



Volunteer Handbook

<http://heavenlygaitsrc.weebly.com>

Mailing Address: 2059 Ninevah Rd, Knox, PA 16232

Phone: (814) 221-1690

INDEX

Welcome	3
Our Philosophy	3
Mission	3
Requirements	4
Clearances	
Training Session	
Age and Physical Condition	
Time Commitments	
General Information	6
General Guidelines	
Dress	
Parking	
What to Bring	
Volunteer/Rider Interactions	
Confidentiality	
Safety	10
General Guidelines	
Barn Rules	
Catching the Horse	
In the stall	
Volunteer Roles	13
Leaders	
Sidewalkers	
Barn Support	
Horse Knowledge & Handling	20
Equine Senses	
Flight as a Natural Instinct	
Herd Animals	
Working with Special Needs Population	23

WELCOME

Welcome to Heavenly Gaits Therapeutic Riding Center Volunteer Program. We are so glad to have you with us. You have just joined an extraordinary group of volunteers who love our riders and our horses. We realize that there is much to learn during the initial training and early in your tenure as a volunteer. This Volunteer Handbook will provide you with information that will help to make your volunteer experience rewarding to you and of the most benefit for our program. In this manual, you will find useful information designed to help you increase your knowledge and skills working with our riders and/or our equine team. It is important that you feel confident and comfortable in whatever role you choose to serve during your time as a volunteer at Heavenly Gaits. Our extraordinary group of volunteers is here to help you enjoy the amazing experience our horses bring to our riders each session.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Heavenly Gaits is an organization whose volunteers comprise its heart and its hands. Our volunteers are compassionate, caring, committed, and professional. Without them, our work would not be possible. They are role models for healthy interpersonal and social behavior. At Heavenly Gaits we value people and our volunteers are afforded the same respect and care that we provide our clients. Volunteering at Heavenly Gaits provides an opportunity to help others. The blessings our volunteers receive are far greater than those given.

MISSION

It is the mission of Heavenly Gaits Therapeutic Riding Center, Inc. to provide meaningful instructions in horsemanship that accommodate and enhance the quality of life of those challenged by physical, cognitive, emotional, and or social constraints. Heavenly Gaits TRC, Inc. strives to provide a facility where everyone can belong; a place where no one is viewed by their limitations, but for their possibilities. The relationship between horse and rider is a unique bond that can improve the lives of those working with them in many aspects of life. The horses at Heavenly Gaits TRC, Inc. have been gathered individually and joined together for a common goal. They have been prepared and trained to work with various riders and disabilities and

are committed to providing therapy to everyone they encounter.

Requirements

Clearances

Prospective volunteers must obtain the following clearances:

- Report of criminal history from the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP)
- Child Abuse History Clearance from the Department of Human Services (Child Abuse).

This is required for anyone working with minors. These clearances are also required for those helping in most church activities and other agencies that require work with children. If you have these clearances, you can provide copies to Heavenly Gaits or obtain them via mail or at the following links:

<https://epatch.state.pa.us/Home.jsp>

<https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>

Background checks must be renewed every 60 months. Need Help? Contact the CWIS Support Center at 1-877-343-0494 Information on both criminal history and child abuse clearance is contained in the Appendix of this handbook.

Training Session

- To assist in providing the safest and most enjoyable environment possible, new volunteers are required to attend either a one-on-one or group training session, scheduled prior to your first volunteer day.
- This session will orient you to the facility, introduce you to therapeutic riding and the population we serve, and will give you hands-on training related to your chosen volunteer roles (including safety and emergency policies and procedures, general rules and regulations regarding all aspects of the program).
- Please attend the training session with an open mind. Even those with significant horse experience can benefit from training specific to our riders and the procedures at Heavenly Gaits.

Age and Physical Condition

- Heavenly Gaits insurance requires volunteers to be a minimum of fourteen (14) years old to work with horses and participants.

- Volunteers working directly with participants and horses must be able to walk a minimum of sixty (60) minutes and jog for brief intervals.
- Volunteers that are not able to walk with riders can also make a valuable contribution to our program. We also need volunteer assistance that may utilize other talents. Photographers, videographers, writers, event planners, fund raisers, caterers, carpenters, mechanics, office assistants...if you have a skill or talent or trade, please let us know!!!
- It is important that Sidewalkers and Leaders be able to assist with physical activities during the unlikely event of emergency.
- Leading and sidewalking can be physically demanding at times. It is important for you to inform the director if you have a condition that may prevent you from comfortably or safely working for one-hour walking with short periods of jogging. It is not necessary to have previous experience with horses or individuals with special needs.

