



THERAPEUTIC EQUESTRIAN CENTER

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

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Starbrite Mission and Goals:

Starbrite is a service organization that utilizes equine assisted activities to spread the Love of Christ by empowering youth, adults, and veterans with a variety of needs and abilities.

Our goal is to accomplish this through the following programs:

- Therapeutic Riding
- Horsemanship
- Horses for Heroes

The goals for Starbrite Therapeutic Equestrian Center are the following:

- Provide therapeutic riding for those with physical, cognitive, social, and psychological disabilities.
- Provide education and training for program participants, their families, volunteers, and staff.
- Increase community awareness of the benefits of equine-assisted services and programs at Starbrite.
- Continue to develop and enhance programs necessary to serve our communities and positively impact their families and environment.

Starbrite Staff:

Lauren Buford, Chief Executive
Officer **April Scarbrough**, Program &
Site Director
Melissa O'Reilly, Equine Manager
Melissa Lee, Barn Manager
Samantha Goyette, Volunteer
Coordinator
Elizabeth Moore, CTRI
Sterling Borah, CTRI
Tara Carper, CTRI
Caysi Mcdonald, CTRI-in-training
Helen Clark, Volunteer Trainer

Our Accreditation

Starbrite Therapeutic Equestrian Center is a member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH). Their mission is “ensuring excellence and changing lives through equine-assisted services (<http://www.pathintl.org>).

What is Therapeutic Riding and How Does it Help?

Therapeutic Riding includes horseback riding and other activities with horses that can improve the cognitive, physical, emotional, and social well-being of individuals with special needs. For our participants, experiencing the rhythmic motion of a horse can provide improved flexibility, balance, and muscle strength. Furthermore, horseback riding also provides the natural benefits of outdoor recreation.

Learning about and riding horses can help our participants develop life skills. These skills include identifying and coping with feelings, developing communication and interpersonal skills, setting boundaries, overcoming fears, and learning to trust.

Why a Horse?

A horse is a dynamic living animal that lends itself perfectly to a multisensory approach. Grooming, mounting, and riding all contain therapeutic aspects. Touch, feel, smell, and movement all become important for learning and growing. Posture, balance, coordination, strengthening, and stretching all occur naturally when riding. Further, riding can be used as a form of low-level cardiovascular conditioning. Many individuals that use wheelchairs, braces, crutches, etc. can be independently mobile for the first time while riding a horse. This is very important in helping build self-esteem and confidence as well as for the neuro-connections to the inner core muscles that further contribute to posture and balance.

Important Information About Horses

Horses do not understand human language. Horses speak through tone of voice, energy, and body language. They also have a very acute understanding of cause and effect. The “smarter” the horse, the better they make that correlation. That is the reason that horses are trained so easily. It is also the reason that a horse will not know what we want from them if we give varying cues. Therefore, it is so important that we are so strict in the procedures when encountering our horses. Everything we do is some form of training. We are either solidifying the training and behaviors we want from them, or we are undoing them. We greatly appreciate your support in this!

Starbrite’s horses are hand-picked and highly trained. Due to their specialized training, we often do things differently than other equestrian centers. Because we are under

PATH regulations, our horses are limited in the hours they can work during the day. We must also keep in mind that the population we serve has more trouble with balance and spatial awareness, making the specialized training of our horses very important.

Getting to Know the Starbrite Participants

General Approach and Interaction

It is important to remember that every person, child, or adult is an individual and wants to be treated with that understanding, regardless of having a disability or not. These individuals can be mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. Each one of our participants has their own learning rate, style of learning, unique personality, and temperament, and they all deserve to be treated with dignity, respect, and patience. We must always look beyond the disability into the person, aiming to provide them with a warm and favorable environment to grow and learn in.

Relating to Our Participants

Being around someone with a disability, especially if it is more profound, may be a new experience for you. You may be overwhelmed at first with things that you have never seen or do not understand. This is natural for most people. Allow yourself time to get used to being with a person who has a disability. Do not give up on being a part of the program without a fair try, because your experience can be incredibly rewarding. At first, you may want to do jobs that are not in direct contact with the clients. Feel free to talk to a staff member about this. This is not an uncommon request. If working directly with our participants is a hardship for you, consider helping Starbrite in some other way.

Each of us must learn how to relate to others, especially if it requires new skills and understanding. Here are a few suggestions to create a positive relationship with a client:

- Understand that each of our participants were created in the image of God and deserve the same amount of kindness and love as everybody else.
- Always be your authentic self.
- Recognize that people with disabilities ALSO have goals within their own home; they also have families and, sometimes, a demanding job.
- Emphasize everyone's abilities, not their limitations.
- Always be patient as they are talking, walking, or responding to instructions – let them find comfort in their own pace.
- Explore mutual interests in a friendly way. For starters, talk about the horse and whether the person has ridden before.
- When conversing with the participant or the parent/caregiver near the participant, speak directly to the participant or include them in the conversation. They may not be able to speak, or may not even appear to be listening, but they appreciate the consideration.

