



3501 Swan Ave.
Wausau, WI 54401
(715)359-6046

Volunteer Guidelines

Stable Hands is a not for profit tax exempt corporation that provides children and adults the opportunity to extend physical and/or psychological therapy, special education, positive interpersonal skill development and rehabilitative therapy into the horsemanship experience. Stable Hands gently and safely challenges riders to perform a variety of physical exercises and games on horseback. It is a specialized service that brings together a qualified instructor, trained volunteers and gentle horses.

The benefits of therapeutic riding include: greater physical mobility, rehabilitative muscle development, toning and strengthening of the body, self-reliance, decision making experience, enhanced self-esteem/self-confidence, improved listening skills, increased attention span, and improved social skills. Additionally, horseback riding is a fun activity!

Organizational Structure

Stable Hands is governed by a Board of Directors responsible for ensuring that the program's purpose is upheld, setting organizational policies, and maintaining financial and legal standards.

Volunteering

It is our hope to make this a rewarding a challenging volunteer experience. We appreciate your suggestions, comments and concerns. Please keep us informed as to the success of your experience.

<h3>General Volunteer Information</h3>

- 1) Volunteers must be at least 14 years of age to be a sidewalker or horse leader.
- 2) Previous experience with horses or people with disabilities is not required.
- 3) A volunteer application form must be completed to provide us with insurance and basic information.
- 4) Volunteers working with students and horses must be trained, and refresher training events may be scheduled thereafter.
- 5) Volunteers working with students and horses should be able to walk for 50 minutes and jog for short distances.
- 6) Volunteers are requested to act in a manner that will be of credit to Stable Hands.
- 7) Confidentiality is to be maintained regarding our student information, including names of students and the nature of individuals' disabilities.
- 8) A tetanus shot is advised for people working with horses.
- 9) For safety reasons we must request that young children are monitored closely and kept with parents/caretaker
- 10) Animals should not be brought to the program during your volunteer service.

- 11) Volunteers under the age of 16 years must have a parent permission slip to leave the property during their volunteer time with any non-family member.
- 12) Volunteers may not be on Stable Hands (McCarthy's) property without a supervising staff person, unless permission has been granted.
- 13) Any injuries must be reported to Stable Hands' staff immediately.
- 14) Use of alcohol, and non-prescription drugs or chemicals on Stable Hands (McCarthy's) property, or the use of any such substance which may affect volunteer performance will be cause for immediate dismissal from the program.
- 15) Any disorderly conduct will result in a warning to the volunteer. If negative behavior continues, or if any behavior is deemed dangerous, a volunteer may be dismissed from the program for the safety of others.
- 16) Smoking is not allowed in the buildings.

Valuable Traits of a Good Volunteer

Reliability Riders look to their team for comfort and stability.

Punctuality Allows us to stay on schedule and avoid frustration for students, other volunteers and staff.

Relaxation and enjoyment

Relays a confident, pleasant manner to student and horse. An anxious person can make a student and/or horse tense.

Alertness and anticipation

Despite outward relaxation, always anticipate the unexpected. Being focused on the student and horse, with an ear tuned to the instructor is a must.

Listening Ability

A volunteer must be able to hear and accept directions from the instructor at all times.

Responsibility and cooperation

As a volunteer, you are a member of a team including: student, horse, instructor, and your co-volunteers. Each member has specific responsibilities which, when followed through, result in outstanding achievement. The instructor teaches. The leader is responsible for the horse, and focuses on the horse's mood and movements. Sidewalkers are responsible for the balance of the student.

Patience

Endless patience is required to adjust to the often painfully-slow movements of some disabled students. Success takes many forms depending upon each student's individual capabilities.

Communication

It is essential that volunteers share questions, observations, concerns and suggestions. Together we can make this an increasingly better program and of even greater benefit to students!

Basic Safety Rules-Working With Horses

Be alert-every second!

Speak in a normal voice. Do not shout. Never scream.