Time Commitment

- Plan to arrive 45 minutes early on the first day of volunteering at the center. If you arrive and a class is underway, look for the Director or Lead Volunteer for direction. For other sessions, plan to arrive **at least** 30 minutes before class begins to have the horses and facility ready for the class. The earlier that you can arrive, the better prepared all volunteers and instructors can be for the day's lessons.
- If you are unable to attend lessons but are available for a few hours in the morning, you may wish to consider coming out to the barn to begin grooming in preparation for the afternoon lessons **with permission of the Executive Director.**
- Evenings of classes can last for several hours. Please let the Director know what your time availability is each week.
- The Heavenly Gaits program accepts and is grateful for all time that volunteers can commit to the program. However, to provide continuity for the participants, volunteers assisting directly with classes (Leaders and

Sidewalkers) are asked to commit to lessons on a weekly basis. If you are unable to make it to class, please call or text the Director at 814-221-1690 as far in advance as possible. We prefer you inform us at least 72 hours in advance, so that we can find a substitute. If something comes up at the last minute, please call so we know you remain committed and we can count on you for future classes. *Always* sign in and out on the Volunteer attendance sheet located in the Volunteer Room.

- If at any time, you have questions or concerns about your volunteer role or responsibilities, or if you have any general comments or concerns, please feel free to discuss with the director outside of lesson time. You may choose to schedule a meeting or discuss via phone or email. During lessons, all directions from the instructor must be followed to ensure everyone's safety.
- As soon as we decide to cancel a class, we will attempt to communicate via email and text message with the entire volunteer group. Please make sure we have your correct email address. If you are uncertain that class is being held, please text or email the Director to confirm. We attempt to cancel class at least two hours before it is scheduled. Whatever the weather is at your home, it may be different at Heavenly Gaits, so email or text when the weather is questionable. We apologize, in advance, if we fail to contact you in a timely manner of a cancellation. At times we hold make up classes.

General Information

General Guidelines

- Please notify Director of email and/or phone changes as soon as they are in effect. If you decide to discontinue your participation in the Heavenly Gaits Volunteer program, please notify the Director and request to be placed on the inactive Volunteer list.
- Use of the Heavenly Gaits logo without permission from the Executive Director is prohibited.
- Conflicts with other Volunteers and/or staff should be brought to the attention of the Director. The Director will mediate between the concerned parties and will

make every attempt to resolve issues in a timely and fair manner. Volunteers who do not adhere to the rules and procedures of the agency or who fail to satisfactorily perform their volunteer assignment are subject to dismissal.

- No volunteer will be terminated until the volunteer has had an opportunity to discuss the reasons for possible dismissal with supervisory staff. Possible grounds for dismissal may include, but are not limited to, the following: gross misconduct or insubordination, theft of property, abuse or mistreatment of clients, staff, horses or other volunteers, failure to abide by Heavenly Gaits policies and procedures, and failure to satisfactorily perform assigned duties.
- Treat every person and horse with respect. Help each other. We are *all* part of the team.
- Be courteous, kind and act in a professional manner to all clients and other volunteers.
- Speak positively of the Heavenly Gaits program and its participants, staff and volunteers. Any feedback or concerns should be expressed to the Director, not other volunteers, clients, or community members.
- Ask questions if you do not fully understand what is needed.
- If you are an experienced Heavenly Gaits volunteer, mentor new volunteers by helping them understand what is required and emphasize safety.
- Inform any new volunteers you are working with of what type of help your rider needs.
- Clean up after the horses and yourself.
- Be mindful of your focus on the riders and the horses. Limit personal conversations with other volunteers to breaks and private time between lessons.

Dress

- Clothing should be neat and appearance presentable (to show your pride in Heavenly Gaits).
- It is sometimes windier and cooler at the Center, so dress in layers and bring a jacket. We encourage volunteers to wear Heavenly Gaits attire if possible.

- Wear gloves during cooler weather.
- Wear a warm hat in the winter and a sun hat or baseball cap in the summer.
- Wear sunscreen.
- Volunteers should wear their name tags while working with riders.
- Wear sturdy, fully enclosed shoes or boots. Plain canvas shoes, sandals, or other non-sturdy footwear are not permitted. Also, remember that you will be walking in wood shavings, gravel, dust and other materials. These substances can get in soft materials and tennis shoes and can be really irritating!
- Do not wear pants that are excessively long (for safety reasons). Shorts are discouraged but permitted in very hot weather.
- Bear in mind that you may get very dirty (horses shed, and slobber and the barn is dusty)
- No perfumes and/or colognes, or lotions as they can attract stinging insects and sometimes irritate the horses.
- Avoid clothing that may be revealing; i.e. midriffs, low-necklines – remember that clients will have an elevated view of you.
- No dangling earrings or other jewelry as they may be tempting to the horses.

Parking

- Keep barn area entrance clear for riders & wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- Parking is limited, so please take up as little space as possible.
- Volunteers should park along the road away from the barn to allow for close parking of cars of riders and their families.

