



Tri-State Therapeutic Riding Center

Volunteer Handbook

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TSTRC

Tri-State Therapeutic Riding Center (TSTRC) program is a non-profit organization formed in 2007 by individuals who recognized the need for therapeutic horseback riding opportunities for children and adults with disabilities. TSTRC strives to provide a therapeutic horseback riding program that safely and effectively meets the therapeutic needs of individuals in the area who have physical, cognitive, emotional and/or developmental disabilities.

THERAPEUTIC RIDING

Therapeutic riding uses equine-assisted activities for the purpose of contributing positively to the cognitive, physical, emotional and social well-being and development of those with disabilities. Lessons focus on horsemanship and the goal of riding, while the riders' efforts to communicate with, control, and enjoy their horses accomplishes many other objectives simultaneously. Therapeutic riding can be educational, competitive, recreational AND therapeutic.

There are five primary classifications of therapeutic riding in TSTRC's program. An integrated approach to therapeutic riding can result in therapeutic benefits in all five fields; however, each can be utilized as a specialty focus.

Horsemanship/Sports Riding Program (Mindful Program)

Horsemanship/Sport classes focus on acquiring and refining riding skills. Activities include preparing a horse to be ridden, horse care and grooming, and developing knowledge of breeds, colors, markings, and the parts of the horse, as well as the parts and care of equine equipment. Prospective students must demonstrate independent sitting balance, reasonably age-appropriate behavior, and ambulation with or without assistance.

Goals

- Increase balance
- Increase strength and endurance
- Increase coordination
- Increase sequencing/judgment skills
- Increase range of motion of joints and limbs
- Increase self-confidence/esteem
- Increase motor planning
- Increase independence
- Increase rider interaction with others
- Riding skill development

Socio-Emotional Therapeutic Riding Program (Taking the Lead)

Because horses are sentient beings with feelings, thoughts, emotions, memories, and empathetic abilities, horses can be active facilitators, evoking emotions in those who work with and around them. Equine-assisted socio-emotional classes give riders the opportunity to enhance self-awareness and re-pattern maladaptive behaviors, feelings and attitudes. By developing riding skills and using the intrinsic bonds that horses create, these classes can increase self-esteem, develop patterns of responsible behavior, and create productive relationships between the rider and other people. Prospective students must demonstrate independent sitting balance, reasonably age-appropriate behavior, and ambulation with or without assistance.

Goals

- Developing choice-making and goal-setting skills
- Developing sequencing and problem-solving skills
- Providing social skills training
- Improving responsibility
- Improving sensory stimulation and integration
- Combining body awareness experiences with motor planning and verbal communication

- Improving self-esteem and self-awareness

Sensory Processing Therapeutic Riding Program (Rainbow Riders)

Sensory processing refers to the brain's ability to take in, analyze and respond to information from the body's five senses. Riders with Sensory Integration challenges have difficulty screening and prioritizing input, which leads to delays with motor planning, attention span and focus, appropriate behaviors and responses, and orientation in space/time. These classes use the input from the horse, as well as activities and positions on horseback, to help improve organization of information. Prospective students must demonstrate independent sitting, balance, reasonably age-appropriate behavior, ambulation with or without assistance.

Goals

- Increase balance
- Increase motor coordination
- Increase body awareness
- Increase ability to screen input
- Increase sequencing/judgment skills
- Increase spatial awareness
- Increase attention span
- Encourage early learning skills

Physical Rehabilitation Therapeutic Riding Program (Rainbow Rehabilitation)

Physical impairments can include muscles with increase tone (spasticity), or decreased tone (weakness), joints that have decreased range of motion (stiff joints), or riders that have difficulty with motor planning and coordination (making their muscles work smoothly together). Physical rehabilitation classes use activities involving the horse and the positioning of the rider on the horse to increase the physical function of the rider, who has movement disorders. Prospective students must demonstrate independent sitting, balance, reasonably age-appropriate behavior, ambulation with or without assistance.

Goals

- Increase balance
- Increase coordination
- Increase range of motion of joints and limbs
- Increase or decrease muscle tone

- Increase motor planning
- Increase postural control
- Increase righting reactions
- Increase verbalization
- Increase strength and endurance
- Increase spatial awareness
- Increase body awareness

Cognitive Therapeutic Riding Program (Rainbow Riders)

Cognition refers to the many processes of the mind, including planning, judgment, memory, orientation, concepts, attention, and ability to attend and express language. Riders participate in exercises on horseback which reinforce carefully selected goals and objectives. Prospective students must demonstrate independent sitting, balance, reasonably age-appropriate behavior, and ambulation with or without assistance.

