



Hands & Hearts for Horses

Therapeutic Riding Program

Volunteer Training Manual

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Table of Contents

Welcome to Hands and Hearts	4
History	4
What is PATH Int'l?	4
Mission Statement	4
Programs Offered	4
Benefits of Therapeutic Horsemanship	5
Examples of Disabilities our Riders Have	5
Volunteer Opportunities	5
Lesson Program Volunteers	5
Other Volunteer Opportunities	6
Volunteer Procedures	7
Operations	7
Volunteer Training	7
Lesson/Program Cancellations	7
Signing In/Out	7
Attendance and Commitment	8
Volunteer Policies	8
Clothing and Attire	8
Communication	8
Communication Method.....	9
Physical Ability	9
Volunteer Conduct	9
Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices	9
Weapon Policy	10
Confidentiality	10
Social Media Policy	10
Dismissal Policy	10
Emergency Procedures	11
Universal Precautions	11
Fire	11
Severe Thunderstorm	11
Hurricane	12
Barn Rules	12

Horse Safety	12
Horse Body Language	14
Interacting with Our Riders	15
General Guidelines	15
During Lessons	15
People First Language	15
Sign Language	16
Acknowledgement	17

Welcome to Hands and Hearts!

Thank you for deciding to become a member of our volunteer team! Hands and Hearts would not be able to conduct many of our lessons without the help of our committed volunteers, who are vital to ensuring that our lessons operate safely and effectively. Riders and instructors depend on you each week to have fun and educational lessons. We look forward to working with you and teaching you the necessary skills to contribute to our program! Always let us know if you have questions or concerns at any time throughout your volunteer experience - we want it to be enjoyable for you.

History

Born from the desire to help others, Karen L. Singletary sought a facility at which a therapeutic riding program could come to life. After speaking with her uncle, Dick Singletary, she was pointed in the direction of Terrell Singletary. Having been searching for a way to utilize his fairly vacant facility, Terrell readily welcomed the opportunity to furnish his facility for the benefit of individuals with special needs. With the help of Terrell's only granddaughter, the name Hands and Hearts for Horses was born. They achieved non-profit status along with status as a Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH) center. Housing three specially trained horses to start, the facility was revamped to fit the PATH standard and achieved PATH premier status in 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2018. To date, Hands and Hearts offers therapeutic riding lessons to over 90 riders in individual and group lessons a week, plus several school groups, and is home to 14 active therapy horses and one pony!

What is PATH Int'l?

The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International is a nonprofit organization that was started in 1969 to promote equine assisted activities and therapies (EAAT) for persons with disabilities. PATH acts as an umbrella organization for centers by providing accreditation to facilities and certification for instructors. They provide the facilities with standards that must be followed in order to assure quality horse care, program safety, and administrative responsibility. Hands and Hearts has been a premier accredited center through PATH for the last 19 years. All of our riding instructors are certified, meaning they have been trained to understand participants' different disabilities and how to adjust riding lessons and skills to best benefit each individual rider.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to improve lives through therapeutic horsemanship.

Programs Offered

Therapeutic Riding: This is the activity in which most of our riders participate and consists of either a group or private mounted lesson that focuses on learning riding skills in any riding discipline.

Occupational Therapy on Horseback: This is a therapy that can only be conducted by a licensed therapist. It utilizes equine movement to achieve the goals of a participant's treatment plan.

Benefits of Therapeutic Horsemanship

Physical:

- Improves balance
- Improves body awareness in space
- Improves muscle tone
- Improves posture
- Improves endurance
- Improves fine and gross motor skills

Social/Emotional:

- Increases self confidence
- Builds relationships between people and animals
- Improves communication skills
- Can help overcome anxiety or fear

Cognitive:

- Improves focus and attention span
- Requires following directions with multiple steps
- Teaches safety awareness
- Plus many other educational components

Examples of Disabilities our Riders Have

- Anxiety
- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Cerebral Palsy
- Developmental Delay
- Down Syndrome
- Neuromuscular Disorders
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- PTSD
- Traumatic Brain Injury

Volunteer Opportunities

There are many ways to be involved with Hands and Hearts. Below is a list with descriptions of ways that you can be a valuable part of our team.

