



Volunteer Orientation Manual

Orientation Session to include:

- Participant Introductions
- Introduction to the industry
- Brief history of therapeutic riding
- Benefits of therapeutic riding

EQUI-KIDS

- History
- Mission and Vision
- Who we serve
- Programs offered

How you can become involved:

- Volunteering
- Lessons- Sidewalker and Horse Leader
- Barn/Facilities
- Special Events
- Front Desk/Receptionist
- Special Skills
- Donor, Supporter

Tour of the Facility:

- A more detailed tour including emergency and safety information will be provided at the Sidewalker and Barn training sessions.

Any Questions?

EQUI-KIDS

Mission Statement:

To provide, promote and support equine-assisted activities for individuals who have mental, physical, emotional, social or learning disabling conditions.

Vision:

The vision of EQUI-KIDS Therapeutic Riding Program is to be recognized as one of the premier therapeutic riding programs in the United States, upholding the highest standards of excellence to serve individuals with special needs. Through our mission, we strive to create impactful, positive, life-changing experiences for our participants, donors, volunteers and the community at large.

History:

EQUI-KIDS was founded in 1989 with one horse and four riders at a local stable. As the program grew, the organization relocated to two shared facilities where a handful of children were served during the fair-weather months. For almost two decades the program and capacity needs grew, and EQUI-KIDS was in need of its forever home. In 2009, following the generous donation of 92 acres of land by a local developer and a \$5.5 million capital campaign, a state-of-the-art facility was built and EQUI-KIDS moved to its current location.

In 2010, the newly expanded capabilities and increased capacity allowed EQUI-KIDS to add the EQUI-VETS Military Service Program. Designed to serve active duty and veterans, EQUI-VETS is dedicated to serving those who have been impacted by their time serving our nation's armed services. Due to the unique challenges faced by those leaving their military careers and readjusting to civilian life, serving transitioning veterans has been a priority of the EQUI-VETS program since its inception.

EQUI-KIDS is well respected in the local community for the services provided, as evidenced by features in local newspaper articles and magazines, as well as the ability to recruit prominent board members. The social environment that is created through services provided by EQUI-KIDS helps generate acceptance, compassion, and general public education about people with special needs. For participants, the skills learned by engaging in EAS translate into important life skills. EQUI-KIDS is also highly regarded within its industry as evidenced by numerous PATH Intl. conference presentations made by staff members.

EQUI-KIDS is a 501c3 organization that provides life-changing equine-assisted services to a large and diverse community of children and adults with special needs, active-duty service members, veterans, and first responders in Virginia Beach and Hampton Roads. The organization is accredited by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.) as a Premier Accredited Center. PATH Intl., a federally registered 501(c)(3), that leads the advancement of professional equine-assisted services by supporting its members and stakeholders through rigorously developed standards, credentialing and education.

EQUI-KIDS serves an average of 80 to 100 participants each week and all services are provided by credentialed providers. Our services include therapeutic riding, therapeutic horsemanship, equine-assisted learning, equine-assisted psychotherapy with a licensed mental health provider (mental health services for individuals and groups), Speech Therapy provided by a licensed speech language pathologist, Occupational Therapy provided by a licensed occupational therapist, EQUI-VETS Military Service Program (serving active-

duty service members and veterans), EQUI-HEROES (serving first responders), job coaching, school partnership programs, summer inclusion camps, and educational workshops. Participants range in age from 5 years to seniors in their 90s with more than 150 distinct diagnoses recorded.

The Origins of Therapeutic Riding

We can trace the relationship between horses and physical therapy back to the ancient Greek, Aesculapius, the first physician and teacher of medicine. However, in modern times we look to the accomplishments of Madame Liz Hartel of Denmark, who was stricken with polio and rehabilitated herself from a wheelchair to horseback, winning the Silver Medal for Grand Prix Dressage at the Helsinki Olympics in 1952. The next major development in therapeutic riding came in 1958 in England, when the first ever purposely-built indoor arena for the disabled was established.

Therapeutic riding came to the North American continent in the 1960's in Canada and later found its way to the first U.S. program in Michigan in the mid 1960's. The later program laid the groundwork for what we now call PATH Intl. Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (formally known as NARHA.). PATH is further organized into 11 Regions and then into state programs. EQUI-KIDS falls into Region 3, which includes Virginia, West Virginia, North and South Carolina. The state organization is the Therapeutic Riding Association of Virginia or TRAV, which consists of an average of 24 operating centers and hundreds of individual members (TRAVINC.org). More information about PATH Intl. can be found on their website: www.pathintl.org.

WHAT IS THERAPEUTIC RIDING?

Therapeutic riding uses equine-oriented activities for the purposes of contributing positively to the cognitive, physical, emotional and social well-being of people with disabilities. Therapeutic Riding (TR) provides benefits in the area of adaptive riding, education, sport, and mental health.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE NATURAL BENEFITS OF RIDING A HORSE?