Goals

- Increase balance coordination
- Increase verbalization
- Encourage appropriate social interactions
- Increase sequencing/judgment skills
- Increase direction/ request following
- Increase confidence/ self esteem
- Increase interaction with others
- Increase attention span
- Encourage early learning skills



INTRODUCTION TO PATH INTERNATIONAL

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH) is a non-profit organization, headquartered in Denver, Colorado that promotes and

regulates equine-related activities for individuals with disabilities. PATH accredited centers have been evaluated through on-site comprehensive inspection of facility, equipment, instruction methods, volunteer training, and record-keeping practices by a PATH accreditation team. PATH members include volunteers, riding instructors, disabled riders and their families, physicians, therapists, teachers, researchers and other concerned individuals.

For information on becoming a PATH member, please visit the PATH web site www.pathintl.org or request a membership form through fax-on-demand (303) 457-8496. PATH may also be reached 1-800-369-RIDE.

TSTRC VOLUNTEERS



TSTRC volunteers assist in a variety of ways: leading horses during lessons, sidewalking (walking alongside the horse to offer the rider support when needed), grooming horses, tacking up horses, cooling out horses, cleaning tack, horse care, helping with fund-raisers, participating in public relations, assisting with administrative duties, planning of special events, and anything else that enhances the quality of TSTRC's programs.

Volunteers must be at least 14 to work directly with children. No previous experience is necessary. Volunteers will be trained according to the chosen/assigned field of service.

Volunteers are required to read, understand and sign TSTRC's liability and medical releases.

Volunteers must sign a confidentiality agreement in compliance with HIPPA.

Because TSTRC is frequently featured in newspapers, television, and magazines, volunteers are asked to sign photo releases.

Volunteers must be *willing* to submit to a criminal history background check.

TSTRC operates Monday through Friday and Sunday from 9:00am - 7:00pm, with occasional weekend special events. Committed volunteers are critical to the success of TSTRC's programs. TSTRC relies on consistent volunteer attendance for a little as an hour each week of a six-week session to several hours every day.

The ROUTINE

- Park in the main parking lot, anywhere not designated “Handicap Parking”.
- Sign the volunteer log book. TSTRC is required by state law to keep track of your attendance and hours.
- Put on your name badge, kept next to the volunteer log book, identifying you as a TSTRC volunteer.
- Check-in with a TSTRC instructor and verify assignment.
- Complete assignment(s)
- Sign out of log book

POLICIES

- Volunteers must complete the appropriate paperwork, which provides TSTRC with emergency information, and sign release forms, prior to beginning work as a volunteer.
- Volunteers must receive training specific to their assigned/chosen duties before working directly with horses or students. Training may be obtained through attending a TSTRC job-specific workshop or through on-the-job mentoring.
- Volunteers working with students or horses must not have been charged with or convicted of a crime committed upon children or animals.
- Volunteers are not permitted to ride horses for recreational purposes. Volunteers who exercise program horses are subject to the School Riding Policy and Schooling Rider requirements.
- The suggested minimum age for working directly with clients or horses is 14 years old. Unless prior approval has been arranged, volunteers less than 14 years old must have a parent or guardian with them on site.
- Regular attendance is required. Volunteers should commit themselves to a specified time period. Unless other arrangements have been made, TSTRC volunteers must attend their assigned time(s) each week.
- Volunteers are responsible for notifying the instructor of an emergency absence or change in availability with as much advance notice as possible. TSTRC must have the appropriate number of volunteers for each class. Having too few people limits the

number of riders TSTRC can safely mount and reduces the class activities which can be accomplished.

- Volunteers will be assigned their respective class or program responsibilities by staff members.
- Volunteers are to maintain confidentiality regarding client information as outlined in the program's Confidentiality Policy.
- Volunteers should dress appropriately as outlined in the Volunteer Dress Code.
- Volunteers must bring appropriate allergy medication, if needed, to TSTRC for each visit. Instructors and team members are to be advised of sensitivities and the location of the medication.
- Any disorderly conduct or behavior deemed inappropriate will result in a warning to a volunteer. If the behavior continues, the volunteer may be asked to leave and/or be dismissed from the program.
- Use of nonprescription drugs or chemicals, including alcohol, which adversely affects the performance of a volunteer, will be cause for immediate dismissal from the TSTRC program.
- Smoking is not allowed anywhere on TSTRC property.
- Dogs are not allowed anywhere on TSTRC property.



CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Riders and their families have a right to privacy that gives them control over the dissemination of their medical or other sensitive information. TSTRC shall preserve the right of confidentiality for all individuals in its program.

No information shall be shared with individuals outside of TSTRC regarding a rider's medical information, disability, financial status, or other sensitive information. All volunteers and staff of TSTRC are bound by this policy to protect the rights and privacy of individuals served by TSTRC. Individuals involved with TSTRC shall keep

confidential all medical, social, referral, personal, and financial information regarding a person and his/her family.

TSTRC will agree to disclose information to outside agencies or individuals only with the specific written consent of the rider or their designated representative. Individuals who breach confidentiality will be removed from the TSTRC program. All individuals accepting responsibilities with TSTRC are required to sign the Confidentiality Agreement located on the volunteer application.

DRESS CODE

- Volunteer attire depends on climate, but the general rule is neat, clean, and functional.
- Modest shorts and t-shirts are acceptable in summer and layers are suggested in winter.
- Shoes must be comfortable and safe with closed toes - no high heels or sandals.
- Long hair should be tied back and volunteers should avoid wearing dangling earrings, necklaces, and bracelets that could be pulled by a client.
- Do NOT wear heavy perfumes, colognes, or hairsprays that might attract stinging insects.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS



Leaders

The main responsibility of the leader is to control the mount. Volunteers who would like to become leaders should have some horse-handling experience to be considered for a horse leader position. Leaders must be aware of and guard against any potential hazards in or around the arena. The leader must make sure there is enough room along the fence and around obstacles for side walkers to pass safely.

Most riders who have leaders are unable to fully control their horses. The leader must assist in guiding, stopping, and starting the horse; however, the rider must be allowed to do as much as possible. An effective leader pays close attention to the rider's needs and reinforces the rider's attempts to control the horse. The leader should not execute an instruction for the rider before the rider has time to process the information and make an effort to comply. It may be appropriate to walk into the corner and stand until the student determines how best to follow instructions.

The leader should hold the lead six to eight inches from the horse's head with the extra lead looped in the free hand, not wrapped around it. The horse may have to be led from either side, rather than from the left, as is customary.

When a rider is being mounted, the leader must hold the animal as still as possible, both at the ramp and in the ring. The leader should stand in front of the mount holding him gently by both sides of the halter. Hanging on the bit or holding it too tightly will cause the mount to toss his head and/or move around. Light, firm pressure should be enough to keep him quiet and steady. Don't put your thumbs through the halter rings; they could be broken with a toss of the horse's head.

A good leader anticipates problems and acts in such a way as to avoid them.

The leader should walk just behind the mount's head and in front of its shoulder. The leader should not hang on the lead or try to drag the animal. The leader should adjust his walk to the mounts pace unless it is unreasonably fast or slow. If a mount is moving

too fast, a stronger pull on the lead will be necessary. If the horse is moving too slowly, the leader can drop back a little and have the sidewalker give it a prod in the barrel. Short tugs rather than a steady pull will help keep a lazy horse moving.

The horse can set himself against a steady pull, but tugs keep him alert. If it is possible, have the rider help keep the horse or pony walking on by pushing with his seat and/or by squeezing with his legs.

At the trot, the leader will have to speed his walk to a jog. Mounts should trot alongside the leader. The leader should avoid breaking into a run, as the mount will pick up speed accordingly. The leader should use voice commands (whoa, walk, trot, canter) to aid in transitions from one gait to another only when the student requires assistance.

Once the lesson has started, it is important that the leader be alert and paying close attention to the rider, the surroundings and the instructor. Leaders can help the instructor by keeping the rider's attention on the instructor. Many riders like to talk and ask personal questions of their volunteers. The volunteer should not be rude but should keep the rider's attention on the lesson. After the lesson, personal conversation can take place, but not during the class.

Leaders should keep the mounts from becoming too close to other riders if the rider is unable to do so. Commands for the rider to halt, cross the arena, or do a circle prevent accidents or pile ups.

The leader must use common sense if a problem arises.

Falls can and do happen. If a rider should fall, the leader's primary responsibility is the care of the horse. Leaders should not drop the lead line and run to the fallen rider. The situation could easily become more dangerous if there are loose horses in the arena. Listen for directions from the instructor. The instructor will call the class to a halt and assist the rider. Move the involved horse as far from the fallen student as possible, moving the horse's hindquarter's away from the fallen student and assisting volunteers. The leader must remain calm and should allow the horse to turn and face the situation when they are well away from the student.