What to bring

- Bring a water bottle every time you come and drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. There is drinking water available in the volunteer room.
- You may also wish to wear work gloves when performing barn duties or even leading the horse in order to save your hands.
- No cell phones during lessons except in cases of emergency. Keep phones on vibrate.

Volunteer and Rider Interactions

- Try to maintain good eye contact, looking at the individual when speaking to him/her.
- Speak clearly, avoid talking slowly or over-emphasizing words and avoid long verbal instructions.
- Become familiar with hand gestures/body positions that the participant may be using to represent words and concepts. See your instructor with questions.
- Hugs and other displays of affection should be left to our clients to initiate. Please refrain from asking our clients for hugs, and never give them without asking permission

Confidentiality

- Names, specific conditions or other personal details are to be held in strict confidence. Share the stories, the successes and the warmth – but please leave out the personal details. This includes detailed information of participants, other Volunteers, donors, staff and instructors.
- All participants, Volunteers and instructors are asked to sign a PHOTO RELEASE so that photographs can be used for publications and on our website.
- Heavenly Gaits clients are protected by HIPAA laws and protected health information should NOT be shared with any individual who does not have a “need to know”.
- ***Posting pictures or comments identifying a client and his/her disability to Social Media sites such as Facebook is not permitted and may be a HIPAA violation. Volunteers must seek permission from the director before taking any pictures or videos.***
- We place great importance on protecting the confidential information of our participants and volunteers. “Confidential Information” includes but is not limited to personally identifiable information such as names, telephone numbers, and addresses. Specifically, medical information about participants, and information about their special needs, must be protected. Volunteers shall never disclose confidential information to anyone other than Heavenly Gaits

staff.

- Information regarding the horses in the program that deal with the overall health and associated medical treatments should also be kept confidential. There are times when horses are retired and may need to be euthanized. This information could be disturbing to clients, families, and those not familiar with the realities of working with horses.

Safety

General Guidelines

- Do not handle horses without permission/instruction from your instructor.
- Special grooming procedures (especially those that involve scissors or clippers) are not to be done without permission of a Lead Volunteer or the Instructor.
- No weapons of any kind are permitted on the property.
- Always walk around horses and in the barn. No running.
- Always speak to a horse when approaching it and before touching it. Never approach any horse directly from the rear.
- Pet a horse on its shoulder or neck, not on its face, nose, or mouth.
- Always be quiet and calm around horses. They may become frightened by loud noises or sudden movements.
- Control your temper when working with horses and never mistreat them. A horse will respond best when you are kind and gentle.
- Keep your feet clear of the horse's feet. Do not kneel or squat around horse's feet. They outweigh you.
- Do not enter a horse stall or paddock without permission. Do not duck under or climb gates, ropes, stall guards, or fence rails. Undo or open them first.
- Whenever you get out equipment, it is your responsibility to put it away properly.
- Always take off a horse's halter after you have put the horse in its stall. Hang the halter on the hook on the stall door.
- Never leave a horse in the stall with its reins, bridle, or lead rope still attached.
- No matter what you are doing, the safety of rider, volunteer, and horse is the main priority.

- No one – Leader, Sidewalker, rider, staff, or anyone else may tease, taunt, harass, or purposely annoy, scare or irritate any horse. All horses will be treated with respect, understanding, and in a humane manner at all times.
- All accidents must be reported immediately to the director and an occurrence form must be completed by all involved
- All participants, volunteers, and staff are required to wear ASTM-SEI approved headgear while taking part in any mounted activity. The instructor is responsible for ensuring the proper fit for participants. Volunteers only need to wear a helmet if they are riding.
- ***Volunteers wishing to ride horses may do so only with the express permission of the Executive Director. Volunteers wishing to work the horses beyond a walk (trot, canter) must first demonstrate proficiency at these skills under the supervision of the Executive Director.***

Barn Rules

- There is no smoking or use of tobacco products of any kind anywhere on the property – inside or outside.
- Do not feed horses unless directed and supervised by an Instructor. They are on specially supervised diets and extra food items could cause them to become ill.
- Always use quiet voices and calm behavior while on the property.
- Only riders, Instructors, and trained personnel are allowed on lifts and mounting blocks.
- All children must be closely supervised and remain with an adult in the entrance area of the barn or immediately outside the entrance.
- No dogs are allowed on the property or in vehicles parked on the property.
- If you have any questions about ANYTHING, please ask. There is no such thing as a stupid question!

