



## Volunteer Handbook

OUR MISSION.....	3
INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE CHALLENGES .....	3
Wheelchair Etiquette.....	3
Escorting an Individual with a Visual Impairment.....	3
Non-Verbal or Limited Verbal Expression .....	3
THERAPEUTIC HORSEBACK RIDING AND HORSEMANSHIP.....	4
VOLUNTEER HEALTH AND FITNESS.....	4
Schedules and Commitment.....	5
Personal Benefits .....	5
PROCEDURES FOR VOLUNTEERS.....	6
Signing-In .....	6
Do Wear.....	6
Do NOT Wear .....	6
Cell Phones.....	6
Communication.....	6
What is CONFIDENTIALITY? .....	7
Rules for Confidentiality .....	7
RISK MANAGEMENT AND ACCIDENT REPORT .....	8
Medical Emergencies .....	8
Fire .....	8
Loose Horse .....	9
Emergency Dismount .....	9
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY .....	10
NON-HARASSMENT.....	10
VOLUNTEER DISMISSAL POLICY.....	11
WHISPERING MANES THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER BARN SAFETY RULES.....	12
Thank You .....	13
Contacts .....	13
Volunteer Acknowledgement.....	14

## OUR MISSION

To benefit children and adults with special needs or disabilities by offering them the opportunity to interact with dedicated horses in a manner that promotes physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. We believe people can develop therapeutic relationships with horses, crossing boundaries of speech and physical disabilities in a way that encourages healing and improved self-esteem.

## INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE CHALLENGES

Interacting with people who have special needs may be a new experience for some volunteers. You will meet people with a wide variety of differences, including physical and/or cognitive. Some may have been present since birth, or may be the result of an injury or disease. You may find your time volunteering is more valuable if you take the time to understand your rider's challenges enabling you to make the most of their horseback riding experience. Please keep in mind that you can *help* the participant more by *assisting them less*. If you have questions about the rider's challenges, please feel free to ask the instructor discreetly.

### **Wheelchair Etiquette**

- ♦ Ask the person if they would like assistance before you help
- ♦ Wheelchairs are an extension of the person's body space, ask before you touch or lean on the wheelchair
- ♦ Be aware that someone in a wheelchair is lower than most people who are standing, you need to make eye contact and be certain to be inclusive in conversations

### **Escorting an Individual with a Visual Impairment**

- ♦ If a participant with a visual impairment needs help, you may ask the participant directly or speak to the instructor, parent or guardian
- ♦ Ask the participant or instructor if they have a particular way they would like to be assisted.
- ♦ Participant may only need verbal direction/cues
- ♦ If physical assistance is needed, allow the individual to hold onto your arm above the elbow and walk one-half step ahead

### **Interacting with Individuals with Hearing Impairment**

- ♦ Maintain eye contact when speaking with the participant
- ♦ Speak clearly, at a normal pace, and be succinct
- ♦ It may help to use visual cues or gestures when needed
- ♦ Alert the Instructor if you feel you are not able to properly communicate with the participant so as to avoid any possible safety concerns

### **Non-Verbal or Limited Verbal Expression**



Some participants may be non-verbal or limited in their verbal expression. To enhance communication with these individuals, instructors and volunteers may need to learn or familiarize themselves with basic American Sign Language (ASL). Some sidewalkers may be asked to carry a white board to help the rider communicate with volunteers and the instructor.

## **THERAPEUTIC HORSEBACK RIDING AND HORSEMANSHIP**

Therapeutic horseback riding and horsemanship, or equine assisted activities (EAA), are programs in which people with disabilities learn about horses and develop horseback riding skills. The goal, however, is far broader than simply teaching people to ride horses. The goal is that by engaging in EAA, people with a range of physical, emotional, cognitive and/or sensory disabilities will benefit from improved self-esteem and self-confidence, and an increased sense of responsibility.

