

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

NORTHLAND THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER

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Thank you so much for your interest in Volunteering at Northland Therapeutic Riding Center!

The Mission of NTRC is to improve the quality of life for persons with special needs through equine assisted activities and therapies.

Giving HOPE to their future one ride at a time!

And we can't do it without committed volunteers, LIKE YOU!



**YOU ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO THE SUCCESSFUL OPERATION OF OUR PROGRAM!
WE COULD NOT FUNCTION WITHOUT OUR WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS!**

This manual has been developed to provide you with some guidelines for working with our riders. **Please read it carefully.** The information it contains is important, and will improve the quality of your work. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. We want you to know that every person you are helping at NTRC is aware of and grateful for your help. Without you, this program could not exist. You are valuable to us, and we appreciate all that you do.

BENEFITS OF OUR PROGRAM

NTRC was founded to improve the quality of life for persons with special needs through equine assisted activities and therapies. Horseback riding helps people to achieve a quality of life that is improved, enhanced and enriched through contact with horses and activity in the outdoors. Based on input from doctors, therapists, teachers and parents, the student's individual goals are designed to complement ongoing therapy and education.

The benefits of therapeutic riding include the following:

Physical: The three-dimensional motion of the horse provides rider hip, back, and trunk action that simulates natural walking. Riding relaxes and strengthens muscles and improves body tone, posture, balance, joint mobility and coordination.

Emotional: Contact with horses and horsemanship training provides a noncompetitive setting for learning. New abilities, self-discipline, and improved concentration build self-confidence and self-esteem.

Social: Horseback riding nurtures a positive self-image. Riders may, for the first time in their lives, experience some independence and a sense of being a part of a team.

NTRC serves children and adults with a variety of diverse abilities such as mental, physical and/or emotional. Instructors design and monitor individualized treatment plans for each student to address their physical, emotional and social needs while they learn the skills of horseback riding. Students are evaluated regularly, and goals are set for long-term change and change within the quarter. Individual and class goals encourage each rider to be the best he or she can be, on or off the horse. Horse shows give riders an opportunity to demonstrate the skills and progress they have made in a non-competitive atmosphere.

GENERAL INFORMATION

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Volunteers must be a minimum of 14 years old and minors must have a signed consent from parents/guardians. Because working with horses can be a potentially dangerous situation, all prospective volunteers must attend volunteer orientation and complete a liability release and confidentiality statement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

NTRC has a high respect for all who participate in our programs. Confidentiality in regard to all personal information about participants is essential. As part of your application you are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement, which obligates you not to discuss personal information about any NTRC participant.

THE VOLUNTEER TEAM

VOLUNTEERS ARE VITALLY IMPORTANT

A volunteer is an individual who gives the gift of his/her time for the benefit of others. The volunteer plays a crucial role and takes an active part in making the program work. Many riders, especially in the beginning stages of riding, simply could not ride without the assistance of volunteers. Some of the riders need as many as three volunteers all working together, so you can begin to understand how valuable your volunteer time is.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD VOLUNTEER

- **Reliability** - Regular attendance and/or advanced notice of absences is a must
- **Punctuality** - Our lessons are scheduled tightly. It is important to start on time.
- **Alertness** - Despite your outward relaxation, be ready to respond in emergency situations.
- **Empathy** - Avoid false sentimentality. It is important to have genuine empathy and regard toward riders.
- **Patience** - Endless patience is necessary to adjust to the slow movements and reactions of riders with severe disabilities, as well as to delayed learning and challenging behaviors. Remember, we are here for them! It's ok if it takes the whole class, it's THEIR CLASS!



All NTRC volunteers must complete the Sidewalker Training/Volunteer Orientation. Additional training is required for the leader and barn volunteer positions. We ask that everyone participates as a sidewalker first, regardless of experience, to see how our lessons are run and to better get to know our horses, riders, and instructors. Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator if you are interested in attending the barn or leader training.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

SIDE WALKER: A person who walks beside the horse and offers physical and/or mental support to the rider. This person must be attentive to the rider and the instructor.

HORSE LEADER: A person who is responsible for controlling the horse for the rider.

