interest in the Volunteer Program at The Therapeutic Equestrian Center. Our staff and volunteers work together, forming a vital team that is essential to our success. The reasons you are interested in volunteering may be unique to you, and yet that special feeling you have for people, horses, and giving of yourself is a common bond with everyone involved in our program. The relationships you form with the riders, horses, fellow volunteers, and staff will stay with you, in many ways, all of your life.*

***Our volunteer needs are many. Whether your experience with horses is lifelong or non-existent, your willingness to give of yourself and your time is what we need.** The many areas of volunteer opportunities are described in the following materials. Please read them and be sure to complete the volunteer registration forms and questionnaire which will help us determine the area(s) where you will feel most comfortable, and will be the most rewarding for you.*

Time is a precious commodity to us all, and any time you give is appreciated. If a regular weekly commitment is possible, that's wonderful. If your time is limited and perhaps variable, we can make an arrangement to accommodate our mutual needs.

We encourage you to visit, observe the various activities going on, talk to other volunteers, and discuss volunteer opportunities with program staff. If you have further questions, please call our office at (413) 532-1462.

INTRODUCTION TO NARHA

North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) is a non-profit organization, headquartered in Denver, Colorado that exists to promote equine activities for individuals with disabilities.

Formed in 1969, NARHA members are individuals and centers that participate in therapeutic riding programs. Individual members are volunteers, riding instructors, disabled riders and their families, physicians, therapists, teachers, researchers and concerned individuals. The NARHA centers are the heart of the riding for the disabled community as they bring together all the necessary individuals, horses, equipment and program knowledge. NARHA centers range from small, one-person programs serving a half-dozen riders to large operations with several instructors serving up to 200 riders each week.

NARHA promotes therapeutic riding primarily through public awareness campaigns and educational events. Above all, NARHA is concerned with safety and service to members and riders. Consequently, NARHA has developed several programs that are designed to benefit everyone concerned with therapeutic riding.

Accreditation

This program assures that the NARHA center is running a safe and medically appropriate program and that it is following the NARHA Standards. NARHA centers are either operating centers or premiere accredited centers.

Instructor Certification

This program provides criteria for competency and a process to recognize levels of capability for NARHA instructors to achieve professional certification. Three levels of certification are available: Registered, Advanced and Master Instructor.

For information on becoming a NARHA member, please visit the NARHA web site www.nahra.org or request a membership form through fax-on-demand, (303) 457-8496.

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers provide an invaluable service to The Therapeutic Equestrian Center. Whether you are able to devote one hour or ten hours per week, your time and energy will always be greatly appreciated! Horse experience is not necessary as assistance is needed in all areas of the program including:

Riding Program Volunteers...*assist in preparing horses for sessions (groom & tack), leading horses or sidewalking riders during sessions.*

Stable & Facility Maintenance Volunteers...*help maintain the horses and the stable. They may assist by cleaning stalls and tack, or help with general maintenance, repairs and improvements of the facility.*

Office Program Volunteers...*provide valuable support by greeting riders, assisting with phone inquiries, data entry, filing, mailings and other general office duties.*

Special Events & Fundraiser Volunteers...*may assist with the coordination and production of various fundraisers and special events. Volunteer assistance is also needed the actual day of an event.*

Special Skills Volunteers...*are encouraged to share their technical or professional skills that may be of benefit to the program such as – grant writing, computer knowledge, public relations, photography, etc.*

Donations & Contributions...

- ❖ *The Therapeutic Equestrian Center therapy horses are truly the spirit of the program. While they do come in a variety of breeds, shapes, colors and sizes, there are some traits they all must share -- they must be gentle and tolerant, “bomb proof” and sound. Please call our office if you are interested in donating a horse you think may be suitable to a therapeutic riding program.*
- ❖ *The Therapeutic Equestrian Center is also in need of riding equipment in good condition including – saddles, bridles, pads, horse care items, riding clothing and boots etc.*
- ❖ *Monetary contributions are always welcomed. Therapeutic riding programs provide a tremendous amount of benefit to individuals with disabilities. However, the care of horses and providing the necessary equipment to riders make these riding programs quite costly to operate. If you are interested in making a contribution to help support The Therapeutic Equestrian Center, please contact us at (413) 532-1462. Thank you for your kind consideration in supporting our cause!*

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center Riders

The minimum age for riders is 4 years. Prior to riding, all participants are required to complete paperwork including a signed physicians statement, and are then assessed by staff to determine that riding is a safe and appropriate activity, and one they will benefit from. An individual riding plan is developed by their therapeutic riding instructor that includes each rider's goals and the objectives (activities) to meet their goals. Riders participate in one-hour session per week for the length of the session. Sessions include activities such as learning horse care, riding skills, exercises, games, obstacle courses and trail rides. Progress is documented after each session.

A Brief History of Therapeutic Riding

References to the physical and emotional benefits of therapeutic horseback riding date back to writings in the 1600s. However, when Liz Hartel of Demark won the silver medal for dressage at the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, despite having paralysis from polio, medical and equine professionals took active notice. It wasn't long before therapeutic riding was being used for rehabilitation in England and then in North America. The first centers for therapeutic riding in North America began operation in the 1960s. Today, there are more than 500 NARHA affiliated centers worldwide.