- Use conversation and social behavior that you might use in any new situation. Participants enjoy discussing things such as TV shows, school, movies, sports, food, and other things we are all interested in.
- Allow the participant to expand their skills and independence, even when their movements may appear awkward to you. Stepping in to help them too quickly may hinder their efforts.
- Respect the participant's right to independence and their request for the kind of assistance they require.
- Be guided by the wishes of the person with a disability. Talk about the disability if it comes up naturally but respect their privacy as well.
- Appreciate what the participant can do. Remember that the difficulties the participant may be facing could stem from society's attitudes and barriers rather than from the disability itself. People with disabilities generally do not view themselves to be as handicapped as society perceives them to be.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take someone to accomplish or respond to something. Be patient.
- Let the participant set the pace in walking and talking.
- It is okay to say to either a child or an adult, "I'm sorry, I cannot understand you. Please say it again."
- Communicate with your heart and see each person from their heart.
- Acknowledge that we all have the opportunity for vast potential in our lives. Share the feeling that our potential is found in the present moment.
- Please respect the privacy and confidentiality of our participants and their families and refrain from asking any questions about their incapacities or reasons for participating in Starbrite's programs.

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak with any of the staff members after the lesson in private.

Choosing Words with Dignity

Without realizing it, you may have adopted some common reference words or phrases about individuals and groups of people with disabilities in ways that undermine them as functioning, viable persons with their own unique abilities, interests, and skills. When active participation or communication is not possible for an individual with disabilities, they can still feel and express happiness, joy, pride, and a sense of accomplishment when encouraged. At Starbrite, it is important to remember that we are all people first, and when we refer to others in this manner, we exhibit and model an attitude of encouragement.

If there is ever a time when you need to refer to a participant's disability, always mention the person first and the disability second. The disability should never be used as an adjective to describe the individual (i.e., autistic child, Down's child). Instead, it should be used as a noun (i.e., child with autism, child with Down syndrome). Avoid speaking with labels such as "he's crazy" or "she's autistic," or using words that have a negative

connotation, such as “she suffers from a birth defect.” Instead, phrase it as “she is an individual with autism” or “she has a congenital disability.”

Safety at Starbrite

General Guidelines

All individuals on the Starbrite property must comply with the following guidelines:

- For safety, cell phones are to be silenced. They are an easy distraction to staff, volunteers, participants, and horses. If you need to take a call, please step away from the lesson.
- Feel free to bring a cold drink, snack, or lunch and store it in our community refrigerator. Please clean up after yourself so that all volunteers, staff, and participants can enjoy that space.
- Only authorized personnel (instructors, volunteers, staff) are allowed in the stalls, teaching arena, and pastures.
- Mounted persons (program participants, and instructors/staff) must always wear a helmet.

Medical Releases and First Aid

Every volunteer and client is required to provide emergency medical contact information, a medical release authorizing treatment in the event of an emergency, and information about current conditions, precautions, allergies, treatments, or medications which might be important for us to know. A first aid kit and AED is located in the common area of the barn.

Emergency Procedures

In the event of an emergency, staff will take charge. All volunteers, program participants, family members, and visitors are to follow instructions given by staff. If there is an emergency requiring an ambulance, fire truck, or police assistance, a 911 call will be made.

Please keep in mind:

- Emergency information is posted in the common areas for: police, fire, ambulance, veterinarian, farrier, sheriff, and insurance. Directions to Starbrite and the calling procedure are also listed.
- Make sure you give clear directions and answer any questions the dispatcher has.
- Do not hang up until the dispatcher says you are clear to do so.
- There are horse and human first aid kits designated with a red cross located above the medicine chest in the common area.
- Please follow the evacuation procedures. Evacuation maps are posted in each common area.

Mounted Emergency Plan

In the event there is an emergency while a participant is mounted, follow these guidelines:

- All handlers will position themselves off center, facing the horse.
- All side walkers will stabilize the participant with the hold asked of them.
- The instructor will instruct the dismount procedure verbally or physically.
- If circumstances call for the area to be evacuated, the participants will be dismounted from the horse(s) and the horses will be removed from the area by their handlers to a location determined by the instructor. If able, the participant will leave first.
- In the event of a medical emergency, the instructor will determine the necessity of dismounting the participant(s) and notify appropriate personnel.