BARN VOLUNTEER: A person who is trained to be a side walker and a horse leader, but chooses to volunteer in the barn. This person is responsible for grooming, tacking and exercising horses in preparation for classes. Other responsibilities may include: equipment cleaning, general barn maintenance (picking stalls, watering, wiping stall bars, sweeping), caring for horses after class or participating in class as needed.

ARRIVAL & RECORDING HOURS

You should arrive at least 15 minutes before the class is scheduled to start. Upon arrival each time you come to volunteer, you will want to do the following:

- 1) Put on your name badge. Please leave it at the Center when you're through.
- 2) Check the posted volunteer schedule to see what rider/horse you will be working with. NOTE: This can change with rider cancellations or at the instructor's discretion.
- 3) Record your hours in the Helper Helper App. Don't forget to verify your time through the app. If you are getting school credit for volunteering, we need proof that you were here. We also use it to make us eligible for certain kinds of funding. Your hours are also noted by us for use in volunteer recognition and volunteer rewards. Drive time is already added in the app to your total hours.
- 4) **Please greet your rider.** It is very important that they know who you are and feel welcome! While you are communicating with your rider you can take this time to make sure they have a helmet, is it clean? Fitted the correct way? Please ask the instructor for assistance if you need help adjusting your rider's helmet.

- 5) If you are a new volunteer or new to a certain rider/horse and feel that a bit of additional instruction would benefit you during the class, please grab a yellow wristband at the volunteer station. This will indicate to the instructor and other tenured volunteers that you would appreciate them knowing that you are in a new situation and could benefit from some assistance. Also, be aware that our experienced volunteers will have green name tags, so you are able to reach out to them if you have any questions and the instructor is occupied.

SCHEDULING PROCEDURES

Who do I contact if I can't come? Cindy Sahl- 816-808-1106

ALL scheduling of volunteers is done through the Helper Helper app and the Volunteer Coordinator. If you will be absent for your shift, please remove yourself from that time slot in the app or contact Cindy Sahl **BY NOON** of that day.

If you have a last-minute emergency and cannot make it for your scheduled time, please call Cindy Sahl at 816-808-1106. It is imperative that we have good attendance. Our riders depend on you to be there.

GENERAL GUIDELINES AND SAFETY REGULATIONS

We treat our horses GENTLY. Never kick or hit a horse. If a reprimand or schooling is necessary, let the instructor do it.

We treat our students with RESPECT. Talk to them appropriately for their age, and never yell.

Use positive rather than negative reinforcement. Be patient. Count to 30 before repeating a request. Keep in mind that some of our riders may process requests at a different pace. He or she might need extra time to process what you asked. Be understanding of fear, but if you can't handle a problem with a student, ask the instructor for help.

Keep what happens at NTRC **confidential**. We know you are excited about what you do here, and want to share it with others. Please do so in a way that does not identify the riders. They have a right to privacy.

Keep busy. If you have a long break, there are plenty of things you can do to help out. There is a list of "other volunteer opportunities" posted at the volunteer table as well as in the stall area. For example, clean up the tack room or office, wash out buckets, clean the toys, muck the stalls, etc. Please feel free to ask the Barn Assistant where your assistance would be most beneficial.

But remember to have fun! Smile, laugh, and enjoy yourself. Your enthusiasm is contagious!

Where are the fire extinguishers?

There is a fire extinguisher located in the tack room next to the arena. There is also one in the front of the arena near the rider sign-in area.

Where is the phone?

All instructors carry a phone in the event of an emergency. There is also a phone with the Barn Assistant in the stall area.

SAFETY POLICIES

SMOKING AND ALCOHOL: Smoking is not allowed on NTRC property, this includes vaping. Alcohol is also not allowed on NTRC property. Volunteers are asked to not consume alcohol immediately prior to coming to NTRC. If participants are caught smoking, vaping, or under the influence of alcohol,

they will be asked to leave the property immediately and risk the possibility of being dismissed as a volunteer.

PARKING: Designated parking areas are reserved for NTRC riders. Volunteers can park farther away from the barn.

CELLULAR PHONES: Are not permitted in the riding arenas or on the trails. Answering a call takes your attention away from your most important job – the safety of our riders.

REFRESHMENTS: Refrain from chewing gum or candy at the barn. Water is available in the waiting area and in the back of the barn. Stay well hydrated!