The development of a unique relationship with a horse may lead to trust in a non-judgmental creature, eventually fostering loyalty, and empowerment. By successfully overcoming fear and anxiety while learning to ride, and developing other related skills individuals, realize self-worth and increase self-esteem. Ultimately, the extension of the relationship between the participant and horse is one where the individual can begin to interact and form relationships and connections with other people. While the participant is gaining psychological and emotional benefits from interacting with the horse, they are simultaneously gaining physical benefits.

The horse's walk provides sensory input to the rider which is very similar to the movement of the human body while walking. The horse's rhythm and gait create different sensory situations for the rider while promoting core strength, improved balance, posture, and mobility. The horse and the riding environment also offer a wide variety of sensory input to participants. Movement exploration on the horse combined with other sights and sounds on the farm contribute to the overall sensory experience for the rider.

## **VOLUNTEER HEALTH AND FITNESS**

Some volunteer roles such as leading, side walking and assisting in the stable can be physically demanding at times. It is important that you are completely honest on your application about any health concerns or physical limitations. You will need to be able to walk on sand for 1 or 2 half hour sessions this could include a small amount of slow jogging. You will also be assisting with grooming horses this would include being able to use your arms and hand. If you have any concerns regarding your physical ability, or any medical conditions, please speak with a staff member prior to volunteering for a session.

## **VOLUNTEER JOBS**

- ♦ Barn Work such as cleaning stalls and paddocks
- ♦ Grooming our horses, including brushing and bathing
- ♦ Side walking with a student/participant on a horse
- ♦ Handling and leading horses during sessions (training required)
- ♦ Barn handler roles (training required)
- ♦ Administrative support

Volunteers do not need prior experience with horses. Volunteers will be trained to assist in any capacity in which they are interested.



## **SCHEDULES & COMMITMENT**

### **Handlers and Sidewalkers**

The lesson schedule for participants is set in advance. You may sign up for volunteer opportunities through the online volunteer calendar. Please be aware that some volunteer opportunities fill up quickly.

- ♦ College students and Teens set your schedule at least 2-4 weeks in advance.
- ♦ Adult/non-student schedule yourself at least one week in advance.

### **Groomers, Barn Chores**

We greatly appreciate the groomers and barn chore volunteers. Horses require a great deal of care and cleanliness to remain healthy. Schedule your time through the online volunteer calendar. If you would like to assist with chores not on the online calendar, please speak with the Program Director.

### **Expectations**

- ♦ You are expected to be on-time or a few minutes early.
- ♦ If you are sick or unable to volunteer, call the Program Director as soon as you know, ideally with a minimum of 24-hours' notice. The participants in the program are expecting you. If you do not show up, we will not be able to allow them to have their riding lesson resulting in disappointment.
- ♦ Teen volunteers who rely on others for transportation must have their parent sign the commitment form agreeing to provide transport.
- ♦ You must read the complete handbook and keep it to refer to in the future.
- ♦ College and teen student volunteers must participate a minimum of 1 session per week. No more than 2 absences in a 3-month period.
- ♦ College student's initial commitment time is 4 months.
- ♦ Teen volunteer's commitment time is half the academic year. Documentation of hours will only be provided once the commitment is met.

### **Personal Benefits**

Volunteers receive many benefits for their time including:



- ♦ The opportunity to engage with and get to know our horses
- ♦ Get lots of exercise
- ♦ Sidewalkers and handlers walk 1 - 2 miles while assisting participants
- ♦ You will get plenty of arm exercise while sidewalking and interacting with horses while grooming
- ♦ Once you have met your commitment you can request letters of recommendation and reference letters
- ♦ Volunteering at Whispering Manes is fun
- ♦ You have helped brighten someone else's day !

## PROCEDURES FOR VOLUNTEERS

### Signing-In

- ♦ Upon arrival, volunteers are required to sign.
- ♦ The sign-in computer is located in the Program Director's Office, shown during the orientation tour.