Muscular Strength

Participants develop and strengthen muscles by performing physical tasks with the horse. The horse stimulates the rider's pelvis and trunk in a manner that closely resembles the normal gait (walk) of an individual, working specific muscle groups. Improvements are achieved in muscle tone, strength and endurance.

Motor Development

Participants have an opportunity to explore movement patterns and develop skills. The quality and quantity of movement experiences relates to the development of movement patterns such as walking, running and jumping.

Balance and Rhythm

Participants develop the ability to maintain gross (large) and fine (small) motor balance and to move rhythmically with the horse. Participants become involved in interpreting and reacting to the horse's movements.

Direction

Participants learn and practice responding to the right, left, up, down, forward and backward instructions. Activities focusing on guiding the horse in a specific direction are used to aid the student in developing sensitivity to the direction of his/her own body and space.

Body Localization

Participants are provided with an opportunity to learn and locate parts of the horse's body. This activity aids in developing awareness and understanding of one's own body by making comparisons.

Self Confidence

Participants gain realistic confidence in their own judgment, ability and power. They improve their confidence by learning new skills, learning to work in partnership with a large animal and by achieving documented and personal goals.

Time Orientation

Participants develop an increased awareness of time concepts, by involving him/her in determining feeding time, exercise time, and resting time for the horses; participants develop an awareness of the effect of weather and seasonal changes on riding activities. Individuals learn to anticipate riding activities based on weather conditions.

Comprehension

Participants develop the ability to use judgment and reasoning in riding and working with the horses. This enhances his/her judgment and reasoning when dealing with situations and changes. Equine activities can help a rider with following directions and learning to sequence.

Problem Solving

Participants have an opportunity to learn and practice the process of problem solving. Problem solving occurs when the participant is working to accomplish a specific goal or skill.

Perception

Participants interact with their environment through feeling, hearing, seeing and smelling. The barn is a unique environment with a variety of shapes, objects, noises and smells.

Health and Hygiene

Participants can learn, practice, and develop an understanding of the principles for health and hygiene. In caring for horses (i.e. grooming) participants are led to understand and utilize good habits.

Social Benefits

Participants can ride in group lessons to allow riders to work on social skills. They learn how to appropriately interact with instructors, volunteers and peers. They form friendships and have fun!

Equine activities are used as a service to achieve physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioral and communication goals. Therapeutic Riding sessions are provided by a certified PATH Intl. Instructor. A team approach may also be used with a team of a PATH Intl. Riding Instructor and a licensed/credentialed physical, occupational or speech therapist as consultants.

Educational

Equine activities are used to achieve psycho-educational goals for people with physical, mental and psychological impairments as well as to provide the individual with skills in this sport. The emphasis is to incorporate cognitive, behavioral, psychological and physical goals into the lesson plans and session goals. The horse and environment are a strong motivator for accomplishing these goals.

Therapeutic riding instructors, educational specialist, and licensed/credentialed health professionals are involved in the design and implementation of the programs.

Sport

People with physical, mental and psychological impairments can participate in sport activities-adapted as needed with the horse. These activities of groundwork and riding are forms of therapeutic recreation and competition. Activities are directed toward the acquisition of skills leading to the accomplishment of specific horsemanship goals and personal goals. By learning skills needed for the sport, therapeutic and recreational goals are also achieved.

Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy Services

Knowledge of the principles of classic hippotherapy is considered essential for all licensed/credentialed health professionals who provide direct therapy treatment using the horse. Such health professionals also integrate the treatment principles of their professions into the equine activities used in a treatment setting.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) - Attention span can be disrupted by brain damage of various kinds. The individual may have difficulty focusing on instructions. Attention may drift or be diverted to something else. Attention span may be shortened due to a language related disorder or poor stress tolerance.

Autism - Autism is a neurological disorder, which can produce some of the following characteristics: self-preoccupations, communication dysfunction, repetitive movements, the individual may appear deaf or blind, although is not, and his/her function can vary from hour to hour and day to day.

Cerebral Palsy (CP) - CP is caused by damage to the motor (movement) area of the brain. CP is an injury and not a disease, characterized by a lack of ability to control the body. The disorder can vary mild or severe, resulting in minimal to extreme movement and coordination difficulties with various body parts moving in unison.

Developmental Delay - A chronological delay in the normal developmental milestones achieved during infancy through early childhood, caused by organic, psychological, or environmental factors. Intellectual function can be low normal to severely impaired, muscles tend to be soft and floppy, joints tend to be loose and almost disjointed. Other areas affected can include heart conditions, breathing problems, ear infections, hearing, speech, and vision problems.

Emotional Disabilities - A congenital or acquired syndrome often compounded by learning and/or physical disabilities incorporating numerous other pathologies.

Learning Disability (LD) - is a dysfunction of the brain caused by interference with the normal process of storing, processing and producing information.

Intellectual Disability (ID) – is a disorder due to brain damage, under-development of the brain or genetic disorder. Difficulties that result can be seen in mobility, vision, hearing, speech, understanding, judgment and behavior.