PETS: Please leave pets at home.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS: Only certified personnel and trained volunteers are allowed in the barn. All visitors should remain in the parking area and designated viewing areas.

EQUIPMENT: Must be put in its designated place after each lesson.

FEEDING HORSES: Please do not feed horses unless directed to by a staff member.

LISTEN TO THE INSTRUCTOR: At all times. You must be aware of your rider's instructions.

RIDER: Make sure your rider is wearing proper attire before taking him/her into the barn (long pants, sturdy shoes with a heel, and helmet). Only the rider and volunteers for the current class are permitted beyond the waiting area. Once students are prepared for class, the volunteer must see that the student remains in the waiting area until his/her class is called.

VOLUNTEER ATTIRE: Comfortable clothing is a must. We suggest jeans or other long pants. Closed toe shoes or boots are a must at all times. Please avoid dangling jewelry, large hats and ponytails within grabbing distance. Do not wear revealing clothing such as short shorts or low-cut tops.

VOLUNTEER TERMINATION POLICY

We do appreciate all the skill, energy and commitment volunteers bring to our program. Please understand, for the safety, security and continuation of excellence in programming, an inattentive volunteer, or one who cannot perform the functions or duties of a volunteer, will be relieved of their volunteer position. Absolutely no intoxicated or chemically impaired volunteer will be allowed to volunteer at NTRC. If there is a question, NTRC staff will err on the side of caution, and will not permit the individual to volunteer.

EMERGENCIES

All staff, instructors are certified in American Red Cross techniques of immediate first aid and CPR. All volunteers should follow instructions given by staff or Certified Emergency Personnel. First aid kits are located in the office area near the restroom.

PRE EXISTING WEATHER CONDITIONS: Riding classes will be canceled ahead of schedule in cases where weather plays a role in the safety of our riders or in the safety of our volunteers and horses. Some instances may be: tornado warnings, high heat index, icy or snowy road conditions, lightning, cold temperatures and wind conditions. All factors will be considered and a determination as to the status of the classes will be made. Volunteers will be notified via email, text and FB post if classes are canceled or changed because of weather.

UNEXPECTED WEATHER CONDITIONS: Should electrical storms or tornado warnings occur during riding time, classes will be delayed until safe conditions are restored.

- **Lightning:** Riders will dismount using normal dismounting procedures. Volunteers and riders will remain in the waiting area until further notice.
- **Tornado Warning:** Riders will dismount using normal dismounting procedures. Volunteers and riders will proceed to the basement of the house (shelter) or tack room.

NOTE: In the event of a “**sudden emergency**”, *horse leaders*, and *staff* will hold the horse's. *Side walkers* will help the instructor **dismount the riders in the arena** and proceed to shelter.

FIRE: In case of fire within the riding facilities, the procedures below will be followed:

- At the *Instructor's direction*, the volunteer will go to the head of the horse; rider will dismount in the arena.
- At the *Instructor's direction*, riders and volunteers will vacate the premises immediately.
- At the *Instructor's direction*, a call will be made to 911.
- All people will meet at the swings and once accounted for they will vacate the premises
- Further instructions will be given to NTRC by the Fire Department.

If there is an emergency while a lesson is in session:

1. All horses will be halted.
2. All leaders will position themselves in front of the horse. The **leaders are responsible ONLY for the horse**, not the riders.
3. All sidewalkers will stabilize their riders (arm over leg support). The **sidewalkers are responsible ONLY for the rider, not the horse**.
4. The instructor will supervise the dismounting, either verbally or personally.
5. In the event that a rider must be removed from the horse quickly, as in a seizure or a spooked horse, the sidewalker on the inside of the arena may be responsible for dismounting the rider.
6. If circumstances call for the arena to be evacuated, the riders will be escorted out first by their volunteers (if used) and the horses will be removed by their leaders to an appropriate place, after the riders are out of danger.
7. The instructor will determine if medical personnel are required and will request assistance in contacting specific personnel.

If another rider has a problem or a fall, DON'T rush to assist. Stay with your rider and listen for instructions. The instructor will handle the problem and ask for assistance if needed. The rider you are assisting is YOUR FIRST RESPONSIBILITY.