### Do Wear

- ♦ Volunteer Tee Shirt (donation \$20.00)
- ♦ Clothing should not be too tight or too loose
- ♦ Wear comfortable tops, pants or shorts that can get dirty
- ♦ Closed toed, non-slip and hard soled shoes

### Do NOT Wear

- ♦ Clothing or jewelry that might get caught on equipment
- ♦ Ripped jeans or shorts
- ♦ Cutoff shirts or tank tops
- ♦ Flip flops, sandals, crocs, open back shoes, ballet shoes, boat shoes, etc.
- ♦ Any clothing of a provocative nature
- ♦ Clothing with written words or symbols that may be deemed offensive
- ♦ Perfume or cologne as it may be irritating to participants with allergies and/or to our horses

### Cell Phones

- ♦ Cell phones must be set to silent
- ♦ Cell phones may NOT be used to make calls or send/receive text messages while in the presence of the horses on cross ties or during sessions
- ♦ Should it become necessary to use your phone while in the presence of a horse and/or participant, you must advise a Whispering Manes staff member or fellow volunteer so someone can take your place before using the phone
- ♦ It is not permitted to wear headphones or listen to iPods or MP3 players (unless directed by staff) while interacting with horses and/or participants

### Communication

- ♦ Ask staff or Team Leader if you have any questions about your responsibilities
- ♦ All directions from the instructor are to be followed including the assignment of riders, horses and volunteers, mount/dismount procedures, and session structure
- ♦ To ensure everyone's safety, it is important to adhere to the instructor's decisions





## What is CONFIDENTIALITY?

The participants in our program have a wide spectrum of disabilities, some of which are “invisible.” Many of our riders and caregivers will be open about the nature of their disability. At Whispering Manes we make every effort to maintain and respect our participant’s privacy. We comply with federal HIPAA guidelines. HIPAA stands for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act which protects personal information and privacy. For example:

- ♦ During the sessions you may be advised of confidential information regarding the rider, which is required for their safety and yours, as well as to make this an effective session for the rider
- ♦ This information is confidential and we expect our volunteers to respect this

## **Rules for Confidentiality**

- ♦ Do not discuss a rider’s disability or diagnosis with anyone else, even other volunteers
- ♦ Do not repeat anything you have heard
- ♦ Do not take pictures of riders



## **RISK MANAGEMENT AND ACCIDENT REPORT**

All accidents must be reported to a staff member immediately. An incident report form must be completed on the same day, by anyone involved the accident. If you suspect there is an unsafe condition which may endanger the staff, volunteers, participants, horses, and/or visitors, immediately notify a staff member.

Know where:

- ♦ the fire extinguisher is in the tack room and utility room
- ♦ the phone and emergency phone numbers are located in every office
- ♦ first aid kits for people and horses are in the tack room
- ♦ to evacuate people from the barn and tack room if necessary

### **Medical Emergencies**

The instructors at Whispering Manes are certified in CPR and first aid. In the event of a medical emergency, the instructor is in charge, but volunteers may be asked to assist.

In case a volunteer is asked to call 911, a phone is located in each of the offices, and the emergency contact information with our address is located in the first aid kit in the tack room.

### **Fire**

- ♦ Evacuate the barn in a safe and orderly manner being sure to help those who may need extra assistance.
- ♦ Follow the "Exit" signs to the closest exit that is away from the direction of the fire.
- ♦ Upon exiting, locate a staff member to see if 911 has been called, if you cannot find a staff member, then call 911 yourself.
- ♦ Request emergency vehicles to turn off their sirens as they approach the farm to avoid causing the horses to panic.
- ♦ The staff will assist with evacuation and do a head count based on session and volunteer schedule.
- ♦ The best place to plan for meeting is the middle of the open field behind the main barn, but this is dependent upon the location of the fire.
- ♦ Do not enter the barn unless directed to do so by a staff member once the fire department has declared the building safe.