Catching the horse

- Get halter organized in your hands
- Approach from the shoulder. Talk to the horse quietly and get their attention on

you as you approach

- Place (don't throw) the lead rope over the neck and hold both ends under the neck to secure the horse. Then halter using the “hug” technique (halter from the horses left side, not from the front)
- Be aware of other horses in the pen at all times and keep your spacing from them
- Watch for crowding at the gate
- Do not allow horses to graze

In the stall

- One person at a time in the stall is best. If you are teaching someone, assist them, but only two people in the stall at once and ALWAYS both on the same side.
- Never approach a horse from the rear; even the sweetest horse can kick if startled. Make sure the horse knows you are there. Only approach when you know they know you are there and they are facing you.
- Make sure you have plenty of empty space around the stall gate area before entering or exiting.
- Ask the horse to stop and wait until you go through the stall gate first.
- If you need to walk around the back of the horse in the stall or other small area, stay close to the hind quarters and keep one hand on the horse's hips as you move. If you are not comfortable with this, untie the horse, cross in front of him and retie. Never go under the lead rope while horse is tied up.
- Use an arm's length of lead rope to tie the horse.
- Always halter and tie the horse up for grooming and tacking, preferably in cross ties.
- Bring any injuries, heat or swelling to Instructor's attention

Grooming

Grooming is a critical step in preparing the horses for lessons and goes beyond making the horse look good.

- A primary focus of grooming should be on the saddle area to ensure that there is

no mud, twigs, bedding, etc. that may become embedded under the saddle, pads, girth, or cinch that could create discomfort for the horse. Additionally, the overall appearance of the horses at Heavenly Gaits need to demonstrate the highest level of care and serve as an example to the clients of the importance of

- When grooming, be alert for any injuries, insect bites, swelling, or any type of injury. Bring any such injuries to the attention of the instructor.
- Cleaning the hooves is also a critical area of concern as well. Failure to properly clean hooves can cause discomfort and potential health problems for the horse.

Do not hesitate to ask for help!

Tacking

The process can and will be covered in on-site training during scheduled workshops and on an as needed basis. For the purposes of this Handbook there are two key points to remember:

- The placement of the saddle and pad are critical to the horse's comfort and health and the quality and safety of the client's experience. If you are unsure of this, **DO NOT** Hesitate to Ask.
- When removing western saddles, we often hook the stirrup over the horn for ease of removal. Please remember when returning the saddle to the tack room to unhook the stirrup from the horn so as not to bend the fender or seat jockey. Place the billet and girth in the keepers.

Volunteer Roles

Volunteers working with horses and riders must be in good health and able to be physically active, mentally alert and focused for at least a two to three-hour period.

Volunteers must also be able to tolerate heat, cold, dust & wind. If you sign up to volunteer in a class, please plan to attend unless you cancel in advance. The participants, families and other volunteers depend on you being there. You may also get a call or e-mail from our Executive Director asking if you can fill in for others who need to miss their class. Please let us know if there are other days you might be able to fill in.

One of the greatest gifts you have to offer is to be a positive role model. It does not

matter if you are an expert horse person, trained therapist or novice Volunteer. If you are open and willing to learn new things, and if you conduct yourself with respect for people and horses, you will make a significant contribution to Heavenly Gaits. As an added bonus, you will take away skills and experiences that are priceless.

There are many ways to volunteer at Heavenly Gaits. The following describes the roles needed to work with riders and horses, as well as those necessary to make sure the horses and barn are in great shape and ready for lessons.

The two types of Volunteers utilized in classes are LEADERS and SIDEWALKERS.

The primary responsibility of the Leader is the horse. The primary responsibility of the Sidewalker is the rider.

Leaders

- The proper position for the Leader is to walk just back of the horse's head. Do not get in front or too far behind.
- The lead line, which is attached to the halter, should never be used to pull the horse forward. Care must be taken to ensure that the horse's head is not being pushed up in the air since that may throw the rider off balance. Do not let the horse's head get too low to the ground as that may pull the rider forward.
- Keep your hands away from the animal's mouth as they do sometimes nip. A good rule of thumb is to hold the lead line in your right hand approximately 6 to 8 inches away from the ring or buckle. Hold the extra in your left hand but NEVER wrap it around your hand, just fold and hold lightly.
- Remember, just as the size of the horse varies, so does its stride. Adjust your pace to that of the horse so that you are not pulling him forward or holding him back.
- Always use the phrases "Walk on" and "Whoa"
- If the rider is able, wait for their cue to walk on and whoa, then reinforce
- If the horse is walking too fast, slow down your own walk.
- Always keep a minimum of two (2) horse lengths between you and the horse in front.