Lesson Program Volunteers:

Lesson program volunteers assist the instructors and students before, during, and after lessons. These volunteers help with leading a horse and sidewalking with our riders. You should be capable of walking

for an hour on different terrain, holding an arm above shoulder height while supporting the weight of a rider, as well as jogging for short distances. Our lesson program volunteers also assist with grooming our horses and tacking and untacking them.

Horse Leaders: The leader is responsible for making sure the horse is groomed and tacked properly before the start of each lesson. You must demonstrate basic horsemanship skills in order to be a horse leader during a mounted lesson.

- Responsibility is to pay attention to the horse, not the rider
- Lead rope should be held 6-12" from the snap unless the instructor says otherwise
- Follow directions of instructor
- Limit small talk amongst other volunteers

Sidewalkers: Sidewalkers walk next to the rider to provide physical support as well as to reinforce instruction. They are there to help the rider reach their lesson goals and ensure safety at all times.

- Responsibility is to the rider, not the horse
- Listen to the instructor for prompts or verbal cues
- Limit small talk amongst other volunteers
- Minimize interaction with rider to only what is necessary; excessive input can be counter-productive and may distract the rider.
- Side-walking needs vary based on the individual needs of the rider. Some may just need a helper to help remind them to follow directions (such as pulling reins) while others need physical support to help keep them stable on the horse.
 - This physical support comes in the form of several different holds/positions which we will teach you, to name a few:
 - Ankle hold
 - Thigh hold
 - Combo ankle-thigh hold

Other Volunteer Opportunities:

We always have a plethora of opportunities to help out around the facility; the to-do list is never ending and often includes tasks such as mucking stalls, filling water buckets, minor repairs, cleaning tack, sweeping the aisle ways, cleaning/organizing, etc. If you are ever bored or would like to volunteer outside of lessons, just ask one of our staff or refer to our "other volunteer tasks" board for ideas on how to help out.

We also have a number of other opportunities that are not so horse-related, such as gardening, photography, arts & crafts, etc. We welcome any special talents or expertise you might be able to offer – just let us know and we will try to find a way to incorporate them into the program!

PLEASE NOTE: Volunteers at our facility do NOT ride our horses. This should not be why our volunteers come help, and this should NOT be your expectation in coming to help. Our horses are specifically used for our therapeutic riding program.

Volunteer Procedures

Operations

Lessons are held Tuesday through Saturday. We are closed most holidays, including those reflected on the school year calendar, as well as for special events and horse shows. The month of August we take off in order to give our horses, riders, and staff a break from the intense Georgia heat! Please keep in mind that we are not able to have volunteers on the property without a staff member present for liability reasons, so when we say we are closed for lessons for any of the above reasons, that means we are closed to volunteers too.

Volunteer Training

Hands and Hearts hosts an introductory training once a month for new volunteers. It is mandatory that you attend training before you can sign up to volunteer. If there is a conflict with the time of training, please email our volunteer coordinator at stephanie@handsandheartsforhorses.com, and we will try to work out a different time for you to come get acquainted with our practices. Introductory training helps get you acquainted to the facility and shows you the basics of our lesson procedures.

Advanced trainings in horse leading, horse behavior, feeding, disabilities, etc., will be offered throughout the year for volunteers that are interested in signing up. Advanced trainings help volunteers grow and build confidence. Emails about different advanced training offerings will be sent out for current volunteers to sign up.

Lesson/Program Cancellations

If a lesson is cancelled, the instructor or Program Director will try to reach you in advance by sending an email, calling by phone, text, or through the Remind application. Weather in South Georgia can be difficult because it can be storming on the north side of town but sunny here at the barn. If you have any concern about the weather conditions, please call the barn and we can notify you if lessons are taking place.

If temperature “feels like” below 45° or above 95° lessons will not be held.

Signing In/Out

There is a tablet located on the table to the right when you first enter the barn. Please sign up with the Track it Forward app on your first visit to help, so that you can sign in and out when you come to volunteer. It is the volunteer's responsibility to sign in and out on a regular basis. Documenting hours can help with student service learning requirements, recommendations, volunteer incentives, and can help us apply for and receive grants.