Benefits of Therapeutic Riding

Physically, *it is the horse's movement that has a dynamic affect on the rider's body. The horse stimulates the rider's pelvis and trunk in a manner that closely resembles the normal gait of a human. This movement can be used to produce specific physical changes in the rider including normalization of muscle tone and improvements in posture, balance, coordination, and increased endurance.*

Sensorial, *the horse and the riding environment offer a wide variety of input to participants. Movement exploration on the horse combined with so many other sights and sounds one encounters in the riding program contribute to the overall sensory experience.*

Emotionally, *the success of overcoming fear and anxiety and the ability to achieve riding skills help a rider to realize self-worth and increase self-esteem. For those involved with the various activities of a therapeutic riding program, the companion animal bonding and development of new skills are critical components to the success of the experience offered. Relationships develop between riders, volunteers, horses, and staff and are all an integral part of a positive, emotional experience provided by a therapeutic riding program.*

Cognitively, *the horse provides a strong motivator for riders. Riding sessions incorporate activities and games on horseback designed to help each rider achieve specific goals such as following directions, staying on task, color and number recognition, and reinforcing existing skills as well as learning new ones.*

Socially, *therapeutic riding programs and their associated activities provide an excellent opportunity for participants to interact with their peers, program volunteers and staff in a positive and enjoyable environment.*

The horse, rider, instructor and volunteers make up a unique treatment team providing an opportunity for physical, emotional, social, recreational, and educational gains for participants with disabilities.

GLOSSARY OF PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

The following are brief, non-medical descriptions of some disabilities and conditions of participants one might encounter in a therapeutic riding setting. This is not intended as a comprehensive explanation of a specific disability. Rather it is a general overview with an explanation of how therapeutic riding can be beneficial.

Arthritis

Inflammatory disease of the joints.

Types: Osteo, rheumatoid and juvenile rheumatoid.

Characteristics: Pain; lack of mobility; loss of strength.

Benefits of therapeutic riding: Gentle rhythmic movements to promote joint mobility and to relieve pain; increase strength.

Autism

A broad spectrum of disorders ranging from mild to severe, which affects thought, perceptions and attention.

Characteristics: Impairments in social interaction and communication; restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests and activities; impairments in the use of nonverbal behaviors such as eye to eye gaze and facial expressions; lack of social or emotional reciprocity; delays in, or lack of the development of spoken language; impairments in ability to initiate or sustain conversations with others; abnormal responses to senses such as sight, hearing, touch, balance, smell, taste, reaction to pain; deficits in gross and fine motor skills.

Benefits: Provides sensory input and promotes sensory integration. Promotes communication skills (expressive and receptive). Develops strength, coordination, muscle tone and gross and fine motor skills. Promotes socialization.

Cerebral Palsy

Brain damage occurring before, at or shortly after birth. It is a non-progressive motor disorder.

Types and characteristics:

Spastic: increased muscle tone, muscle imbalances and equilibrium. Increased startle reflex and other pathological reflexes.

Athetoid: Extensor muscle tension, involuntary movements, difficulty maintaining upright posture.

Ataxic: weakened muscles, poor balance, difficulty with quick, fine movements.

Benefits: Normalization of muscle tone, muscle strengthening, development of posture, balance and motor coordination. Promotes socialization and confidence.

Cerebral Vascular Accident (CVA) – Stroke

Hemorrhage in brain, which causes varying degrees of functional impairment.

Characteristics: Flaccid or spastic paralysis of arm and leg on same side of the body. May impair thought, speech, sight, balance, coordination and strength.

Benefits: Promotes symmetry, stimulates balance, posture, motor planning, speech, socialization and confidence.

Developmental Disabilities (DD)

A diverse group of physical, cognitive, psychological, sensory and speech impairments that begin anytime during development up to 18 years of age.

Characteristics: Varied, but can include processing delays, and delays in physical, motor and social development.

Benefits: Increase confidence and self-esteem, stimulates processing, speech and body awareness, provides opportunity for sport and recreation, promotes socialization.

Down Syndrome

A genetic disorder in which a person is born with an extra chromosome (chromosome 21).

Characteristics: *Mild to severe learning disabilities, low muscle tone, speech impairments.*

Benefits: *Promotes expressive and receptive language skills. Increases gross and fine motor skills, balance, coordination, posture and muscle tone. Promotes social skills. Increases confidence and esteem.*

Emotional Disabilities

Social, emotional or behavioral functioning that is not age appropriate and affects a child's academics, social relationships and self-care.

Characteristics: *Difficulty coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relations, inappropriate affect or behavior responses, depression, anxiety, physical symptoms, difficulty learning, withdrawal, and aggressiveness.*

Benefits: *Increase confidence and self-esteem, provide opportunities for accomplishments, promotes positive socialization.*

Hearing Impairment

Congenital or acquired hearing loss varying from mild to profound.

Characteristics: *Difficulties in communication or communication through sign language, lip reading or finger spelling.*

Benefits: *Increases confidence, self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. Provides recreational activity with opportunity for socialization. Stimulates balance, posture and coordination.*

Learning Disabilities

Neurological disorders that interfere with a person's ability to store, process or produce information.

Characteristics: *Difficulties with reading, writing, speech, computing math. May affect development and social skills.*

Benefits: *Promotes processing, language skills and attending skills, increases confidence and self-esteem, provides opportunity for success, increases balance, coordination and posture, provides opportunity for socialization.*

Mental Impairment or Mental Retardation (MR)

A disorder in which a persons overall intellectual functioning is below average with an IQ of 70 or less.

Impaired ability to cope with common life demands and daily living skills.

Characteristics: *Impairments in learning, communication, social interaction, self-care.*

Benefits: *Increases balance, coordination, strength and posture, improves gross and fine motor skills, promotes socialization, increases confidence, reinforce life and vocational skills.*

Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Progressive neurological disease with degeneration of spinal column tracts, resulting in scar formation.