## Loose Horse

In the event a horse, whether part of the session or not, should become spooked or loose, use the following guidelines:

- ♦ Sidewalkers put their arm over the thigh of their rider
- ♦ Horse handlers halt their horses and stand in front of them
- ♦ One person should make sure all exits are secure.
- ♦ As instructed, all horse handlers remove their horses from the immediate area, taking their horses and riders to safety.
- ♦ When other riders are safely out of the area, one person approaches the loose or spooked horse quietly and calmly from the side of the neck and try to secure and calm the horse.
- ♦ Do NOT chase a loose horse. If necessary, it is ok to use a small amount of food to try and bring the horse to you.

## EMERGENCIES INVOLVING HORSES

THE INSTRUCTOR IS ALWAYS IN CHARGE!

In the event that a rider should fall, volunteers must do the following:

1. Instructor calls HALT to all horses.
2. Handler(s) halt horse.
3. Handler stands at horse's head.
4. Instructor and/or assistants dismount other riders (as applicable).
5. Horse(s) are removed from area
6. Instructor evaluates situation, assign first aid or emergency steps as needed.

The sidewalker(s) must stay with the rider until directed otherwise by the instructor.

## Emergency Dismount

If it should become necessary to remove a student from a horse quickly during a riding session, the instructor may ask the sidewalkers to assist with an emergency dismount. To perform an emergency dismount, the instructor will tell the volunteers to start the emergency dismount procedures.

- ♦ Horse handlers will halt the horses, and stand in front of them.
- ♦ Sidewalkers will remove the rider's feet from the stirrups, put their arms around the rider's waist, and slowly and gently remove the rider from the horse and take them a safe distance away.
- ♦ At this point, all handlers and sidewalkers stay with the riders until given directions from the instructor.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY**

Whispering Manes provides equal opportunity for all volunteer positions without regard to race, color, national origin, citizenship status, religion, creed, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, veteran status, or genetic information.

## **NON-HARASSMENT**

Whispering Manes will not tolerate any form of discrimination or harassment. Harassment includes verbal or physical conduct, non-verbal gestures, sounds, or movements, and the display or dissemination of written or graphic materials which threatens, denigrates, or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of his or her race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, disability, or any other category protected by federal, state, or local law and that

1. has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive volunteer experience;
2. has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's volunteer performance; or
3. otherwise adversely affects an individual's volunteer experience.

Sexual Harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other such verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's volunteer experience; or
2. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for decisions affecting the individual's volunteer experience; or
3. such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's volunteer experience or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive volunteering environment.

Conduct which falls under the definition of sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to:

1. unwelcome physical contact of a sexual nature such as patting, pinching, or unnecessary touching;
2. overt or implied threats against an individual to induce him or her to perform sexual favors or to engage in an unwelcome sexual relationship;
3. verbal harassment or abuse of a sexual nature, including intimating by way of suggestions a desire for sexual relations, or making jokes or remarks of a sexual nature to or in front of a person who finds them offensive;
4. use of sexually suggestive terms or gestures to describe a person's body, clothing, or sexual activities; and/or
5. displaying or posting offensive sexually suggestive pictures or materials, including on email.

In the event that a volunteer feels that there has been a violation of the policy, he or she must report it immediately to the Executive Director. However, if the Executive Director is the person accused of engaging in improper conduct, the volunteer shall bypass the individual and immediately contact the Chairperson of the Board of Directors.

Whispering Manes, with the assistance of appropriate third parties, will conduct a prompt investigation into any suspected violation of the policy. The investigation will be conducted in as confidential a manner as possible, and will seek to protect the privacy of those involved. When the investigation is completed, Whispering Manes will take action commensurate with the scope of the violation, if any. The person who initiated the complaint will be informed of the result of the investigation and will be given an opportunity to comment on it. If, after investigation it is determined that the policy has been violated, then the guilty volunteer may be excluded from the volunteer program. By the same token, if a volunteer deliberately files a false complaint they will be subjected to exclusion from the volunteer program if warranted.