Attendance and Commitment

As a valuable member of the Hands and Hearts team, it is important to us that you honor your commitments and attend regularly. Our riders really count on you for their lessons and like to build relationships with their volunteers. For this reason, it is recommended that you sign up for the same classes each week during a session. The same goes for the care of our horses, they rely on you just as much. If you must cancel, please call us (229-551-0086) as soon as possible so that we may find a replacement.

Volunteer Policies

Clothing and Attire

Dress appropriate for the weather each day you volunteer. It is important to wear comfortable clothing and shoes because you will be walking and jogging. This is a barn and clothes may get wet or dirty, so keep that in mind. We provide sunscreen and bug spray, but in the summer it is recommended that you wear hats to protect yourself from the sun and long pants to avoid bites from bees, horseflies, and red ants. Clothing should be modest and not be revealing or contain obscene language or gestures. Of course close-toed shoes are strongly recommended, specifically of a boot variety (tennis shoes get sand in them very easily and are also not waterproof!). Boots will also provide more protection in the case that a horse were to accidentally step on your foot!

- Must have closed toed shoes, preferably boots
- Minimal jewelry, especially no dangling earrings
- Avoid perfumes and cologne
- No overly loose clothing
- No spaghetti straps, or tube tops
- Shorts are allowed but must not be too short. Remember there are biting insects.

Communication

Please know that we always appreciate advice, feedback, and concerns from our volunteers. You are more than welcome to bring to our attention anything that you feel is important for us to know – whether it be something you're uncomfortable with doing, a concern with scheduling or communication, an issue with another volunteer, or a concern about a situation that may arise. We have an "anonymous box" located near the volunteer sign-in where you can leave these suggestions or concerns if you do not wish them to bring it to our attention personally. We have an open door policy here at HHH!

That said, if you have comments or recommendations during a lesson, we ask that you please wait until after the lesson to bring it to the instructor's attention. Instructors appreciate feedback, but please do not take time out of the riders' lesson to discuss it, especially in a manner that may be distracting or disruptive. We also ask that if there is an issue with another volunteer or rider, that you bring the issue

to a staff member as opposed to confronting anyone directly, so that we can determine the best way to handle the situation.

Communication Method

We ask that all volunteers sign up for communications with us through Remind. This service allows all of our staff members to see your messages right away. As our staff members are often in the arena, the barn, or out running errands to keep our program running smoothly, we often are not able to get to our computers to check email in a prompt manner. Using Remind ensures that you get a fast response. It also makes sure your message doesn't get missed if any of us are out sick or on vacation.

You can join any of these ways:

- 1) Going to the website at <https://www.remind.com/join/hhhwevol>
- 2) Text message: @hhhwevol to the #81010
- 3) If already have the Remind app or download it
 - Click 3 lines on top Left of screen
 - Click Add Class
 - Click Join Existing Class
 - Enter Class Code: @hhhwevol

Physical Ability

We want you to enjoy your time at Hands and Hearts, so if there is anything that may limit you physically, please inform the Volunteer Coordinator. Most lessons involve a fair amount of walking and sometimes a small amount of jogging. Let us know how to best accommodate you if there is a reason you cannot walk/jog for extended periods. There are many ways to help without pushing your physical limitations or risking physical injury.

Volunteer Conduct

While you are at Hands and Hearts, we expect you to treat others with respect; this includes riders, staff, parents, other volunteers etc. Please conduct yourself in an appropriate manner at all times. Inappropriate behavior such as sexual harassment, verbal and physical abuse, or aggressive behavior towards oneself, others, or horses will not be tolerated and will result in termination of your volunteer role. If you see or are victim of any form of harassment or abuse, please notify the Director immediately. We also have safety rules in place which we will go over with you, these are vital to keeping our riders, volunteers, horses, and staff safe and breaking of them can also be grounds for termination. For instance, volunteers are not at any time to operate any of our machinery (such as the gator, tractor, truck, etc).