Move casually. Walk. Do not move quickly or unexpectedly, as the horse may be startled.

Always let the horse know where you are by talking to it or touching it.

Walk in front of horses to get to the other side whenever possible. If you must walk behind, move close to the horse's tail, touching the rump and talking softly.

When leading, walk at arm's length to the side of the horse, even with the head.

Enter or exit a narrow doorway/gate slightly ahead of the horse.

Helmets are required of all riders.

Feed treats from a flat hand - with instructor or staff supervision. Never feed a horse wearing a bit.

WHAT TO DO IF-

A horse steps on your foot-

Push it (on the shoulder or rump) away from you with both hands with even pressure.

A horse pins its' ears back flat to its head-

This horse is agitated. Be alert. If possible, leader should walk the horse forward away from the other horses until the source of the agitation is located and removed.

A horse spins its hindquarters or backs up toward another horse-

This horse is contemplating kicking. Leader should move it forward away from the other horses.

A horse sidesteps toward you in the cross ties-

Push it over gently on the shoulder or flank.

A horse shies or acts very nervous or frightened of something-

Walk the horse away from the source of its' fright. Tell the instructor or a staff member and ask that they assist you.

Do not panic!

Ask for immediate assistance. "I need help now" spoken calmly will get instant results.

Horse Psychology and Handling

- 1) Horses are creatures of habit. They respond best to a daily routine and consistent treatment.
- 2) Negative experiences become ingrained very quickly.
- 3) A horse responds to praise, both verbal and tactile.
- 4) Be aware of the horse's mood. Is the horse bothered, happy, irritated?
Is there anything that can be done to improve the situation?
- 5) Sudden or jerky movements can be frightening to the horse. Move body and hands quietly and calmly. Use a soothing voice.
- 6) Reprimand horse with voice only first, such as "Sassy, quit!!" Few horses need more than this if the horse and handler are clearly aware of what is being asked and what behavior is negative.
- 7) Hold or tie horse with enough rope to allow movement of their head, but not enough to allow the horse to walk around or lie down. Hold 6" from bit or halter when leading. If held too tightly, the horse will become frustrated and toss his head and become unwilling.
- 8) Horses have three visual planes: To the front, side, and rear. Sudden movements near the head may cause the horse to startle and throw the head up.

Lesson Organization and Content

While lessons will be similar to each other, adaptations will exist due to individual needs. Thus, slight differences in procedure and/or sequence may also occur.

Grooming/Tacking of Horses

Staff members will oversee and train proper procedures for grooming and tacking of horses.

- 1) Volunteers remove their assigned horse from the stall after securing the halter and attaching a lead rope under the chin on the halter ring. The horse is then led out of the stall (volunteer exiting ahead of the horse) or groomed in the stall.
- 2) The horse is attached to the nearest cross-tie (if it is to be groomed or tacked up in the aisle) by securing the snaps to the side rings of the halter (along the horse's cheek), one on each side. Remove lead rope.
- 3) The horse is groomed. No more than 2 volunteers are recommended to work on the horse at one time. Groom by: Brush with long bristle body brush (in the direction the hair naturally lays). Gently brush head with a soft brush. Clean hooves with a hoof pick.

During the Lesson

- 1) **Follow the directions** of the instructor.
- 2) **Allow the student to do the maximum that his/her capabilities allow** in following commands and signaling the horse.
- 3) **Sidewalkers or the leader may assist a student** to achieve a command, if necessary, such as helping a hand turn the horse or aiding in following through with a halt signal.
- 4) **Enter the center of the arena** for all adjustments. Try not to stop in line. Return to the center if assistance is needed from the instructor.
- 5) **Encouragement** is needed by the students. However, too much talking from volunteers can be distracting, so a balance is needed. Be honest and sincere with your comments.
- 6) Keep **three horse lengths** between each horse when walking/trotting around the arena or on the trail.