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) - is a disease which begins in young adults. There are lesions in the myelin sheaths or nerves in the brain and spinal cord which cause “short outs”.

Muscular Dystrophy (MD) - is a disorder that has a genetic basis and occurs in several forms, it involves the weakening of certain muscle groups.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) - Accidental injury to the head resulting in intracranial bleeding with death of brain cells, and gross and fine motor skill deficits.

PROGRAMS OFFERED

Please refer to our [Program Overview Brochure](#) and the [Programs Page](#) on our website for a listing of all our programs and services.

VOLUNTEER POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

Sidewalkers

Sidewalkers provide direct support to the participant during lessons. They act as the “safety squad” and reinforce the instructor’s directions in order to help each participant meet their lesson goals.

Horse Leaders

Horse leaders assist with grooming and tacking our horses to get them ready for their lessons as well as leading the horse during the lesson.

Barn Volunteers

Works around horses, cleans barn, mucks stalls, sweeps, fills water buckets and troughs. Works under the direction of the barn staff.

Facilities/Maintenance Volunteer

Works under the supervision of the Site Supervisor assisting with facility upkeep and projects.

Front Desk/Receptionist

Greets visitors and riders, answers phones, files documents, does light typing, mailings for special events, and other general office help.

Special Events

Assists with public relation events, horse shows, fundraisers (Golf Tournament, Stall Ball) and other public activities.

Specialized Skills

Share your talents—graphic artist, gardener, marketing, grant writing, fundraising.

Volunteers Report To

- EQUI-KIDS Staff Members
- Team Leaders

Hours

Specified times throughout the week

VOLUNTEER QUALIFICATIONS

- Lesson volunteers must be able to commit to an entire lesson session (typically 6 weeks)
 - We understand that schedules change and other life commitments might prevent you from doing so, but if you are able to commit to the entire session it helps our participants tremendously as most of them do not deal well with change or having to learn a new face every week.
- Ability to follow directions of program staff and/or instructors at all times.
- Ability to become familiar with horses and riding equipment used in programs.
- Ability to communicate diplomatically and enthusiastically with others.
- Commit to a defined period to fulfill lesson and event responsibilities.
- Willingness and cooperation to learn necessary safeguards of programs.
- Tobacco, , alcohol and drug free (at this facility) due to the youth environment.
- Able to physically meet the qualifications for the sidewalker position including walking for 1 hour and jogging for short distances or able to make reasonable accommodations to meet requirements.

LENGTH OF SERVICE

Our goal is to create and maintain as much consistency as possible within our lessons to maximize the benefits of therapeutic riding for our participants. This will help our participants see the same smiling faces each week and will benefit our horses as they will be working with the same partner throughout the session. Our volunteers have the power to help us create a safer environment for our horses, participants, other volunteers, and staff. We recognize that committing to the entire 6-weeks isn't always possible. We understand that schedules get busy with other life and work commitments, but we hope that you can squeeze in some extra time for EQUI-KIDS to help us meet our volunteer needs. We would love to have you join us for the weeks that you are available.

DRESS CODE

- Closed-toed, heavy tennis shoes or boots (no Keds, Tom's, Sanuks, or flip flops)
- Pants or fingertip length shorts (if you wear leggings only your shirt must cover your hips).
- T-shirt or tank tops (3 fingers wide at straps- no cammies or spaghetti straps)

For cool weather, wear or bring a jacket appropriate for the weather outside. If you get warm you can remove it but the barn and arena are not heated. Bring gloves and a hat. If your hands are in your pockets, you cannot be assisting your rider/doing your work.

- For warm weather, bring a water bottle, wear sunscreen/bug spray, have a hat with a brim and/or sunglasses. Please remember that the hot weather is not an excuse to wear skimpy clothing that reveals too much. Your job requires bending and leaning over, please choose your wardrobe with that in mind.
- Limit your jewelry, it can become a distraction to our riders. Long necklaces, large earrings and large hair accessories can become a snag/grab hazard.
- Perfumes and lotions can be a distraction as well as attract bees and other biting insects so please don't wear them at the barn if possible.
- Keep it covered!

NEXT STEPS

- Sign up for a training session based on your interest. All lesson volunteers must start at the sidewalker position.
- Complete the required Volunteer Registration Forms prior to attending training.
- Attend training.
- Sign up for a Volunteer schedule (lesson, barn etc). For lesson volunteers, your schedules will be confirmed by the Volunteer Coordinator.

Thank you for attending the New Volunteer Orientation!

Our volunteers are the heart and soul of our center, and our program would not be possible without the countless hours of dedication that our volunteers provide to our participants. We are **SO THANKFUL** that so many wonderful folks believe in our mission. The positive impact YOU will make in the lives of our participants will be amazing – we can't do it without you!

Contact Information

Volunteer Coordinator
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Please contact us at any time if you have questions.