If you are assigned a task, please make sure you complete the task or alert a staff member if you are unable to do so. These tasks are often vital to the health of our horses and the safety of our riders and we need to know if they are not completed for any reason.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices

We understand that everyone has a cell phone in this day and age, but we ask that you please leave it on the volunteer shelf or in the car during your time at the barn. If you must carry it with you, please place it on silent so that it does not disrupt the lesson. If there is an emergency, let the instructor know so he/she is prepared for you to leave the lesson if you get a phone call.

Music players and headphones are absolutely not allowed during lessons. If you are helping around the barn not in a lesson, having a radio on is fine, but headphones should not be worn. You need to be able to hear others around you and be attentive to the horses. Having head phones on your ears limits your ability to hear any emergencies that could be occurring.

Cameras are permitted, but please be sure to ask permission before taking pictures. Please ask the Director or an instructor so that they can check the riders' files for signed photo releases.

Weapon Policy

Hands and Hearts is not the place to bring a weapon of any kind (knives, BB guns, etc.). Those should be left at home and not be brought onto the premises. Having such weapons is dangerous and unsafe to have around others and our animals.

Confidentiality

You may be trusted with specific information about a rider in order to safely and effectively support them in their lessons. This information is confidential and must not be shared with anyone, including other volunteers, unless explicit instructions are given to do so. This information is kept private for a number of reasons and should not be disclosed. If you see or hear someone sharing information about a rider that is personal, please tell a staff member. You should also respect the confidentiality of other volunteers and staff members. Please ask permission before taking pictures or videos.

Social Media Policy

We understand that you might want to share the terrific work that goes on at Hands and Hearts on social media platforms – Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc. However, we ask that you please remember to respect the privacy of other volunteers, staff, and riders. Do not post anything that is questionable. If you are unsure if something should be posted, please check with a staff member. You do not have permission to use the Hands and Hearts logo in any format. Please use your best judgment when posting anything related to Hands and Hearts on social media, as it is a direct reflection on our program. Some of our riders and volunteers do not wish their photos to be shared on social media and we as an organization must respect their wishes.

Dismissal Policy

Hands and Hearts strives to provide an environment that is fun, educational, and safe for all involved. It is important that volunteers follow all of the above procedures and policies in order to provide the best overall environment. If anyone does not adhere to the above policies, they may be asked to leave the program.

Dismissal of a volunteer will be a last resort in most cases, but immediate dismissal may occur in extreme circumstances. Reasons for dismissal may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Violent behavior towards oneself, others, or program animals
- Theft or damage of property
- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol during your volunteer shift
- Failure to follow policies and procedures
- Harassment of a physical, verbal, or sexual behavior
- Failure to comply with the Volunteer Code of Conduct

Emergency Procedures

Emergencies may arise at any time, and we want everyone to be prepared in the event that something happens. Emergencies include hazardous weather conditions, fire, or an injured horse or human. Telephones are located in the office as well as by the sink outside of the toy room. The horse and human first aid kit is located in the office to the left of the doorway.

Universal Precautions

- *Please use latex gloves when coming into contact with any bodily fluids or blood*
- *Wash hands regularly with soap and water*
- *Resuscitation masks should be worn while performing CPR (if trained)*

Fire

Fire is very serious and can take over an entire barn in a matter of minutes. Please react quickly and follow these steps. Never put yourself in immediate danger.

- Remain calm and call 911, stay on the line to give proper directions to the barn to the dispatcher. (Emergency information is located above the telephone by the toy room)
- Remove all riders and families from the barn
- Evacuate horses to the pasture- start with horses closest to the fire. **Never put yourself or other personnel in danger by trying to evacuate horses from a burning barn!**
- Make sure to be available when the fire department arrives
- Use fire extinguisher to help control a small fire if it is safe to do so.

- Location of fire extinguishers: Next to the sink across from crossties, middle of the aisle on the right of the barn, one in the classroom by the door closest to the driveway, and one outside the office door.

