

Freedom Hills Therapeutic Riding Program, Inc.

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

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Welcome Volunteers!

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

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

Program Objectives

The Freedom Hills Therapeutic Riding Program has three main objectives:

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

In order to achieve these objectives, we need the help and support of well trained volunteers. Simply put, without volunteers, the program could not continue!

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General Information

Please be prompt. Plan to arrive about 15 minutes before lessons begin. Sign in on the volunteer sheet, which is located on the bulletin board.

Notify the office at 410-378-3817 if you cannot assist in your scheduled lesson as soon as you know you can not attend. If an emergency arises at the last minute, please call before 8 a.m. This gives us time to attempt to find someone to fill your vacancy.

Wear outdoor clothes suitable for the season, including comfortable close toed waterproof footwear, such as boots or sneakers, **no sandals**. Gloves are safer than mittens for headwalking or sidewalking. Hats assist in sun protection. Because of temperature variations, layering of clothing is a reasonably sure way of being comfortable.

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

- Remain aware of the rider's safety at all times.
- Include the rider in conversations.
- Choose appropriate topics, keeping the rider's interest in mind.

In order to avoid unnecessary distractions to the rider, and to ensure you hear the instructor's directions, volunteers are asked not to talk during lessons.

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

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Participation

Our program uses volunteers in different ways. Activities include:

- Direct contact with the riders and horse by serving as a headwalker or sidewalker.
- Participation in fundraising events, horse shows, and publicity campaigns.
- The training and schooling of horses and ponies.
- Assisting with administrative functions.

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

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

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

Riders

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

- Mentally challenged
- Physically challenged
- Emotionally challenged
- Socially challenged
- Learning disabled
- Multiple disabilities

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Headwalker

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

Please allow the rider time to process an instruction, allowing the rider to execute the instruction on his own. If necessary, after enough time has passed, you may have to initiate the move. An example: When the instructor gives the command to walk-on or whoa, wait for the rider to give the command to the horse. Avoid the temptation to talk to the rider and/or sidewalkers.

Walk alongside the horse on its left, about even with his eye/shoulder. Watch where you are going and what is happening around you.

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

When you halt for more than a few seconds, stand in front of the horse with your hands on the halter's or bridle's cheek pieces or loosely hold the reins. If an accident occurs, stay with the horse. Listen to the instructor's directions.

Avoid showing affection to your horse during the lesson. Once the rider is safely dismounted there will be plenty of time to show affection.

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Sidewalker

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

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

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

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

When you are ready for relief for your arm, ask the headwalker to move into the center of the ring to stop. Ask the instructor for assistance before trading sides with the other sidewalkers. At all times pay attention to your student.

Competition is fun for all. Please remember your rider is the true competitor. You are to assist only when necessary.

Barn Assistants

Knowledgeable volunteers may be asked to assist in the barn. Plan to arrive about 30 minutes before the riding time begins, if asked to assist in the barn.

- Barn assistants help groom and tack the horses.
- Barn assistants may also be asked to assist riders in grooming and tacking up their own mounts.
- If you are not sure if equipment is required, or correctly applied, please ask.
- When the horse is ready, walk him outside until lesson time or put him back in his stall.
- It is important to keep the barn and tack room areas clean and tidy.

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

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

We also need help in cleaning tack. If you have extra time, your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Additional Volunteer Roles

Freedom Hills Therapeutic Riding Program can also use help with fundraising, publicity and maintenance. Speak to the director if you wish to assist in any of these activities or to learn more about our needs.

Overview of Job Descriptions

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Working board members. Meetings held six times a year.

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

PROGRAM DIRECTOR: Maintaining the program on site. Oversees instructors, checks on lessons. Provides a safe and healthy environment for horses in stabling area, to include fresh bedding, fresh water and proper feeding. If designated, oversees the cleaning of turnout/lesson areas and reports needed repairs. Responsible for grounds and facility standards.

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

STABLE MANAGER: Helps tack up horses for lessons, feeding horses, oversees horse care.

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT: Responsibilities can include replying to correspondence, billing, filing of forms, general office duties, answering the telephone, and filling requests

for rider and volunteer information, updating computer records of volunteers and clients, newsletter preparation, accounts payable and receivable.

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VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR: Responsibilities include recruiting and scheduling of volunteers and resolving volunteer conflicts or complaints. The volunteer coordinator, using information on the filed volunteer forms, contacts volunteers to schedule them to assist in riding lessons and other program events. The volunteer coordinator should schedule sufficient volunteers for each scheduled program activity.

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

Risk Management Natural Hazards

Ticks and Chiggers: Volunteers should be aware of possible contact with ticks and chiggers. We offer methods of protection as well as some home remedies if infested. Bug spray will repel them. If infested, NIX, a head lice product, should be used to kill the pests.