If your rider falls, the horse leader is responsible for the horse, not the rider. A loose horse is a danger to every rider in the arena. Stop the horse, get it away from the rider and call for the instructor. The sidewalker stays with the rider until the instructor arrives, and then follows the directions of the instructor.

When dismounting to the ground unassisted, make sure the rider takes BOTH feet out of the stirrups before lowering themselves to the ground. Assisted dismounts should always be done by the instructor.

The responsibility of the sidewalker, first and foremost, is the safety of the rider. Sidewalkers assist the riders to the degree necessary.

SIDE WALKER & HORSE LEADER INFORMATION

Side Walker and Horse Leader Manuals are provided to each volunteer depending upon which position they hold.

Side Walker training is conducted during New Volunteer Orientation. Virtual training is also available via our YouTube Channel at:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3T_P4zpsNcjP3-J9xD-oFw

Horse Leader training is conducted several times during the season. Reach out to **Cindy Sahl** if you are interested in attending a training session.

GETTING TO KNOW PEOPLE WITH DIVERSE ABILITIES



GENERAL APPROACH AND INTERACTION

It is important to remember that every child or adult is an individual and wants to be treated with understanding, dignity and respect, regardless of having a diverse ability or not.

Each has his/her own unique learning rate, style of learning, personality, and temperament. One must always look beyond the diverse ability of the person and provide them an enriched experience with a favorable environment in which to learn and grow.

Being around people with disabilities may be a new experience for you. You may be overwhelmed at first with things you have never seen or do not understand. This is natural for most people. Just remember to be yourself but with a little more patience! Here are a few suggestions to assist your relationship with your rider:

- Be yourself. Our riders are just people!
- Relax. Let the rider put you at ease if you do not know what to say. Explore mutual interests in a friendly way. For starters, talk about the horse and whether the person has ridden before.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Use conversation and social behavior that you might use in any new situation.
- Offer assistance when asked or when the situation requires it. Do not overwhelm the person with help or insist upon helping when they are managing alone. Do not hinder the rider's ability to expand their skills and independence, even when their movements may appear awkward to you.
- Respect the person's right to independence and their request for the kind of assistance they want.
- Appreciate what the rider can do. Remember that the difficulties the person may be facing could stem from society's attitudes and barriers rather than from the disability itself.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take someone to accomplish or respond to something. Be patient. Let the person set the pace in walking and communicating.
- Realize that some individuals with diverse abilities are not able to communicate with words. Instead they will have alternative means of communication, which may be as elaborate as sign language or a picture system or as basic as various vocalizations, facial expressions and body movements.

- Even if the rider may not be able to verbally communicate with you, please continue to communicate with them as you would with any individual you engage with.
- Do not be afraid to say, “I’m sorry I cannot understand you. Please say it again.”
- Be aware that riders may experience anxiety when entering the arena without their adaptive equipment, and may need extra patience and attention from you.

CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION

The policy seeks to safeguard these individuals who are taking part in NTRC classes and camps from physical, sexual or emotional harm. The organization will take all reasonable steps to ensure that, through appropriate procedures and training, those persons participating in our activities do so in a safe environment. We recognize that the safety and welfare of those persons is paramount and that all people, irrespective of sex, age, disability, race, religion or belief, sexual identity or social status, have a right to protection from abuse.

Policy Statement:

- Volunteers shall not be alone with NTRC participants. Staff shall always be on premises and in the near vicinity when participants are present.
- Volunteers nor NTRC staff shall help with the use of the restroom, changing of clothes or briefs of participants.
- The welfare of the child or vulnerable adult is paramount.
- Anyone under the age of 18 years should be considered as a child for the purpose of this document.
- It must be remembered that not all adults who are disabled are necessarily vulnerable. A vulnerable adult is defined as “any person aged 18 or over who is or may be in need of care services by reason of mental or other disability, of age or illness; **and** who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation”.
- All children and vulnerable adults, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/ or sexual identity, have the right to protection from abuse.
- NTRC staff and volunteers should report any suspicions of abuse, neglect or exploitations by parents, caregivers, other NTRC staff, and volunteers of participants to the Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Coordinator. The coordinator will report to the NTRC Executive Committee for investigation and/ or anything mandated by law to the authorities.