Severe Thunderstorm

In South Georgia, storms can pop up without warning or predictions. If there is lightning and thunder, lessons should be stopped or canceled until the storm has passed. Get yourself and others into the classroom for the duration of the storm, making sure to stay away from windows. Leave horses where they are- in stalls or out in the pasture. Do not put yourself in danger by trying to bring horses into the barn.

Hurricane

Hurricane season is from the beginning of June to the end of November. We are located only 60-70 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, meaning there is potential for us to get hit with a severe hurricane. If a severe hurricane seems to be tracking this way, call the barn before coming out for your shift if the Instructor has not already informed you of cancellations. During extreme storms, it will only be staff reporting to the barn to maintain the horses and property.

Barn Rules

- Smoking is not permitted anywhere on the property
- Please follow directions of the staff and instructors
- All gates must be latched properly, at all times
- Make sure to place the "S" hook latch on the stall doors while horses are in stalls
- Always keep aisle ways clear and free of equipment
- Return items (tack, equipment, supplies, etc.) back to their proper location
- Dispose of trash properly to help keep our rooms and grounds clean
- Helmets must be worn while around and riding our horses- this includes volunteers and staff
- Absolutely no running in the barn or around horses
- Avoid shouting or making loud noises as to not startle horses
- If you notice broken gates, fence boards, equipment, or anything out of the ordinary on the property, please inform a staff member
- Volunteers are never to operate heavy machinery such as our gator, tractor, truck.
- Volunteers at our facility do NOT ride our horses. This should not be why our volunteers come help, and this should NOT be your expectation in coming to help. Our horses are specifically used for our therapeutic riding program.

Horse Safety Tips

- Approach horses in a calm, quiet manner
- Always lead horses with a halter and lead rope

- Never wrap a lead rope around your hand or any other part of your body; if a horse spooks, it could drag you with him. Hold the lead rope in a loose loop.
- Keep reins and lead ropes off of the ground to avoid people and horses stepping on them
- **Never** walk behind the horse. They cannot see directly behind them or directly in front of their nose.
- Horses portray a lot of emotions through their ears, so pay close attention. (See examples on the next page)
- Notify staff ASAP if you see anything irregular about the horses' behavior or appearance.
- **NEVER** hit or slap any horse, even with the aim of "reprimanding." This **ESPECIALLY** applies when a rider is mounted.
- Do **NOT** touch any part of any horse's face; this includes brushing, patting, kissing, etc.
 - This is an important rule for us! We know everyone loves our horses and wants to love on them. However, we have huge amounts of people in and out of the barn every day. While it may be harmless if one person does it with their own horse, that many people touching our horses faces causes behavior problems such as nipping at people, bumping their heads into people, and invading volunteer's space during lessons. Our rule of absolutely no face touching helps curb these behaviors and keep everyone safe.
 - If you want to show our horses affection, you can pet or brush anywhere you would like **EXCEPT** their faces.
- When giving horses treats at the barn, we do **NOT** use our hands, this encourages nippy behaviors and horses can easily chomp down on a finger thinking it is a snack, we have a treat bucket available on a shelf near the sign in tablet that can be utilized instead.

Understanding Horse Body Language

READING HIS EARS

The horse's ears and actions are the key to his emotions. He can tell you what he is paying attention to and how he feels by the way he uses his ears and the way he acts. Following are some tips to his emotions.



Ears forward but relaxed
interested in what's
in front of him.



Ears turned back but relaxed
listening to his rider
or what's behind him.



Ears pointed stiffly forward
alarmed or nervous about what's
ahead. Looking for danger.



Ears pointed left and right
relaxed, paying attention
to the scenery on both sides.



Ears stiffly back
annoyed or worried about what's
behind him: might kick if annoyed.



Droopy ears
calm and resting,
horse may be dozing.



Ears flattened against neck
frenzy angry, in a fighting mood.
May fight, bite or kick.

OTHER SIGNS YOU SHOULD NOTICE ARE:

- Tucking the tail down tightly.
Danger to the rear.
Horse may bolt, buck or kick.
Watch out if ears are flattened, too!
- Switching the tail.
Annoyance and irritation:
at biting flies, stinging insects or
tickling bothersome actions of a rider or another horse.
- Droopy ears and resting one hind leg on toe.
Calm and resting, horse may be dozing.
Don't wake him up by startling him!
- Wrinkling up the face and swinging the head.
Threatening gesture of an angry or bossy horse.
Watch out for biting or kicking.