## **DISMISSAL FROM PROPERTY AND/OR PROGRAM**

Grounds for immediate dismissal from the property and the organization include but are not limited to:

- ♦ Endangering the safety of others
- ♦ Inappropriate use of the facilities, mailing lists or monies
- ♦ Disruptive or abusive behavior to the animals or people
- ♦ Disregard of the organization's rules, policies and procedures
- ♦ Possession of a weapon
- ♦ Under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- ♦ Sexual harassment of any person (peers, adults, families, staff, participants, etc.)

### **Volunteer Conduct**

- ♦ Volunteers must conduct themselves in a cooperative and appropriate manner at all times
- ♦ Volunteers who engage in any form of harassment, aggressive or abusive behavior toward themselves or others, including the horses will be requested to leave immediately
- ♦ Inappropriate behavior may result in dismissal from the program

## **VOLUNTEER DISMISSAL POLICY**

Volunteers must to adhere to our rules and policies, including but not limited to the attached Barn Safety Rules included in this manual. If a person is unable to perform their volunteer role, or maintain a reasonable level of commitment, or they fail to observe the rules and policies of the program, they will be given an opportunity to discuss the situation with a Whispering Manes staff member. Whispering Manes reserves the right to determine at its discretion, that it may be in the best interest of the program to terminate a volunteer's involvement with the program.

**WHISPERING MANES THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER  
BARN SAFETY RULES**

1. Always listen and follow WMTRC staff member directions.
2. Respect all persons, animals, and property.
3. Abusive, threatening, or violent behavior or language is NOT allowed.
4. Absolutely no smoking or open flames allowed on the premises.
5. No alcohol or illegal drugs allowed on the premises.
6. Absolutely no teasing, taunting, or harassing of the horses.
7. Do Not walk behind a horse.
8. ONLY WMTRC staff members or approved volunteers are allowed into the stalls.
9. Children must be supervised at all times.
10. No running or loud noises allowed in the barn or around the horses.
11. WMTRC staff member or approved volunteers must be present in order to handle the horses.
12. ONLY WMTRC staff members or approved volunteers are allowed into the paddocks.
13. All program participants must be supervised by a PATH International certified instructor.
14. All required forms must be current and on file in the WMTRC office.
15. All riders must wear an ASTM certified helmet in order to participate.
16. All participants must wear appropriate attire (see Participant Handbook).
17. Do not feed the horses.
18. Approach all horses quietly and calmly from the front side.
19. The barn aisle must be kept clean and free of obstructions.
20. Pets are not allowed in the barn and should not be brought to the farm.
21. Cell phones should either be turned off or silenced.
22. Wearing headphones is not permitted when working with the horses and/or program participants.
23. Immediately report all accidents, injuries, or hazardous conditions to a WMTRC staff member.

## Thank You

We want to thank you in advance and express our deepest appreciation for your interest in volunteering at Whispering Manes Therapeutic Riding Center. We hope that you will enjoy yourself, make new friends, and find personal satisfaction during your time with us.

Please be sure to sign the form on the next page stating that you have read, understand, and will abide by the rules and policies of Whispering Manes Therapeutic Riding Center set forth here in the volunteer handbook.

## Contacts:

Executive Director - Erin Bauer, DVM

Program Director/Head Riding Instructor - Robin Bramson

Phone: 305-596-4204

Email: [volunteer@whisperingmanes.org](mailto:volunteer@whisperingmanes.org)





### Volunteer Acknowledgement

I. I have read, understand, and will abide by the rules, policies, and procedures set forth in the Whispering Manes Therapeutic Riding Center Volunteer Handbook. I understand that if I fail to follow the rules, policies and procedures as defined in this handbook, I will be asked to leave the volunteer program.

II. I have attended the volunteer training session on: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of volunteer)

Volunteer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name of Parent or Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_  
(If volunteer is under 18)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of parent or guardian if volunteer is under 18)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_