During exercises, the leader should stand in front of, and slightly to the side of, the mount to prevent it from moving from the "halt position".

Games can be fun for riders, volunteers, and the instructor. During games, as throughout the lesson, the rider does the rewarding and productive work, not the leader. Direct participation from all involved is desirable, but not to the extent that the leader takes complete control and the rider does nothing. Volunteers should not become enthusiastic to the point of detriment to the benefit of the rider.



Sidewalkers

A sidewalker's primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the rider. The degree of assistance from the sidewalker will depend on the balance of the rider. Sidewalkers who accompany poorly balanced riders may need to change sides occasionally to relieve the stress on their arms. Sidewalkers should not pull the rider sideways or backwards. The sidewalker must be able to jog alongside the rider if trotting is involved in the lesson. Sidewalkers must maintain a position by the rider's knee at all times. Being too far forward or back will make it very difficult to assist with instructions or provide security for the rider if the horse should trip or shy.

There are two common ways to hold onto the rider without interfering. The instructor will determine which method is most suitable for each rider. The most commonly used is the "arm-over-the-thigh hold". The sidewalker grips the front of the saddle with the hand closest to the rider. Then the fleshy part of the forearm rests gently on the rider's thigh. Sidewalkers must not allow their elbow to accidentally dig into the rider's leg. The "therapeutic hold", where the rider's leg is held at the joints, usually the knee and/or ankle, is used to avoid pressure on the rider's thigh, which can increase and/or cause muscle spasticity, especially with a rider with Cerebral Palsy.

Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider's waist, especially when walking beside a pony with a young or small rider. This position can offer too much and/or uneven support and may pull the rider off balance. Encourage students to use their own trunk muscles to the best of their abilities.

If a safety belt is used on the rider, do not pull down or push up on it. Grip the handle firmly, and touch thumb and finger together around the safety belt. This position allows the rider assistance if needed, but will neither provide unneeded support nor pull rider off balance. At intervals, ask the leader to move into the center and halt to trade sides, one at a time, with the other sidewalker - never leave a rider with poor balance unsupported! In most cases, the safety belt is only used to assist during mounts and dismounts.

Sidewalkers may help the instructor in many other ways; i.e., keeping the rider's attention on the lesson, assisting in right/left directionality and spatial orientation, understanding the instructor's directions, and helping to keep the mount walking on. Any unnecessary interference during the lesson should be avoided. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing, and to riders who already have perceptual problems it can be overwhelming. If two sidewalkers are working with one student, one should be the "designated talker" to avoid this situation. When the instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process the directive. If the instructor says, "Turn to the right toward me," and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say, "Right," to reinforce the command.

During exercises, pay attention to the rider. Sidewalkers must remember that the riders are to do the exercises and the sidewalkers are to reinforce and assist. The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and grow to be as independent as possible. The sidewalker should help the instructor to challenge the rider.

If a rider starts to fall, pushing the rider back into the saddle is more effective than trying to get the rider off the horse. If there is no way to prevent a fall, the sidewalker should try to soften the fall, making sure not to compound the problem by getting in the way. In most instances, the job of the sidewalker on the left is to pull the child off after the sidewalker on the right assists by getting the rider's right foot free of the stirrup and lifting it over the horse's neck. If the sidewalker on the left is uncomfortable with this role, other arrangements must be made before the lesson begins. The sidewalker should do nothing with the rider who has fallen, allowing the instructor to handle the situation.

Sidewalkers can be used with a rider who is starting to ride alone. No leader is present, but the sidewalker is there to control the horse or pony if the rider's aids are not effective. The sidewalker is for the control of the mount rather than for helping the rider's balance. The sidewalker's presence may give the rider more confidence with the transition to independent riding.

Spotters

The spotter performs an essential safety role when assisting the instructor in mounting riders. The spotter should be trained to perform the following functions:

1. Holding down on the stirrup on the opposite side of the horse for a rider who is large in stature or is exceptionally slow in getting up into the saddle to prevent the saddle from slipping to the side as the rider mounts
2. Assisting the rider from the opposite side as rider is transferred or mounted from a wheelchair or from any position along the ramp.
3. Receiving the rider's hips as the instructor places the rider onto the saddle. Taking hold of the safety belt with one hand and assists in bringing the rider's legs over the

croup or crest with the other will insure the safety of the rider while being transferred to the mount.

Mount/Dismount Assistants



One of the most important single phases of a therapeutic riding program is the mounting/ dismounting procedure. Though relatively simple for the agile, able bodied rider, mounting and dismounting procedures can be complex and challenging for those with disabilities.