Characteristics: *Most commonly occurs in the 20 to 40 year old range. It is progressive with periods of exacerbation and remissions. Fatigues easily. Symptoms include weakness, visual impairment, fatigue, loss of coordination and emotional sensitivity.*

Benefits: *Maintains and strengthens weak muscles, maintains balance, increases confidence and self-esteem.*

Muscular Dystrophy (MD)

Deficiency in muscle nutrition with degeneration of skeletal muscle. Hereditary disease that mainly affects males.

Characteristics: *Progressive muscular weakness, fatigues easily, sensitive to temperature extremes.*

Benefits: Provides opportunity for recreational, physical, and social activity. May help slow progressive loss of strength, stimulates postural and trunk alignment, allows for movement free of assistive devices.

Polio (post)

Infectious virus disease

Characteristics: Flaccid paralysis, atrophy of skeletal muscle, deformity.

Benefits: Strengthens non-paralyzed muscles, stimulates posture, increases confidence.

Scoliosis

Lateral curve of the spine with a C or S shape with rotary component.

Characteristics: Shoulder, trunk and waistline asymmetry. May have back pain and postural fatigue.

Benefits: Stimulates postural symmetry, strengthens trunk muscles.

Spina Bifida

Congenital failure of vertebral arch closure that results in spinal cord damage.

Characteristics: Varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs coupled with sensory loss. May also be associated with hydrocephalus, lordosis, scoliosis and hip dislocations.

Benefits: Stimulates posture and balance, increases strength, balance and coordination, promotes confidence and self-esteem.

Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

Trauma to the spinal cord resulting in a loss of neurological function.

Characteristic: Paralysis of muscles below the level of injury – can be flaccid or spastic. Fatigue, sensory loss and pressure sores.

Benefits: Stimulates posture and balance, strengthens trunk muscles, provides opportunity for recreational and social activity.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Accidental injury to the head resulting in impairment of cognitive, emotional and/or physical functioning.

Characteristics: May include deficits in gross and fine motor skills, balance, coordination and strength. May have deficits in language, communication, processing, memory and perceptual skills.

Benefits: Stimulates balance, posture, coordination, and gross and fine motor skills. Stimulates speech and perceptual skills. Increases confidence.

Visual Impairment

Moderate to total loss of sight.

Characteristics: May include insecure posture, lack of visual memory, anterior center of gravity and fearfulness.

Benefits: Stimulates spatial awareness, proprioception, posture, balance and coordination. Provides opportunity for socialization, structured risk-taking and freedom of movement.

Purpose of The Volunteer Orientation & Training Session

Volunteers come to the program with a wide range of knowledge and experience. The purpose of the volunteer orientation and training is to assure volunteers are comfortable, knowledgeable, and safe in their volunteer roles and responsibilities. Volunteers will be provided with an introduction and orientation to the facility, therapeutic riding and the population the program serves, as well as hands on training in their volunteer roles and responsibilities, which includes safety and emergency policies and procedures, and general rules & regulations regarding all aspects of the program,

Training for Riding Program volunteers (Horse Leaders, Sidewalkers, Groom & Tack) is mandatory. Training sessions are offered throughout the year. Training for other volunteer jobs is done individually as the jobs dictate.

PROGRAM POLICIES & GUIDELINES

COMMUNICATION & QUESTIONS

*The instructor is ultimately responsible for each rider, horse and volunteers. All directions should come from the instructor, including the assignment of riders, horses and volunteers, the time and method of mounting, and the structure of lesson plans. **Unless notified otherwise, all volunteers must defer to the instructor's decisions. This is extremely important to help ensure everyone's safety.** If at any time, you are unclear regarding your volunteer role or responsibilities, please direct questions to the instructor, program staff or an experienced volunteer.*

COMMITMENT/AVAILABILITY:

Because of the bond and trust that develop between the rider and volunteers, The Therapeutic Equestrian Center requests that volunteers directly involved with the riding program (sidewalkers and leaders), be willing to commit to a minimum of one (1) hour each week (same day and time) for the length of a session. If your schedule does not allow for a specific time commitment, many other volunteer opportunities are available including being a substitute leader, sidewalker and/or helping in the barn.

All other volunteers involved with the program (office, stable, etc.) are scheduled on a weekly basis. Please check with the staff regarding scheduling.

We understand there are times when emergencies or scheduling conflicts arise. Please notify The Therapeutic Equestrian Center as soon as possible if you are not able to make your scheduled time. A substitute list is available and your assistance in securing someone to fill in for you would be greatly appreciated.

PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Leading and sidewalking in arena, as well as assisting in the stable and facility, can be physically demanding at times. It is important for you to inform The Therapeutic Equestrian Center staff if you have a condition such as high blood pressure, heart condition, allergies, etc., that may prevent you from working a full hour in the arena at a walk or a jog, or walking on the trails. If you feel being a riding program or stable & facility maintenance volunteer is not something you are physically able to do, volunteers are needed in many other areas of the program.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center has strict confidentiality guidelines regarding the right to privacy for all individuals involved with the program. This policy extends not only to program participants and their diagnosis/special needs and any sensitive information, but also extends to protect the privacy of others involved with the program including volunteers and staff. It is extremely important that volunteers and staff respect the individual circumstances of those involved with the program. Please do not take the issues of our participants or personal information regarding other individuals beyond the facility.