Sidewalking Overview

- 1) The instructor will inform you of the requirements of your particular student. **Listen carefully** and follow instructions as the sidewalker is a very crucial part of therapy. "Holding" a student incorrectly may deter progress rather than assist good therapy.
- 2) A student may not have to be assisted in balancing at all times, but may need a sidewalker in case of emergency. **Stay alert.**
- 3) Do not move a student about in the saddle unless the instructor asks you to do so.
- 4) **If asked to move any part of a student, tell the student what you are about to do.** Move gently. Even though a student may have no feeling below the waist, he/she will be easily unbalanced by a sudden or unexpected movement in the stirrup, leg on saddle, etc.
- 5) The sidewalker is always close to the student. Because of this, the student will often try to talk with you when he/she should be paying attention to the instructor.

- Do not ignore direct questions, but please make an effort to channel the student's attention to the instructor in the ring.** If the student is not paying attention or does not hear the instructor, you can help by repeating and/or reinforcing the instructions.
- 6) **As a general rule, a firm hand on the student's knee gives a great deal of stability** and confidence while allowing students to develop balance. Remember, the instructor will tell you how to assist the student.
 - 7) If you feel that your student needs to halt for safety's sake, please tell the instructor. If the instructor is busy and you feel it is necessary to halt, tell your horse leader.
 - 8) **Do not leave your position as sidewalker to pick up game equipment or for any other reason unless there is someone else to immediately take your place.**

Horse Leader Overview

- 1) ***The leader is solely responsible for the horse.*** While the leader may be interested in what the student is doing, he/she should not for one second take his/her mind off what the horse is doing. ***It is very important that you always anticipate what the horse may be doing next.*** It is when a horse appears sleepy, relaxed, and/or bored that he will startle most easily. Take note of the environment and anticipate any problems (loose paper, dogs, tractors, etc.). A horse that startles will throw his head up suddenly and unbalance the student.
- 2) ***The horse should walk next to the leader*** with the leader's right hand just under or behind his chin. If he does not stay next to you, use an encouraging leading rein and continue to say "walk on" in a kind, asking tone. Do not drag the horse behind you. Hold extra lead rope in left hand (***never*** coiled around hand or fingers).
- 3) ***Look where you are going and plan ahead.*** There should be at least three horse lengths between you and the next horse for safety. Anyone needing to halt for safety and adjustments, (Other than students halting on the Instructors' command) may do so, but must let the instructor and other leaders know first in order to prevent unsafe spacing.
- 4) ***When leading, try to make wide, rounded corners.*** It is difficult for most students to maintain balance on sharp turns. If you must turn sharply, be sure to first warn the student.
- 5) ***The lead rope should never lie on top of the student's reins*** which might interfere with the student's usage of reins or would cause the horse to feel pressure on that rein, causing the horse to lean in that direction.
- 6) ***Remember to leave space for the sidewalkers when walking next to a fence, through a gate or next to a wall.***

Emergencies

- 1) **Falls are very rare, but can happen.** The instructor will take care of the student.
- 2) If a rider does fall, **the leader must pay attention to the horse** you are leading. Never let go of your horse for the safety of all involved if at all possible. A loose horse can cause a chain reaction of problems.
- 3) **As a sidewalker, do not leap or grab at a student** if the horse should startle. This motion may startle the horse even more and unseat the rider even further. If you are close enough to calmly assist the student in maintaining balance, then do so.

- 4) Do not panic if there is a fall. Stay calm. The instructor and staff are trained to handle the situation.

Weather Related Cancellations

The safety and good health of the students, volunteers, and horses are the most important concerns of Stable Hands. For this reason, class will not be held in the event of extreme weather conditions such as severe thunderstorms or tornado warnings. **Please call Diane Abitz at 359-6046 (home) or 302-2484 (cell) if conditions appear to be questionable.** If weather conditions become questionable during a session, the instructor and staff will take appropriate measures according to the situation at hand, for the safety and well-being of our students, volunteers and guests.

On program days, the staff of Stable Hands will be at the Stable by 5:00PM on evenings, and by 9:00AM on mornings.

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