If bitten by a tick, remove carefully and watch for signs of Lyme Disease.

Cats and Dogs: All animals on program property are friendly and enjoy your attention. However, it is recommended that you do not pick them up. Enjoy them on their level. Also remember everyone has a bad day from time to time. Make sure you stay with your child, especially when he is near any animal.

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

Fox: Fox may be in the area. Notify instructors and **LEAVE THEM ALONE.**

Man Made Hazards

All parents are responsible for their children when they are not participating in a lesson.

Tractor: May only be used by designated personnel.

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

Operation of Facility and Equipment

Loss of Electric: In the event of loss of electric, contact Renée Luther at 410-378-9277 or Mr. Linton at 410-378-2200. Do not turn on water, as pumps will not work. If there is a short in the electric resulting in smoke, fire or exposed wires, call 911 for assistance.

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

Natural Disasters

Fire: In the event of a fire in the barn, the instructor will be the person in charge of the situation. Only adults will assist in the evacuation of the horses. Remove riders from horses and lead all to a safe area. Horses are to remain in outside schooling areas. Fire extinguishers are located throughout the barn. **REMEMBER, HUMAN LIFE IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE!**

Each horse must be taken from the barn and walked to one of the turnouts. Lead the animal until inside of turnout or he will more than likely run back to the barn. Send a volunteer to call 911 during the horse evacuation. If it is safe to do so, use the phone in the office or use personal cell phone. Other volunteers clear the way for fire trucks, moving cars that may interfere with trucks getting close to the barn. Be sure all younger volunteers are away from danger. They may assist riders and parents.

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

Tornado: Farm is not located in a tornado zone.

Hurricane: In the event of a hurricane, all stall horses are to be put in their stalls with two full water buckets (in case electric goes out). All barn doors are to be closed and

locked to avoid the wind sucking them out. Use human doors to exit. All lights should be turned off.

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

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

Hazards Specific to the Use of Equines

Falls: In the event a rider falls from the horse, the instructor is in charge of the situation. All horses should come to a halt. Headwalker of that horse or a designated volunteer will catch, contain and restrain the horse. Headwalker of other horses must stay with their designated horse. Sidewalkers must stay with their riders. Riders may be asked to leave the ring at the discretion of the instructor. Instructor will follow Red Cross First Aid procedures and call 911 if appropriate. Following safety and welfare of injured, the instructor will complete an incident report to be kept on file. Instructor will notify the office as soon as possible regarding the incident.

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

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

Conduct of Personnel and Participants

Inappropriate behavior of rider: The instructor is in charge of the situation. If necessary, the rider will be removed from the horse or area of disruption. The volunteer

will remove the horse from situation of abuse. Instructor will assist rider to appropriate area and discuss situation or return rider to parent or guardian. An incident report must be filed by instructor and office notified.

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

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

Safety Regulations

All lessons will be conducted in a safe environment.

- Only equipment used for lessons should be in the ring.
- Volunteers should be aware of their jobs.
- Riders should have suitable horses and equipment.
- Riders must have ASTM/SEI helmets.
- Riders wear appropriate footwear when possible.
- Check equipment before riders mount.
- Gear lessons to riders' abilities.
- **Keep everyone as safe as possible.**

Emergency Procedures

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

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

Fire Drills: Procedure will follow as described in Risk Management section regarding barn fire. Review will be held at staff meetings each year and a designated day will be

set to review at the barn. Instructors will review with volunteers. Initial drill will be during the yearly volunteer orientation. Procedure listed in barn for review.

Confidentiality Policy

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

Volunteer Rules

1. Wear appropriate shoes (no sandals) when headwalking or sidewalking.
2. Dress for the weather (layered clothes, gloves, muckers or boots.)
3. Please keep jewelry to a minimum. Dangling earrings and facial piercings can accidentally be ripped out by riders or horses. Therefore, we request you leave most jewelry at home.
4. Bring bug repellent/spray when needed.
5. Walk in the barn and around the horses.
6. Be respectful of the horses. Loud noises may scare them.
7. Only take a job you have been trained for and feel comfortable doing.
8. Helmets and appropriate footwear must be worn at all times while riding.
9. Volunteers must sign in and out. The information is used for various purposes, including grants and reports. You are responsible to keep your information up to date and to inform Freedom Hills of any changes.
10. Call the Freedom Hills office at 410-378-3817 if you are unable to assist at your scheduled time. We will try to find a substitute.
11. The program depends on you. Please be consistent.
12. What you see here, and the riders you meet here, let your conversations about them remain here.

13. Horses love treats. They must be fed from a bucket, and not by hand at any time.
14. If you like what you are doing, please tell your friends. If you have a problem or a suggestion, please tell us!