CONDUCT/BEHAVIOR

All individuals involved with the program are expected to conduct themselves in a cooperative and appropriate manner at all times. Examples of inappropriate behavior would include – any form of harassment, aggressive or abusive behavior towards themselves, other persons, or horses. If you are subject to any type of

inappropriate behavior, please do not approach the individual. Notify staff immediately. Individuals exhibiting inappropriate behavior will be requested to leave immediately and if determined, additional assistance may be called for (911). Please notify staff immediately of any concerns regarding the behavior of program horses such as biting, kicking, etc. Inappropriate behavior may result in dismissal from the riding program.

ACCIDENTS/OCCURANCES

All accidents must be immediately reported to The Therapeutic Equestrian Center staff and all involved must complete an occurrence form. Occurrence forms are located in the volunteer office.

HELMET, CLOTHING & FOOTWEAR POLICIES

HELMETS

All participants and personnel (staff & volunteers) of The Therapeutic Equestrian Center are required to wear protective headgear that is ASTM-SEI approved for horseback riding while mounted or driving. Any helmet not ASTM-SEI approved for equestrian use must meet NARHA lightweight helmet guidelines (see below). Participants must also wear protective headgear while taking part in other equine-related activities such as horse care or management. Instructors are responsible for ensuring proper helmet fit for participants. The Therapeutic Equestrian Center helmets will be cleaned and inspected everyday. All helmets must be less than five years old.

***NARHA Conditions for Use of Lightweight Helmets:** Helmets that are not ASTM-SEI approved for equestrian use must meet the NARHA lightweight helmet guidelines. Alternative lightweight helmets may be acceptable under specific circumstances that will be determined by a therapeutic riding instructor on an individual basis. In addition, physically involved riders must be evaluated by a physical or occupational therapist to determine the appropriateness of a lightweight helmet and to recommend which type to use. A lightweight helmet may ONLY be used when there is a leader and one or more sidewalkers with the rider.*

STIRRUPS

Stirrups with safety features that reduce the chance of foot entrapment are required on all saddles used for participants in the riding program. Approved safety stirrups include “S” shaped and Peacock style. Staff and volunteers using traditional Western stirrups must wear riding boots or hard-soled shoes with heels.

FOOTWEAR

*Riding boots or sturdy hard-soled shoes with a ¼ inch heel (**no loafers, open toed shoes or sandals**) are required to be worn for all equine related activities. We recommend volunteers wear shoes or boots that are comfortable yet offer foot protection. Sneakers are inappropriate riding footwear UNLESS the participant requires special footwear. Alternative footwear may be acceptable under specific circumstances that will be considered on an individual basis by the riding instructor.*

CLOTHING

*Participants, volunteers and staff should dress appropriately and comfortably for riding and equestrian activities – long pants, and weather appropriate clothing (jacket and gloves if necessary). Dangling jewelry is considered unsafe. **For the sensitivity of our riders, revealing clothing (tank tops, exposed belly shirts, low cut shirts, tight clothing, shorts and/or see through clothing) should NOT be worn. No slippers, clogs or backless shoes can be worn in the arena or barn.***

ADDITIONAL FACILITY POLICIES...

- **NO SMOKING!!!** The Therapeutic Equestrian Center is a smoke-free program.
- **No Candy or Gum.** Candy and chewing gum is unsafe while riding or working in the riding program.

- **Horse Sense.** Always approach a horse from the front or the side. Never approach from an area where you cannot be seen. Work quietly and slowly around the horses. Sudden movement or harsh noises may spook them.
- **No Alcohol or Illegal Drugs.** The consumption of alcohol prior to and/or while at The Therapeutic Equestrian Center is prohibited, except for events approved by The Therapeutic Equestrian Center. The use of illegal drugs prior to and/or while at The Therapeutic Equestrian Center is strictly prohibited. **If you are taking prescribed medications, which might adversely affect the safety of your rider or yourself, please discuss the situation with the instructor or the staff.**
- **No Goodies Please.** Please be aware that some riders may have medical conditions such as allergies, diabetes, etc. which make certain foods off limits or incompatible with their medication. Check with the staff or the family before sharing “goodies”.
- **No Hand Feeding Horses.** Please do not hand feed program horses. It causes them to look for treats in tiny hands. Treats may be placed in a treat bucket to be dispersed at mealtime.
- **Parking.** Volunteers are to park to the far side of the facility and come in through the front entrance. Please keep the closer parking spaces outside the main entrance available for participants who require closer parking. And please drive slowly while at The Therapeutic Equestrian Center to reduce the risk of injury by disturbing horses or riders. **PLEASE RESPECT A 5MPH SPEED LIMIT.**
- **NO PETS PLEASE.** Please do not deny your pet the comforts of home. PETS ARE NOT PERMITTED.
- **Courtesy.** Please respect your co-volunteers and be courteous to all with whom you come in contact.

Our thanks to you! A successful therapeutic riding program requires a team effort and a great deal of hard work from all involved. Your input is valuable. Please share any suggestions or comments that may make your volunteer experience at The Therapeutic Equestrian Center more enjoyable.

REASSIGNMENT AND TERMINATION POLICY

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center policies and rules have been developed to serve the best interests of the entire The Therapeutic Equestrian Centers’ community. Safety, confidentiality, respect for each other – human and equine – and the preservation of an optimal environment for beneficial therapeutic riding are the primary reasons for strict adherence to these rules.

Individuals who fail to observe the rules and procedures of the program will be given an opportunity to discuss any situation that is perceived to be a violation of The Therapeutic Equestrian Center policies and may be provided with job re-assignment. However, The Therapeutic Equestrian Center reserves the right to determine that it may be in the best interest of the program to terminate a volunteer’s involvement with the program.