- To speed up the horse, Leader should “up” their own energy. Leaders can also use gentle tugging of lead rope to increase the horses speed.
- If horse is turning toward the Leader, use pressure to push him back
- While stopped (other than at the mounting block), the Leader should face the horse at a 45-degree angle, and not “play” with the horse. This time may be used as a breather for the horse at times. Do not hold the horse’s head too tightly and allow them to relax.
- Never let the horse use you as a scratching post.
- Be aware of Sidewalkers position relative to fences, trees, walls, barrels, etc.
- Your Sidewalkers are supposed to focus on the rider. Horse interaction is the responsibility of the Leader.
- If a Sidewalker does something inappropriate but not unsafe, take them aside after the class to discuss the situation or ask your instructor to talk to them.
- If a Sidewalker interferes with the horse in an unsafe way, you should immediately speak to the Sidewalker, or let your instructor know.
- Face the horse to back it up
- When trotting, count “1, 2, 3”. The Leader must be more alert. Do not attempt to pull the lead as the horse may try to fight it. Wait for the rider to say “Trot”.
- Know what a reverse on the diagonal is.
- Know what a serpentine is.
- Using a “long lead” means stepping back from the horse and letting the line out some in order for the rider to take more control, but it does not mean letting the lead line sag to the ground.
- Do not “clip off” from a rider without permission or direction from the instructor. “Clip off” refers to unhooking the lead rope and walking next to the horse, but not leading.
- During games:
 - Watch the horse to detect any signs of distress, change in position, or affect. Work with the Sidewalker(s) to ensure success for the rider.
 - Encourage enthusiasm! (Hint: You can be enthusiastic too!). Allow the rider to do as much as possible on their own.

Mounting:

- Lead the horse so that you have a straight shot to mounting block
- Move into ramp using the step method, moving the horses head toward the ramp so the body follows.
- Try not to push the horse over to get it closer to the ramp. It's better to lead him out and around again if he's not lined up close enough to the block. Try to get him to stand squarely, you may need to ask the instructor if she will wait for you to square him.
- Pay close attention to the instructor (or mounting assistant) because he/she will tell you where to position your horse at the mounting block.
- You will want to place the horse as close as possible to the side of the block on which the rider will be mounting.
- Your responsibility while the rider is mounting is to keep the horse standing as calmly as possible. Stand directly in front of the horse.
- After the rider's feet have been adjusted in the stirrups, the instructor will ask the rider to tell the horse to "walk on."
- Walk the horse straight out of the ramp or mounting block slowly, so that the instructor and Sidewalkers can remain close.
- Stop the horse after clearing the ramp or mounting block so the instructor can check girth, stirrups, etc.

Warming up without the rider prior to the first lesson:

- Use this time to work with your horse on speeding up and slowing down to match your speed.
- Do serpentines, practice circles, stopping and starting.
- If the instructor has set up a course, take your horse through it.
- Check the tack for appropriate placement. Tighten girth/cinch as needed.

Warming up with rider with Sidewalker:

- AS DIRECTED BY INSTRUCTOR – Ask the rider to do simple stretching exercises, serpentines, practice circles, stopping, and starting.

During classes:

- Be in tune with and observe the surrounding area for potential distractions for

the horse.

- Watch out for trees and branches.
- Stay close to group.
- Don't let horses graze (eat grass, branches, hay, etc.) while being ridden or when wearing bridle.
- Maintain a minimum of a two-horse distance in all directions at all times. Horses have positive and negative relationships with one another and can sometimes respond to other horses who are too close to them.
- To go around a slower horse, maintain a two-horse distance and announce to the other team that you are "passing on inside".

Emergencies:

- If an emergency occurs, the Leader should turn the horse toward the event.
- If a horse is causing the emergency, the Leader should move with the horse and give them space (know you cannot physically stop a horse from spooking).
- Remain calm and speak calmly to both horse and rider. Do not shout or move radically as this can create greater confusion and panic in the horse.
- ***The instructor will review emergency procedures during volunteer training and can review with others whenever necessary. Each of us is responsible for knowing the procedures! Once the rider has been safely removed, the Leader shall immediately remove the horse quickly and quietly.***

Sidewalkers

- Sidewalkers may assist in bringing the horse to the block by creating a gate/barrier for the horse to enter.
- Sidewalkers should assist the rider with helmeting and mounting, at the instructor's direction. Guide your rider safely as he or she gets to know and care for the horse.
- When mounting, the Sidewalker should assist by applying counterweight to the open stirrup and assisting with moving the client's leg over the horse as needed. When dismounting, Sidewalkers should assist, once again, moving the client's

leg over the horse as needed and, with the instructor, to safely make contact with the ground. Sidewalkers should NOT attempt to mount or dismount the client without the instructor and then, only as directed by the instructor.

- The job of the Sidewalker is to maintain the safety of the rider. Some riders, especially in the beginning stages have a balance problem. Depending on the degree of difficulty, there will be either one or two Sidewalkers assigned to the rider. The instructor will inform you of the requirements for a rider. For example, some riders will not have to be held, but just need to have someone walking beside them in case of emergency. Others will need to be supported for stability, balance, and/or confidence using one of three “holds”; 1) over the thigh, 2) calf hold, or 3) ankle hold. Other riders may require a safety belt attached around their waist for the Sidewalker to hold as needed. Use these techniques only when directed by the instructor.
- During the class itself, your job is to provide safety and support for the rider, specifically to prevent the rider from falling off. Your instructor will give you directions on what type of hold to use with each rider.
- If a rider needs two side walkers, one will speak to the rider, reinforcing Instructor’s directions and offering encouragement. Only one Sidewalker should be the "designated talker" as directions from more than one person may be confusing and overwhelming. This person, will remind the rider about "lazy hands," focusing or shortening the reins, engaging in the activity, etc.
- Do not touch or influence the horse in any way; that is the horse Leader’s responsibility. It is disturbing for the horse to have unnecessary input.
- Be sure not to lean on the horse or rider, as it has a negative effect on them both.
- Observe the rider with your front or side vision at all times. Never become so relaxed that you are not aware of the rider, horse, Leader, instructor and the activities around you.
- Be very careful not to pull down or push up on the belt. It is important that you do not use the safety belt for your own support. If your arm tires, ask the Leader to move to the center so that you can trade sides. If there are two Sidewalkers, trade sides, one at a time making sure to walk in front of the horse. You may also

try touching your thumb and finger together around the side loop. This way you are in position to assist the rider if needed, but you will not give unneeded support or pull them off balance. If fatigue does become an issue, which is possible in extremely hot weather, the instructor will find a substitute

- Because it is very important that the rider does not fall, be prepared at all times. Never walk with your hands in your pockets. Do not grab if the rider starts to slip, gently push them back into the right position. Sidewalkers are very important, as they are constantly aware of the rider and what they are doing. The safety of the rider depends on them. Please stay within arm's length of the horse and rider at all times.
- In the arena, the Sidewalker should help focus the rider's attention on the instructor and activity.
- Riders must keep their helmets on while in the arena. Sidewalkers must watch that the belt and helmets are properly worn. If there is a problem, move to the center of the ring and call the instructor. This would also apply if the stirrups or saddles need to be readjusted.
- The Sidewalkers must also watch for problems such as seizures, dizziness or sometimes, falling asleep. Also, be aware if the rider shows any signs of discomfort. In any of these situations, inform the instructor. Since the rider is always close to the Sidewalker, you may find they want to talk to you. Do not ignore direct questions but encourage your rider to pay attention to the instructor in the ring and reinforce the instructor 's directions if necessary.
- One of the worst distractions in the ring is excessive talking. Please limit your conversations with the riders, and other team members, to what is necessary. Save your conversations with others until the class is over.
- Never mention words like "fall," as in, "You won't fall." That puts a scary notion in their heads. Always say things in a positive light, like "I'm here to help you."
- Whenever there is only one Sidewalker, he/she must always be on the side opposite the Leader.

Gates:

- Swing your lead rope to drive away any horses hanging out by the gate.

- Make sure you have plenty of empty space around the gate area before entering or exiting – this prevents crowding and being in the middle of horse dominance behaviors.
- Open the gate into the pasture, this will help prevent escapes.
- Never let go of the gate, always keep one hand on it, or latch if you must walk away.
- Ask the horse to wait until you go through the gate first.
- Turn the horse to face the gate and ask the horse to halt before releasing from the lead line.

Barn Support

When not working directly with a rider, other volunteer duties involving working in the barn before, during, and after lessons. These responsibilities include:

- Reading the daily rider schedule
- Reading the tack sheet
- Cleaning stalls
- Organizing the tack room to make sure that all equipment is in the proper place.
- End of lesson activities
 - Taking the horses out to pasture
 - Final cleaning of stalls and barn (manure removal, bedding, sweeping, etc.)
 - Rinsing water buckets and refilling
 - Preparing breakfast for the herd

Horse Knowledge and Handling

The Horses at Heavenly Gaits

Our horses are the foundation of our program. They receive top quality care, including regular turn out to pasture, comfortable, clean stalls, regular veterinary care, hoof care, tooth care, and, yes, even massage and chiropractic care when needed. Each horse's work schedule is monitored throughout each day of lessons and throughout the week so as not to overuse any member of the herd.

When selecting horses to be used in the program, many factors are considered. The horses at Heavenly Gaits must possess an exceptional level of tolerance, be gentle, well mannered, and in good general health. Horses that meet these criteria are

accepted on a trial basis during which time they are gradually introduced to the demands and routines of our program. Volunteers play a critical role in preparing horses for each session. We encourage our volunteers to gain additional knowledge of our team through our volunteer trainings & refresher sessions.

Equine Senses

When working with horses, communication is key to providing a safe environment. Developing an understanding of horse senses, instincts, and implications is a step in predicting behaviors, managing risks and increasing positive relationships.