Fire Procedure

- Fire extinguishers are located in the main office, in the common area next to the tack room door, in the instructors office, and in the mechanical shop/shed.
- PLEASE immediately notify the staff.
- Call 911. Emergency information is posted on the dry erase board in the common area. Follow the written instructions for an emergency call.
- All personnel, volunteers, participants, and family members are to meet at the volunteer/staff parking area in front of main office.
- An experienced person may be asked to get the fire extinguisher from the tack room or from the office if it is a small, controllable fire and use the PASS method.
 - Pull the pin
 - Aim the nozzle at the base of the fire
 - Squeeze the trigger
 - Sweep back and forth
- A judgment call will be made whether participants, families, and volunteers should evacuate and leave the property as well as if horses need to be turned out of the barn. If horses are released, close the gates to prevent horses from returning to the barn.
- A person will be assigned to meet the Fire Department at the driveway entrance and at the corner of FM 848 and Northwest Rd to direct them to the fire.
- Complete an Incident Report.

Medical Emergency

- First Aid Kit is in the common area in the barn.
- If the person in need of Emergency Care is a participant – immediately notify the parent or guardian. This individual has the right to refuse the 911 call, if they are an adult.

- If the situation is life threatening:
 - Call 911. Emergency information is posted in the common area. Follow the written instructions for an emergency call.
 - A person will be assigned to meet the Emergency unit at the driveway entrance and at the corner of FM 848 and Northwest Rd and ask to have the siren turned off before approaching the barn.
 - An individual will be assigned to bring the human first aid kit to the instructor in charge, if necessary.
 - If the person in need of emergency care is the instructor in charge, and there is no other staff on the property, a trained volunteer can delegate assignments to others on the property.
 - Complete an Incident Report.

Tornado/Severe Weather

- Starbrite does not have a storm shelter. Classes may be cancelled for the safety of all people and animals due to weather conditions.
- During periods of extreme or severe weather conditions, weather reports will be monitored closely by an appointed person.
- Starbrite cancels classes due to imminent weather, lightning, tornado warnings, etc. Participants are to leave the property if classes are cancelled.
- Pop-up rain showers do occur from time to time and do not necessitate the cancellation of classes. Students can have an un-mounted lesson and learn about stable management, tack identification, etc., when appropriate.

Inclement Weather

Sessions may be canceled or adjusted on a case-by-case/hourly basis at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer or individual instructor when any of the following conditions are present:

- “RealFeel” is less than 34 {fall/winter} or more than 102 {spring/summer} or at the discretion of the instructor on a case-by-case basis.
- If lightning is present 10 miles or less away
- Heavy precipitation
- Steady winds over 15mph; gusts over 25mph
- Arena or facility conditions

A staff member will use your preferred method of contact to inform you of session cancellations directly. You may also call the office directly at (903) 530-4050 or (903) 312-1050 to check on weather cancellations.

Heat Exhaustion/Stroke

The hot summer months are difficult on humans and horses. Everyone is asked to drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. Classes may be cancelled due to extreme heat and humidity.

Minimum Age Requirement

The minimum age required to volunteer at Starbrite Therapeutic Equestrian Center without a parent/guardian present is **14 years old**. Minor children wishing to volunteer with a parent/guardian present will be evaluated and approved on a case-by-case basis. Horse-handler positions are only available to those 18 years of age and older. Side-walker positions are available to those 16 years of age or older. All volunteer positions are assigned at the discretion of the Volunteer Coordinator.

What to Wear

Volunteers should dress appropriately for horse related activities around children.

- Wear closed-toe, closed-heel, supportive, and comfortable shoes when volunteering. You will be turned away for improper footwear.
- Please dress **modestly** in close-fitting clothing that is weather appropriate. Loose, floppy clothing can get caught and tangled with equipment.
- Long pants are required. You will be turned away if wearing shorts.
- During cooler months, bring a jacket that you can zip, and in warmer months, wear cool clothing. Sleeveless shirts are allowed but please do not wear tank tops.
- Avoid dangly earrings and bracelets that can get caught and tangled, and if you wear a necklace, please tuck it into your shirt.
- Sunglasses are permissible. A hat gives much needed relief from the sun in warmer months and is encouraged, but not required.

Recording Volunteer Hours

It's important to track your time volunteering at Starbrite. Please be sure to sign in on the Ipad.

When You Can't Be There

Notify Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible if you cannot make it to your scheduled shift. You should request a substitute through the VSP system ASAP.

If you are running late, please notify us with your ETA.

Disciplinary Action

Immediate action will be taken when there is failure to meet the guidelines set forth in this Volunteer Handbook, or when verbal instructions are not adhered to.