RISK MANAGEMENT:

Volunteers are responsible for – knowing and following all safety rules, emergency policies and procedures as indicated, supporting all efforts to promote safe working conditions, making full use of safety equipment, reporting immediately any unsafe working conditions or behaviors, and knowing the location of first aid kits, fire extinguishers, emergency exits and emergency plans.

In all emergencies, the instructor is responsible for incident management and must assess the situation, and apply any first-aid needed. No persons are to enter or leave the arena without direction from the instructor. If further assistance is needed, the instructor will designate a person to call 911 – telling the dispatcher the center location, what happened, and any information about the person’s condition. The telephone is located in the office of the program room. Emergency information (emergency phone numbers, the center’s address, etc.) is posted on the wall next to the telephone.

Emergency Policies & Procedures

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center intention is to provide a safe environment for all individuals involved with the program. Being prepared in the event of an emergency is part of providing a safe atmosphere. Please review the following policies and procedures on how to handle specific emergencies. It is important to remember in any emergency situation, remain calm, reassure riders, and take direction from The Therapeutic Equestrian Center instructors. The Therapeutic Equestrian Center instructors are responsible for managing the emergency and applying any first aid required. Volunteers may be called upon to assist.

For mounted activities... “Safety” Dismount

During riding sessions, it is always the instructor who performs rider mounts and dismounts. However, in an emergency, the instructor may ask volunteers to perform an emergency or “safety” dismount.

Safety dismounts are performed as follows – when an instructor calls for a “safety dismount,” horse leaders halt and head off their horse. The sidewalker on the left side of the rider will perform the safety dismount by --

1. Informing the rider that they will be dismounted
2. Request the rider remove their feet from the stirrups (right sidewalker may assist)
3. Left sidewalker to place their arms around the riders waist
4. Gently pull rider off and safely away from the horse

Await further direction from the instructor. Instructor may request volunteers escort riders out of arena to a safe area (program room). Instructors should stay with their riders.

Spooked Horse

Should a horse become frightened or overly nervous, sidewalkers are to apply “arm over thigh” support to the rider. The horse leader should attempt to halt the horse and head it off. The horse leader must always stay with the horse and be aware that the horse may move quickly forward or side step in either direction. As the horse moves, sidewalkers need to continue their support to the rider, staying close to the horse’s side as it moves. Follow direction from instructor. Safety dismounts will be performed at the discretion of the instructor.

Loose Horse

Should a horse become loose in the arena while a session is in progress, the session immediately stops. Horse leaders are to immediately halt and head off their horses; sidewalkers should apply “arm over thigh” support, and await further direction from instructor. Safety dismounts will be performed at the discretion of the instructor.

To retrieve a loose horse - whether in the arena, stable or on the facility grounds – only the instructor or staff (NEVER a volunteer) will approach horse from the side and using a quiet voice, place a lead rope around neck, then the halter. In the instance that a horse shall become loose, the Instructor will dismount all riders in the center of the ring, and direct all observers to remain in the lounge. The Instructor will then return the horse to an appropriate place. Do not chase the horse.

Fallen Rider or Medical Emergency

Should a rider or volunteer become injured or have a medical emergency during a session, the session is to come to an immediate halt.

Procedure in case of an emergency:

- 1. The instructor will assess the situation.**
- 2. The instructor will inform staff if medical assistance is needed, the nature of the injury, and if 911 should be called.**
- 3. The instructor is responsible for managing the incident, including applying any first aid needed. Staff or designated volunteers may be asked to assist by retrieving a first aid kit.**
- 4. In the event of a fallen rider, the horse leader is to move the rider's horse a safe distance away from the rider, then halt and head off the horse. All other horse leaders are to halt their horses and head them off. Sidewalkers of the fallen rider may remain with the rider until directed otherwise. All other sidewalkers are to apply "arm over thigh" support and stay with their riders, waiting for further direction from the instructor. No one, including riders' parents, should enter or leave the arena without direction from the instructor.**

Other Medical Emergencies

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center staff must be notified of any injury or medical emergency. The Therapeutic Equestrian Center staff are responsible for managing the emergency including evaluating the scene, determining if additional medical assistance is required, and providing any first aid required. An occurrence report must be completed for every incident.

Fire: If a Fire should occur at the Center all participants, observers, and staff should immediately vacate to the Celebration Center parking lot far from the facility. The Instructor will then proceed to Jericho House to call the Fire Department. Participants, observers, and staff will **NOT** enter the facility unless directed by the Fire Department. Horse leaders are to escort horses out the rear arena gate and place them in the turnout paddocks. Instructors should stay with their students. All individuals in the observation room and offices will exit through the front doors, turn right and go around the parking lot away from the facility. When staff is checking for people in the building, they should close doors as they check rooms. The last staff member out of the office will take the cordless phone and the volunteer clipboard & rider schedule to ensure that all parties are out of the facility. All people in the stable area are to go directly to the parking lot. Horses in their stalls are to be placed in the turnout paddocks by staff. Barn manager may ask stable volunteers to assist.

Severe Weather: In the case of a severe storm the Instructor will obtain directions from the Holyoke Police or Fire Department, and relay them to all present.

Intruder or unruly person: The Instructor will be responsible for determine when additional assistance should be called. The Instructor may choose to vacate the Center.

PLEASE KEEP IN MIND THAT THESE PROCEDURES ARE ONLY SUGGESTED GUIDELINES AND THAT THE SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES MAY WARRANT CHANGES TO BE MADE BY THE INSTRUCTOR.

Calling for Emergency Medical Assistance

In the event of an emergency, staff or volunteers may be asked to call for emergency medical assistance. A telephone is located in the office. Emergency information including phone numbers, facility address and directions, is posted near the telephone.

Location of First Aid Kits

Horse and human first aid kits are located in the office area.

Severe Weather

Thunder Storms - In the event of a severe thunderstorm, sessions will be immediately discontinued. Taking direction from the instructor, horse leaders head off horses and sidewalkers prepare for riders to dismount (a safety dismount at the discretion of the instructor) and escort riders to the program room.

High Winds – In the event of high winds, sessions will be immediately discontinued. Taking direction from the instructor, horse leaders head off the horses and sidewalkers prepare for riders to dismount (a safety dismount at the discretion of the instructor) and escort riders to a safe location in the stable area, away from any windows (in stable center isle and working tack rooms). Horses are to be placed in their stalls.

Power outages

In the event of a power outage, lighting will be provided by battery powered floodlights located throughout the facility. Should a power outage occur after dark while sessions are being held in the indoor arena -- sessions will be immediately discontinued. Taking direction from the instructor, horse leaders head off the horses and sidewalkers prepare for riders to dismount (a safety dismount at the discretion of the instructor) and escort riders to the program room. Leaders return horses to their stalls.

Mounted & Unmounted Outdoor Activities

- *Be cautious of motor vehicles when crossing the driveway and in parking areas.*
- *Stay clear of lawn equipment, heavy machinery and construction areas at all times.*
- *Absolutely no persons or horses allowed in restricted or off-limit areas.*
- *Never lead a horse or ride in any area unless it is free of debris, obstacles, holes, etc.*
- *Outdoor activities not conducted after sundown.*
- *Advanced riders may ride outside at discretion of the executive director. Always indicate when and where you will be riding, the length of time, and check in upon return.*
- *Advanced equestrians – do not use arena while lesions are taking place*
- *Should your horse becomes nervous, excited or behave inappropriately, return to stable immediately and notify staff.*
- *Never attempt to approach a wild animal.*

Driveway / Parking

- *Please use caution when driving at the facility – drive slowly, **adhere to the 5 mph speed limit**, and check for pedestrians and horses.*
- *Please turn OFF car alarms, pagers and cell phones while at TEC.*

VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Upon arrival, all volunteers should sign in, put on their name badge, and check the schedule for their assignment. When you have completed your assignment, please sign out, noting the number of hours you have worked.

Please inform staff of any planned absences. If you are unsuccessful, please notify another staff member at (413) 532-1462 ASAP to providing as much advance notice as possible. Last minute cancellations should be made directly to any available staff member.

Treat your volunteer commitment as if it were your profession and always be responsible. If you don't know what to do or are unsure of yourself, please ask!

RIDING PROGRAM JOB DESCRIPTIONS

** Please refer to the section on Emergency Policies & Procedures for specifics on your job responsibilities should an emergency occur.*

GROOM & TACK JOB DESCRIPTION

Groom & Tack volunteers please arrive 30 minutes prior to the start of a scheduled session. If you are a Groom & Tack volunteer, be aware of the horses you will be preparing and the equipment to be used. As a Groom & Tack volunteer, it is your responsibility to ensure that the horse is well groomed and the tack is put on and adjusted properly. If at any time, you are unsure of your assignment or the resources needed, please seek advice from a staff member.

***Thirty minutes prior to class** – Please check with the staff **BEFORE** approaching the horse, as there may be concern you should be aware of before working with that horse. Begin by thoroughly grooming then saddle the horse. It is also important at this time to check the horse for any signs of illness or injury (unsoundness). When girth is first put on, leave it slightly loosened. Five minutes before the class is scheduled to begin, do a complete tack check to assure the equipment is correctly positioned. If you are also the Horse Leader, you may bring the horse to the arena. (See Horse Leader job description.) If you are not a Horse Leader, hand over the horse to the Horse Leader for that session.*

HORSE LEADERS JOB DESCRIPTION

Leaders please arrive 15 minutes prior to session. If you are a Horse Leader, please check the schedule for the horse you will be responsible for. Generally, volunteers who come to the program with some horse knowledge and who feel comfortable leading a horse will be asked to be a Horse Leader. Horse Leaders are primarily responsible for the horse. They must be alert and aware of the horse's movement and behavior at all times.

Check the schedule for your horse assignment. Five minutes prior to the start of a session, bring your horse to the arena. If others are in the arena, please call "door" before entering, wait for the response "enter", closing the arena barrier behind you. Lead the horse once around the arena to stretch, check the horse for any symptoms of illness or unsoundness, and then line up in the center. The instructor will be responsible for re-check the girth and the rest of the tack to assure proper fit and condition. Please bring any problems or concerns regarding horse or tack to the attention of the instructor or staff. During class, handle the horse according to the instructor's direction.

*All riders mount from a mounting block. This helps save our horses' backs. Instructors will advise regarding dismounts. Dismounts may be done in the arena. The Horse Leader's primary role during mounts and dismounts is to prevent the horse from moving. **IN AN EMERGENCY, THE HORSE LEADER STAYS WITH THE HORSE.***

*Horse Leaders use a lead line. This will be attached to the halter, as will the reins. The Horse Leader leads from the horse's left side unless the instructor directs otherwise. When leading, keep slightly behind the horse's head, but in front of the shoulder. **Horse Leaders should position themselves in front of the horse, facing the horse's head, for all mounts, dismounts and extended halts. ("Heading-off")***

When a horse has finished a session, please bring the horse back to his stall and untack if it is not being used in the next class. Pick the horse's feet and brush the coat.

Return all tack to its proper place. Wipe bits clean and return all saddles, bridles, blankets/pads, and grooming tools neatly to their appropriate place. Please mark horse usage on chart located above horse's bridle.

SIDEWALKERS JOB DESCRIPTION

Sidewalkers please arrive 15 minutes prior to the start of your session. Please note which rider you will be working with and you may assist with arena set up (activity equipment, etc.) Sidewalkers generally are responsible for the safety and well being of the rider. One or two sidewalkers may be assigned to each rider depending on the rider's needs. Sidewalkers may greet the rider, check helmet for proper fit, and assist rider to mounting area when the instructor indicates it is time. The sidewalker's primary role is to walk alongside the horse and assist the rider in maintaining balance. They may also reinforce the instructor's directions or act as spotters during sessions. Spotters position themselves around the ring for the more independent riders. Some riders do not require sidewalkers or spotters.

Different sidewalking techniques are used according to rider's needs. The instructor will indicate which type of support should be used. (Please use caution never to force movement or use excessive pressure when applying any of these techniques.) Sidewalk support techniques include:

- *“Side-walk” The sidewalker walks beside the rider (lined up with the rider's shoulder), prepared for “hands on” when indicated by instructor.*
- *“Arm over thigh” The sidewalker places the arm closest to the rider over the rider's thigh and grasps the front edge of the saddle.*
- *“Ankle support” The sidewalker cups the riders ankle to stabilize the rider's lower leg.*
- *“Arm over thigh & ankle support” Occasionally, a rider needs support provided by doing both an arm over thigh, and cupping the ankle.*

Important to remember...

- ✓ *In an emergency situation, horse leaders stay with their horses and sidewalkers stay with their riders until directed otherwise by the instructor.*
- ✓ *When a rider requires two sidewalkers, only one sidewalker should be communicating with the rider at a time. Too much input can confuse a rider.*
- ✓ *If a rider has only one sidewalker, the leader and sidewalker should walk on opposite sides of the horse.*
- ✓ *The role of the sidewalker varies greatly between riders. It is important to have an understanding of your rider's needs and knowledge of his or her goals. Riders' goals are available in the volunteer office. Please ask the instructor to provide this information to you.*
- ✓ *The sidewalker needs to be aware of the rider at all times. Even when the rider is not mounted, the sidewalker should be conscious of the rider's safety*
- ✓ *Sidewalkers - Never place your hand or fingers in any of the saddle's rings or buckles while sidewalking.*
- ✓ *If a rider or a horse behaves inappropriately or in an unsafe manner, please notify staff immediately.*

Equestrian Volunteers - Job Description

Under the direction of the Executive Director, Equestrian volunteers are advanced equestrians who assist the program in the exercising and training of program horses. Prior to volunteering, they are required to schedule a riding evaluation with the executive director to determine their riding skills and comfort level with horses, and receive an orientation to the facility including reviewing all safety policies and procedures. After signing in, Equestrian volunteers report directly to the executive director for list of duties and riding assignment(s). All Equestrian Volunteers need to assist the program in another area such as sidewalking, leading or stable volunteering through out an entire session. This is on an “as needed basis”.

Stable & Facility Maintenance Volunteers - Job Description/Responsibilities

Under the direction of the executive director or program staff, stable & facility maintenance volunteers are responsible for the general cleaning and upkeep of the stable and facility including but not limited to -- cleaning stalls, filling water buckets, turning out horses, cleaning riding equipment, and keeping the stable area clean and neat (i.e. sweeping aisles, dusting etc.), cleaning and upkeep of the program room area (bathrooms, floors, offices, windows), grounds upkeep – clearing debris from trail, and cleaning and maintaining the paddocks.

Stable & Facility Maintenance volunteers receive training provided by the barn manager. Please notify the stable manager of any physical or other limitations that may affect your job responsibilities.

Office Program Volunteers - Job Description/Responsibilities

Under the direction of the staff, office program volunteers are responsible for assisting with phone inquiries and general clerical duties including but not limited to – answering the phone, sending out program information, filing, typing, data entry, word processing, making copies, assisting with special mailings etc. Office Program Volunteers receive training provided by the executive director. Please notify the director of any limitations you may have in performing this job.

Special Skills Volunteers - Job Description/Responsibilities

Under the direction of volunteer director or program staff, volunteers offering to share a special skill or technical experience that may benefit the program are encouraged to do so. Areas of special skills/experience may include -- computers; grant writing, public relations, photography, etc. Please contact the program director for more information.

Special Events Volunteers -Job Description/Responsibilities

Under the direction of volunteer director or program staff, Special Events Volunteers may assist with special events hosted by The Therapeutic Equestrian Center throughout the year such as -- volunteer gatherings, horse shows, fundraisers, etc. Volunteer duties may include assisting with coordinating an event, serving on a special committee, and/or assisting the actual day of the event. The Therapeutic Equestrian Center staff to provide Special Events Volunteers with training and information required performing duties.

*** Please refer to the section on Emergency Policies & Procedures for specifics on your job responsibilities should an emergency incur.**



The Therapeutic Equestrian Center Horses

The Therapeutic Equestrian Center horses are truly the spirit of the program. Horses considered for program must meet basic criteria including – possessing an exceptional level of tolerance, they must be kind and well mannered, in good health including sound at the walk and trot and possess smooth rhythmic gaits. Horses that meet the criteria are then accepted on a trial basis, placed on an extensive training program to introduce them to their role in the program and the activities they will be exposed to. Mock sessions are conducted prior to having “real” riders on the horses.

UNDERTANDING HORSE BEHAVIOR

EQUINE SENSES

When developing relationships and working with horses, communication is key. It is critical to provide a safe environment in a therapeutic riding setting. Beginning a process of understanding the horse senses, instincts and implications is a step in predicting behaviors, managing risks and increasing positive relationships.

SMELL: The horse's sense of smell is thought to be very acute and it allows him to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations.

Implications:

- Allow horses the opportunity to become familiar with new objects and their environment by smelling.
- It is recommended that treats are not carried in your pocket since horses may desire to go after them.
- Volunteers are not permitted to eat or have food in the arena or barn.

HEARING: The horse's sense of hearing is also thought to be very acute. The horse may also combine their sense of hearing and sight to become more familiar with new or alerting sounds. "Hearing and not seeing" is often the cause of the fright/flight response. Note the position of the horse's ears. Forward ears communicate attentiveness and interest. Ears that are laid back often communicates that they are very upset and/ or showing aggression towards another horse or person.

Implications:

- Horses are wary when they hear something but do not see it. If your horse is acting nervous, talk to him in a quiet and calm voice for reassurance.
- Avoid shouting or using a loud voice. This can be frightening to a horse.
- Watch your horse's ears for increased communication. Stiffly pricked ears indicate interest. Drooping ears indicate relaxation, inattentiveness (easily startled), exhaustion or illness. Flattened ears indicate anger, threat or fear. Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest.

SIGHT: The horse's eyes are set on either side of the head; there is a good peripheral (lateral) vision, but poorer frontal vision. A horse focuses on objects by raising and lowering its head. The horse's visual memory is very accurate. Horses are thought to see quite well in the dark, due to the large size of their eyes. There is still controversy as to whether or not horses see in color.

Implications:

- The horse may notice if something in the arena or out on a trail is different. Allow the horse an opportunity to look at new objects. Introduce new props that the horse may be unfamiliar with.
- The horse has better peripheral vision; consider a slightly looser rein, enabling him to move his head when taking a look at objects.
- Although the horse has good peripheral vision, consider two blind spots: directly in front and directly behind. The best way to approach a horse is to his shoulder. It may startle him if you approach from behind to directly in front. The horse may be unable to see around the mouth area, which is a safety consideration when hand feeding.

TOUCH: Touch is used as a communication between horses and between horses and people. Horses are sensitive to soft or rough touch with a person's hands or legs.

Implications:

- Handlers should treat the horses gently but firmly.
- Each horse has sensitive areas, and it is important to be familiar with them (i.e. flank and belly areas).
- Watch rider's leg position. Riders may need appropriate assistance to reduce a "clothes pin" effect with their legs. Ask the instructor/therapist what is best handling technique.
- Horses will often touch or paw at unfamiliar objects. For example, a horse may paw at a bridge or ground pole before crossing it.

TASTE: Taste is closely linked with the sense of smell and helps the horse to distinguish palatable foods and other objects.

Implications:

- Taste is closely linked with smell or touch; therefore, a horse may lick or nibble while becoming familiar with objects and people. Avoid this contact with the horse.

SIXTH SENSE: *Horses do have a “sixth sense” when evaluating the disposition of those around him. Horses can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good therapy horse is chosen for their sensitive response to the rider. At times there may exist a personality conflict between handlers and horses. It is important to let the instructor or executive director know if you’re having a difficult time relating or getting along with a particular horse.*

THE HORSE’S LIFESTYLE: *In addition to understanding the horse’s six senses, we need to appreciate and increase our awareness of the horse’s lifestyle. This will assist us in responding appropriately to his reactions to situations.*

FLIGHT AS NATURAL INSTINCT: *Horse’s would rather turn and run away from danger than face and fight it.*

Implications:

- *At a sudden movement or noise, the horse might try to flee. Speak to the horse calmly.*
- *A frightened horse being held tightly might try to escape by pulling back. Relax your hold or untie him quickly and usually he will relax. Be sure not to stand directly behind the horse.*
- *If flight is not possible, the horse could either turn to kick out or face the problem and rear, especially in a tight area like a stall. Use a halter with a lead rope to maintain control while working around the horse in a stall.*
- *If a horse appears to be frightened or fearful (note the position of the horse’s ears in pictures following article), alert program staff.*
- *Most horses chosen to work in a therapeutic riding setting have less of an instinct to flee. The horse may look to you for reassurance. It is helpful if the volunteer remains calm and talks to the horse in a soothing voice.*

HERD ANIMAL: *Horses like to stay together in a herd or a group with one or two horses dominant, with a pecking order amongst the rest.*

Implications:

- *Be aware that a horse may not like being alone. This is a consideration when horses are leaving the arena or a horse loses sight of the others while on a trail ride.*
- *Be aware that if the horse in front of a line is trotting or cantering, the horse that is following may also attempt to trot or canter.*
- *If one horse spooks at something, the surrounding horses may also be affected.*
- *For safety, it is recommended to keep at least one horse’s length between horses when riding within a group to respect the horse’s space and pecking order.*

**The Therapeutic Equestrian Center Volunteer Orientation Handbook
Acknowledgement Form**

**I, _____, have received The Therapeutic Equestrian Center
Volunteer Orientation Handbook and understand that I am responsible for all the
information contained in it and will follow all stated policies and procedures.**

Signature & Date