Hearing

The horse sense of hearing is very acute. The horse may also combine their sense of hearing and sight to become more familiar with new or alerting sounds. “Hearing and not seeing” is often the cause of the fright/flight response. Always note the position of the horse’s ears. Forward ears communicate attentiveness and interest. Dropped ears indicate relaxation, inattentiveness (easily startled), fatigue, or illness. Flattened ears indicate anger, threat, or fear. Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest as well.

Sight

Horses’ eyes are geared to finding danger. Their vision is poor close up, but they can detect tiny movements at a distance. The horse’s eyes are set on either side of their head so there is good peripheral vision but poorer frontal vision. Unlike humans, the lens of the horse’s eye does not change shape to focus on objects. Instead, the horse must change his head position and raise or lower his head to focus on a specific object or person. The horse’s visual memory is very accurate. The may notice if something in the arena or trail is different. Allow the horse an opportunity to look at new and smell objects, including allowing him to move his head when taking a look. Always remember a horse’s two blind spots; directly in front and directly behind. The best way to approach a horse is at his shoulder.

Touch

The horse has a very sensitive sense of touch. Horses can detect very light touch or pressure. Each horse has sensitive areas and it is important to be familiar with

them (i.e. – the flank or belly areas). Touch is used as communication between horses and between horses and people. Horses may also use touch to examine strange objects. They will look, sniff, and feel an object with their muzzle. The tongue, lips, and bars of the mouth are especially sensitive places and we need to use caution when a horse has a bit in his mouth. Horses are trained by applying and removing pressure and may be sensitive to soft or rough touch with a person's hands or legs. Handlers should treat horses gently but firmly. Ask the instructor what the best handling technique for the various members of our herd.

Smell

The horse's sense of smell is also very acute, allowing them to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations. Smelling allows the opportunity to become familiar with new objects and their environment. Caution should be taken when carrying treats in your pockets as horses will smell them and may become distracted to the tasks they are performing!

Taste

Taste is closely linked with the sense of smell and helps the horse to distinguish palatable food and other objects. A horse may lick or nibble while becoming familiar with objects and people. Be careful when a horse chooses to lick you as they may also want a little nibble.

"Sixth Sense"

Horses do have a "sixth sense" when evaluating the disposition of those around them. Horses can be very sensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good therapy horse is chosen for his sensitive response to the participant. At times there may exist a personality conflict between handlers and horses. You need to let the instructor know if you are having difficulty working with a particular horse.

Flight as a Natural Instinct

Most horses chosen to work at Heavenly Gaits generally have less of an instinct to get excited and, subsequently, flee than other horses. If frightened, horses would rather run away from danger than stand and fight. At a sudden movement or noise, the horse

might try to flee. Speak to the horse calmly. A frightened voice being held too tightly might try to escape by pulling back. Remember their “sixth sense” and the ability to sense your mood. Try to remain as calm and relaxed as possible. Relax your hold or untie the horse quickly and they will usually relax. If flight is not possible, the horse may try to turn to kick out or face the problem and rear, especially in a confined space such as a stall. If a horse seems agitated or frightened, alert program staff immediately.

Herd Animals

Horses like to stay together in a herd or a group with one or two horses dominant, and a pecking order among the rest. This pecking order may affect the behavior of the horses when in a line during a lesson, and when taking the horses to or from the pasture. Pay attention to the horses’ signals for distress in those and similar situations when horses are in close proximity to one another. Some horses may not like being alone or being behind other horses. This is a consideration when horses are entering or leaving the arena or when a horse loses sight of the others while on a trail ride. Be aware that if the horse in front of a line is trotting or cantering, the horse that is following may also attempt to trot or canter. If one horse spooks at something, the surrounding horses may also be affected. Keep at least two horse lengths between horses during lessons and when leading horses to pasture.

WORKING WITH A SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATION

Working with individuals with special needs may be a new experience for some volunteers. Please take time to know your participant and direct questions to the instructor. Physical or mental impairments may present at birth, or may be due to injury, disease, or aging. Often, a major barrier for individuals with special needs is not the disability itself, but the lack of awareness and knowledge by others. “How may I help?” or “Please tell me what I may do to help you?” are examples of how you might receive input from the client or parent/guardian. Above all, please treat individuals with respect, being considerate and sensitive to their needs.

Wheelchair etiquette: Many people are unsure how to act when meeting someone in

a wheelchair. Always ask the wheelchair user if they would like assistance before you help. Be respectful - a wheelchair is an extension of the individual's body space. Don't hang or lean on them unless you have permission. Speak directly to and be careful not to exclude the wheelchair user from conversations.

Individuals with a visual impairment: If an individual with a visual impairment looks like they need assistance, please ask first if help is needed. Remember that they may only need verbal directions. If physical assistance is needed, allow the individual to hold onto your arm above the elbow and walk one-half step ahead. The individual may also have a specific way that they prefer to have assistance. Repeat or verbalize information that may be written or posted. If you are uncertain of what to do, ask your instructor how you can be of further assistance.

Individuals with hearing/language impairment: Try to maintain good eye contact, looking at the individual when speaking to him/her. Speak clearly, avoid talking slowly or over-emphasizing words and avoid long verbal instructions. Become familiar with hand gestures/body positions that the participant may be using to represent words and concepts. See your instructor with questions.

Non-Verbal or Limited Verbal Expression: Some of our riders are non-verbal or limited in their verbal expression. Allow riders time to respond to questions or verbal commands. Seek ways to communicate through demonstration or non-verbal commands if needed. Never assume cognitive ability with riders. That is, a rider may be quite able to understand directions and complete multistep tasks, while also not able to verbally respond. The instructor will provide information and feedback on how best to communicate with certain riders. Listen carefully to families and caregivers for cues and information about how best to communicate. This includes situations dealing with socio-emotional issues that the client may have experienced involving trauma, good vs bad touching, and the use of positive, consistent, reinforcement.

Resources

Some of the material for the content of this handbook was derived from and books and information from the following organizations:

1. Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Inc. Crownsville, Maryland
2. Pikes Peak TRC, Elbert, Colorado
3. Therapeutic Riding Equestrian Center, Fairview, PA
4. Therapeutic Riding Inc. Ann Arbor, Michigan
5. Trinity Equestrian TRC, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

APPENDIX A

PENNSYLVANIA ACCESS TO CRIMINAL HISTORY FACT SHEET

The Pennsylvania State Police established a web-based computer application called "Pennsylvania Access to Criminal History", PATCH for short. Using this system, a requestor can apply for a criminal background check on an individual. Eighty-five percent of the time, "No Record" certificates are returned immediately through the Internet to requestor.

The information provided by the requestor will be checked against the criminal history database maintained by the Pennsylvania State Police Central Repository. If the subject's information does not match any information in the database, the requester will receive the results instantly over the Internet and the requester can print out the "No Record" certificate. If the subject's information matches information in the database, the requester receives an immediate "Request Under Review" response. A "Request Under Review" response does not necessarily mean that the individual has a record. A manual review of the information will occur. After the review, the status will be updated to "No Record" or "Record". An email will be sent to the requestor when the status has been updated. All "No Record" and "Record" checks must be printed out at the requestor's computer. It may take up to two weeks for a status to be updated from a "Request Under Review" to a "No Record" or "Record".

PATCH accepts both registered users and unregistered users

REGISTERED USERS: Registered Users are defined as companies, agencies, or offices that routinely have a need to make criminal record checks. The company, agency, or office can contact the EPATCH help desk at 888-783-7972, option #3. Registered users are placed into a billing cycle that is invoiced every thirty days. Registered users also have the option to use an approved credit card. Approved credit cards are Visa, Master Charge, Discovery, and American Express Card. They can submit up to ten requests during any one session. If a request goes "under review" it will be updated to the status of "No Record" or "Record" within two weeks. All "No Record" and "Record" checks must be printed out at the requestor's computer.

NON REGISTERED USERS: Individuals are considered non-registered users. They will not be accepted as registered users. Companies, agencies, or offices can also use the system as a non-registered user if they so desire. Non-registered users navigate to the [ePatch Website](#) and select "Submit a New Record Check". The non-registered user can submit up to ten record checks during one session. They must provide the requestor's name and mailing address; information on the individual they want to make the check on; and credit card information. If a request goes "under review" it will be updated to the status of "No Record" or "Record" within a minimum of two weeks but could take up to 4 weeks. All "No Record" and "Record" checks must be printed out at the requestor's computer. PATCH does not maintain requester and credit card information for non-registered users; therefore, this information must be entered each time a non-registered user logs onto PATCH.

VALIDATING CRIMINAL HISTORY RESULTS: The information on a "No Record" or "Record" certificate form can be validated by accessing the [PATCH Record Check Status screen](#) and submitting a search request that contains: the Control Number assigned the request; the Subject's Name as it was entered on the original request; and the date the request was submitted to PATCH. PATCH will find and display the corresponding record check request. Details on the request can be viewed by clicking on the control number. A copy of this certification form can be obtained by clicking on the Certification Form hyperlink provided on the request details screen.

APPENDIX B

PENNSYLVANIA CHILD ABUSE HISTORY CLEARANCE

The Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance can be submitted and paid for online through the [Child Welfare Information Solution \(CWIS\)](#) self-service portal. Submitting an application online allows individual applicants to receive their results through an automated system that will notify them once their results have been processed. Applicants will be able to view and print their results online. The self-service portal also provides organizations the ability to create business accounts to prepay for child abuse clearances and have online access to the results. [Get more information](#) about the electronic submission of child abuse clearances or on obtaining a Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check or Federal Bureau of Investigation Criminal Background Check.