The mounting and dismounting procedures used are depend on the rider's disabilities, weight, and assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, or canes. Recommended mounting and dismounting procedures for riders with physical disabilities may be determined on an individual basis by a physical therapist and discussed with the instructor.



Barn Assistants

- Horses must be groomed and tacked or untacked before and after each class. It is extremely important that the horses be very clean underneath their tack to avoid discomfort or sores. Depending on the number of mounts to be readied, TSTRC may begin tacking about 30 minutes before each scheduled class. Riders may be encouraged to participate in these activities.

- Each equine partner is on a feeding program, based on specific nutritional needs. Horses are turned out to eat grass and must be brought in the barn for supplemental feeding. Hay may be fed and water supply must be checked.
- Mucking, sweeping, cleaning tack, washing horses, stripping stalls, and spreading manure, while not glamorous, must still be done regularly.

Facility Assistants

Volunteers are needed to help with a variety of maintenance, cleaning, and grounds-keeping duties including cutting grass/pastures, mending fences, painting, plumbing, maintaining the arena, designing /building activity stations and props, changing light bulbs, raking leaves, leveling the driveway, sweeping and sanitizing.

Office Assistants

Volunteers can perform administrative tasks, such as helping with new volunteer recruitment, writing articles for TSTRC's newsletter, fundraising, filing, faxing, making copies, and answering the telephone. TSTRC appreciates volunteers' many talents and welcomes any suggestions, ideas, or assistance.

Schooling Riders

Schooling riders are competent equestrians chosen by the TSTRC staff to school and exercise TSTRC horse/ponies. They must complete one six-week session as a dedicated volunteer, before starting the schooling rider program. Schooling riders are expected to maintain the horses'/ponies' fitness, obedience, and responsiveness, as well as help to correct behavior problems as directed by TSTRC staff. Schooling riders must adhere to our School Riding Policy and meet the requirements for schooling riders.



EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

Mounted Emergencies:

- Halt all horses

- Horse leaders position themselves in front of the horse.
- Sidewalkers stabilize their riders.
- Instructors supervise dismounting, either verbally or personally.
- Uninvolved participants evacuate the arena, if necessary, with sidewalkers escorting riders out of the arena through emergency exits and horse leaders leading horses to the instructor's designated place after riders are out of danger. Horses be held in the safe area while the instructor assesses the situation and directs other necessary actions.

Emergency Dismount:

- Sidewalker calls out "Emergency!" to notify instructor and leaders of the need for an emergency dismount.
- Halt all horses
- Sidewalker on the right frees rider's foot from stirrup and helps it over horse's neck
- Sidewalker on the left removes compromised rider from the horse, using his body as a cushion or barrier for the rider if necessary
- Leader immediately moves the horse's hindquarters away from the rider and volunteers.
- Instructor will assess the situation and direct any other further actions.

In Case of Injured Rider:

- Instructor will appoint one person to oversee the rest of the class participants while the instructor focuses on the injured rider. Uninjured riders must be removed from the riding area to a safe area for dismounting and removal of students.
- Instructor will ask one sidewalker to call 911 to report the condition of the injured rider, while instructor administers First Aid procedures and/ CPR.
- The instructor will immediately complete and file an official accident report and notify the Executive Director. An ongoing record of all accident reports and recommended preventative measures is maintained by TSTRC.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of the information contained in this handbook was taken in part or copied directly from the following sources:

Aspects & Answers, available from The Cheff Center for the Handicapped, (616) 731-4471.

PATH Guide, available from PATH (800) 369-7433.

PATH Instructor Educational Guide, available from PATH (800) 369-7433.

PATH Operating Center Standards and Accreditation Manual, available from PATH (800) 369-7433.

Special Olympics Alabama Volunteer Handbook, available from Special Olympics of Alabama, (800) 239-3898.

THERAPEUTIC RIDING PROGRAMS, Volumes I & II, by Barbara Engel, available from Barbara Engel (970) 563-9599.

Volunteer Manual for PATH Centers, available to PATH Accredited Centers from PATH (800) 369-7433.

Internet Sources:

"Understanding Disabilities: Examining Issues of Language and Portrayal," by Meng-Kok Tan, at www.isdesignet.com/Magazin/Jun'95/Disabilities.htm.

"Understanding Disabilities (NGGSC)" a www.scoutlinks.com/GSRC/sr0z00x.htm.

M.A.N.E. website at www.MANEnet.org.