Disciplinary action including discharge from the program may occur for reasons included but not limited to those listed below:

- Weapons on the property.
- Smelling alcohol on the volunteer's breath or impaired/altered behavior.

- Abusive action or language towards or about an animal, instructor, rider, volunteer, staff member or observer.
- Any sexual action or inappropriate language.
- Inability to follow directions is interfering with the environment.
- Three (3) no call/no show without prior cancellation for a scheduled volunteer shift will result in removal from the semester schedule.
- Other violations of the volunteer handbook, infractions of law or internal policy, or at management discretion.

At any time, if a staff member or volunteer feels threatened, law enforcement officials will be contacted for assistance and security as appropriate.

If disciplinary action is required, Starbrite will review the situation and determine necessary steps. Starbrite reserves the right to engage in coaching, retraining, dismissal, or legal action.

Riding Lesson Timeline

10-15 minutes before class:

- Be wearing or pick up your name tag and sign in on the lpad.
- Check the whiteboard to see what classes you will be assisting in.
- If you are horse handling, take your horse to the designated warm-up area and warm up the horse for the class.
- Review the book in the tack room for information about the tack and assistance needs of each lesson.
- The instructor will fit the participant's helmet.
- Do not enter the lesson area with the participant until instructor is present.

Class:

- Each participant has different needs. Only communicate with the participant at the direction of the instructor.

After class:

- If you are handling the horse, take the horse back to the cross ties. At the instructor's direction, allow the participant to untack their horse and take their tack back to the tack room. If the participant is unable, untack the horse, put the horse back in the stall, and then put away the tack in the tack room.

If you are not clear what you should be doing, ask your instructor or staff member.

- If you are not assisting in the class, check the whiteboard for a list of chores that need to be done in priority order. Make sure that you only do the chores that you have been trained to do. If you are unsure what you are cleared to do, please ask the Volunteer Coordinator or Trainer.

- Observe the participant with your front or side vision always. Never become so relaxed that you are not totally aware of the participant, horse, handler, instructor, and activities around you.
- Be sure not to lean on the horse or participant since this pressure may unbalance the participant or irritate the horse.
- When the participant is using body and leg aids and does not need to be supported, do not touch the horse, saddle, or pad, since this may interfere with the aid applied by the participant.
- You may need to reinforce the instructor's directions, assist the participant in carrying out instructions, or direct the participant's attention to the task.
****Only at instructor's direction****
- Listen to the instructor's directions so you can be ready to reinforce, when necessary, BUT allow the participant plenty of time to process the information before you begin to assist. For example, if the instructor says, "Pull on the right rein towards me," and the participant seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say "right."
- Talking to the participant during a lesson is not allowed unless under the direction of the instructor. Please refrain from any unnecessary conversation.
- Refrain from talking to the other side walker or handler during the lesson unless directly asked by the instructor. Be sure that you do not talk with other participants or volunteers in the arena as they pass you. **Any unnecessary talking distracts the participant, shows disrespect for the riding lesson, and diverts the attention of the team.**
- Participants who need moderate support, especially support to the back, will need more attention. Be sure that you understand and are comfortable with the method of support, both mentally and physically, before moving into the riding lesson.
- **If you become tired during the lesson and would benefit by switching sides, let the instructor know.** The handler will stop the horse, and the instructor will provide support to the participant while you walk to the other side of the horse.
- Be careful not to inadvertently pull the participant towards you when you are physically supporting them.
- When the participant is dismounted, make sure he or she always walks in FRONT of the horse when going from one side to the other.

SPEAK UP IF YOU BECOME FATIGUED DURING A LESSON

Special Notes

Be patient with your participants; give them the time to respond, to try, and to do the task asked of them. The rewards, no matter how small or large, make your volunteer work very worthwhile. Without volunteers, we would have a very difficult time making this program a reality.

It is the volunteer's responsibility to communicate when they do not feel competent, capable, or properly trained to perform any specific activity.

Volunteer Lessons/Riding

Riding lessons and trail rides may be offered to volunteers at the discretion of Starbrite's Program Director. Riders will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis prior to approval. Certain qualifiers must exist to begin riding and/or lessons as a volunteer.

These include, but are not limited to the following:

- Volunteer must show 3 months of consistent service on a weekly basis (or the equivalent in hours and consistency).
- Volunteer of the Month will be given the option for 4 free lessons and/or rides.
- Other than for Volunteer of the Month incentive, other volunteers are encouraged to include a suggested donation of \$20 per lesson/ride.
- Qualified volunteers are also welcome to participate in speciality clinic (Examples of possible clinics: tack, feeding, first aid, lunge, bits, trailer loading, farrier, horsemanship skills, etc)

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Version Update