(Compliments of Maryland Therapeutic Riding Inc. Volunteer Manual)

Helpful Hints for Interacting with Our Riders

General Guidelines

- Always be yourself!
- Keep an open, inviting posture and maintain eye contact
- Treat them as an equal; do not talk down to them or like a child. Recognize their age and treat them appropriately.
- You may offer to help, but do not be offended if the rider declines. Do not assume they need help. Do not do things for them without asking if they need help. Likewise, always let the rider try first before offering help.
- Address the rider directly; do not speak as if they are not in the room. Let the rider speak for himself or herself and avoid answering questions for them. They are their own person!

During Lessons (Sidewalkers)

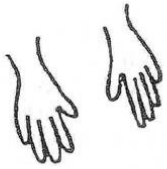
- Try to avoid small talk with the riders. They need to focus on the instructors' directions.
- If a rider needs a direction repeated, please do so, but try to use the same words as the instructor. It helps keep confusion to a minimum.
- Please allow for processing time – sometimes as much as 30 seconds after an instruction for them to attempt it before repeating the direction or else the cycle repeats itself.
- Never speak to the rider while the instructor is giving directions; always direct the rider's attention back to the instructor.

People First Language

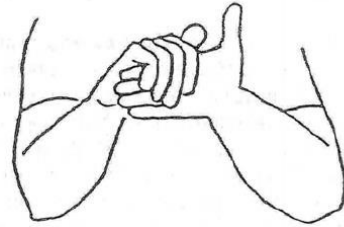
People-first language refers to language that puts the person before their disability. People are not bound by their disability, nor does their identity lie within their disability. Always speak in a manner that refers to the person first.

- Always refer to the person before the disability: “the boy who has autism” is acceptable, but “the autistic boy” is not.
- People are not attached to their wheelchairs; rather, wheelchairs are simply tools that those with a disability use to achieve more independence.
- Always refer to a person's abilities rather than their limitations or disability. Avoid terms like “handicapped” and “retarded”.
- Never focus on an individual's disability; rather, focus on their ability and the things they can do rather than the things they can't.

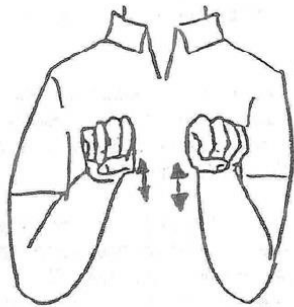
Sign Language
SIGN LANGUAGE



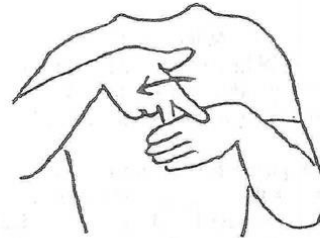
Walk-on
Hands are palm down, wrists go up & down



Saddle
Fingers of right hand hook over flat, palm-in left



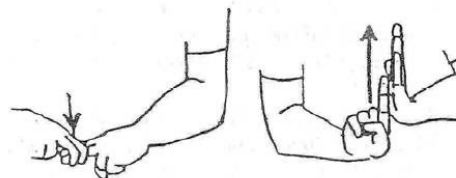
Trot
Close fists with thumbs across fingers, motion up and down from wrists



Ride
Straddle palm-in left hand with first two fingers of hand, slide



Halt/Stop
Side of right flat hand strikes left flat palm



Sit Tall
Sign "Sit" and "Tall"

(Compliments of Maryland Therapeutic Riding Inc. Volunteer Manual)

Acknowledgement

I _____, have read and understand the contents of Hands and Hearts for Horses' volunteer training manual. I will abide by all of the stated guidelines and refer to the manual as needed. If any questions should arise, I will contact the Program Director or Volunteer Coordinator for clarification.

Signature:

Date:

Signature of Parent or Guardian if the volunteer is under 18:
