



Volunteer Orientation

Updated January 2010

Welcome new volunteers, we are delighted to have you join us!

Volunteers drive the Hearts & Horses Program, are indispensable at all levels of the organization *and need not be equine oriented*. Some do bring skills in horsemanship, others bring leadership skills, and others simply bring understanding and acceptance in helping others to seek fuller, more satisfying lives. Volunteers also bring many new ideas and insight to the program and frequently enlist their friends! Ask any H&H volunteer and they will readily state that they gain as much, or more, than they give.

As a volunteer, *you* will learn and achieve, as well! The information in this manual is designed to assist you in understanding some of Hearts & Horses policies and procedures. This handbook is not all-inclusive and does not include every policy or protocol relating to volunteers at Hearts & Horses. Please feel free to ask staff members or seasoned volunteers if you have further questions or concerns. Thank you for your interest in Hearts & Horses Therapeutic Riding Center!

Volunteer Coordinator:	Carrie Coyne (970) 690-0122 cell
Ranch Telephone:	(970) 663-4200
Fax:	(970) 663-3891
Email:	carrie@heartsandhorses.org
Website:	www.heartsandhorses.org
Physical Address:	163 North County Road 29, Loveland, CO 80537
Mailing Address:	PO Box 2675, Loveland, CO 80539
Office Hours:	9:30 am – 3:30 pm Monday through Friday



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Benefits of Equine Assisted Activities

Intrinsically riding a horse is a beneficial activity for any person challenged with a physical, cognitive and/or emotional disability. The uniqueness of equine assisted activities lies in the gait of the therapy horse. The horse having gaits with a three dimensional swinging motion is a living therapy tool for the rider, enabling the rider to experience up/down, forward/backward, and side-to-side motion – all the while stimulating muscle, brain and social activity. Without doubt equestrian activities, in and out of a therapeutic setting, increase a rider's posture, balance, strength, focus and coordination while also positively enhancing flexibility, self-awareness, confidence and a sense of independence. Social and emotional growth is too gained from the natural bond created between horse and rider.

The physical benefits of therapeutic riding include:

As the horse moves, the rider is constantly thrown off-balance. In an attempt to rebalance the rider's muscles are required to contract and relax.

- Improved posture control and balance
- Increased muscle tone and strength
- Greater range of motion
- Decreased spasticity
- Better hand-eye coordination
- Reduction of abnormal movement patterns

The cognitive benefits aide participants to excel in:

The repetition of patterned movements required in controlling a horse quickens the reflexes and aids in motor planning.

- Development of learned skills
- Tactile awareness and sensory integration
- Improved application of direction
- Greater skill at sequencing, patterning and motor planning.

The overall experience contributes to emotional gains by the rider:

Riding provides excitement and the sense of achievement of working independently as well as with a team.

- Independence
- Increased self-control and awareness
- Better emotional control
- Greater self-awareness and self-confidence

The social benefits reaped by riders:

Being involved as a rider creates a shared interest and experience on which to build a social foundation.

- Friendship building
- Increased experiences
- Improving social skills and cooperation



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Mission of Hearts & Horses

Hearts & Horses Therapeutic Riding Center promotes the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social well being of people with special needs through equine-assisted therapy.

History of Hearts & Horses

Hearts & Horses was incorporated January 27, 1997 by a group of volunteers who created the program to replace a former therapeutic program in Loveland, which dissolved when its landowner and executive director moved out of town. The program was organized and financial donations were obtained, allowing classes to begin August 26, 1997 using leased facilities at Ellis Ranch. A long-range plan was created to gain capital allowing Hearts & Horses to acquire its own land and riding facility. In the fall of 1998, the present ranch property was available for purchase and after many hours of work and research on financing options, a lease-purchase contract was made with a local developer and we moved in June 8, 1999! With many hours of renovation by volunteers throughout the community, classes resumed September 20, 1999. During 1998, classes served 64 clients and 1999 classes served 98 clients despite the ranch move and renovation. Over the years Hearts and Horses has grown considerably. In 2007 volunteers logged approximately 12,300 hours and served 278 clients. This affirms the power of volunteers! Future plans allow for additional class offerings and increased riders as we continue to grow. The program continues to improve facilities with renovations and enhancements due to many donations received and many volunteers providing labor.

Accreditation

Hearts & Horses Therapeutic Riding Center has been a Premier Accredited Center through the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, Inc. (NARHA), since 2002, one of six in Colorado. NARHA is a membership organization that fosters safe, professional, ethical and therapeutic equine activities through education, communication, research and standards. The association ensures its standards are met through an accreditation process for centers and a certification process for instructors. NARHA Centers have an exemplary safety record and are recognized internationally as leaders in the field.

Since 1969, NARHA, has provided Equine Assisted Activity and Therapy (EAAT) programs in the United States and Canada through its network of nearly 800 member centers. Each year, dozens of new centers initiate new programs and more than 38,000 individuals with disabilities benefit from activities which include therapeutic riding, hippotherapy, equine assisted psychotherapy, driving, interactive vaulting, and competition. Headquartered in Denver, Colorado, NARHA's mission is to "change and enrich lives by promoting excellence in equine assisted activities."

Accreditation is a voluntary process in which the NARHA Center demonstrates compliance with over 70 stringent, professional standards through an onsite peer review. A NARHA accredited center is awarded the designation of a Premier Accredited Center and must undergo the onsite peer review every five years.



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Introduction to our Therapeutic Programs

- 1. Therapeutic Sports Riding - This includes activities designed by NARHA certified instructors that focus on recreation, education, groundwork, sport or competitive pursuits.**
- 2. Hippotherapy – A direct medical treatment and provided by a licensed physical therapist occupational therapist or speech language pathologist. It literally means “treatment with the help of the horse” from the Greek word *hippos*, meaning horse. It is used primarily for students who have movement dysfunctions. Movement of the horse is the key in therapy sessions and students can benefit from improvement in posture, balance, sensory processing and functional mobility.**
- 3. Horses for Heroes – A pilot program that began at Hearts & Horses in September, 2008 serving disabled veterans utilizing volunteers who are also veterans.**
- 4. Equine Facilitated Leadership Program – Our newest program offered for youth agencies that serve at-risk-youth. Hearts & Horses staff and horses partner with youth agencies such as Reflections for Youth and Mountain Crest to teach leadership skills and help address coping, trust and respect issues directly and effectively. Youth successfully completing a six week groundwork program will then be allowed to participate in a six week riding program. Horses have proven to be versatile and dynamic assistants in reached troubled youth.**

Health professionals providing direct service “therapy” through equine activities should have additional specialized training in the use of the horse as a component of treatment in their respective areas of expertise.

Team Approach

At Hearts & Horses, we practice a team approach. No matter what job you choose to volunteer for at H&H, you are an integral part of the team. For instance, different professionals from the areas of Therapeutic Horsemanship and Equine Assisted Therapy and/or Physical Therapy will work together with our volunteers during class to provide a team approach to services. A NARHA certified professional will always be present to oversee the safety of equestrian interactions no matter what volunteer job you choose.

If you choose to work in the barn, the office – whatever – you are part of the H&H team and are greatly valued.



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Volunteering at Hearts & Horses Therapeutic Riding Center

Hearts & Horses could not operate without dedicated volunteers – they are the backbone of the program. Without the extra sets of hands to help riders sit tall, to groom and care for horses, or to help in the office, it would be difficult to operate the program.

Hearts & Horses takes considerable care and effort to find, train and keep excellent and motivated volunteers. Hearts & Horses offers an ideal volunteer opportunity for adults and young people.

Volunteering provides:

- An outdoor activity
- A service that results in joy and growth for people with disabilities
- Light physical work and exercise
- Interaction with animals in a farm setting
- An expanded circle of friends
- Rewards in smiles, progress in skill and enthusiasm from everyone involved
- A chance to help others
- Community service hours from some schools
- Service hours for service learning students
- Activities for clubs and professional organizations

Volunteer Jobs Available at Hearts & Horses

At H&H there is a job for everyone. It may come as a surprise to you that not all volunteers are experienced equestrians. Certain tasks require horse experience, but that is not necessary in many other volunteer roles. Many of our volunteers begin with little or no experience, but through H&H's hands-on educational opportunities, have gone on to become fine horse handlers.

Equine Support Team: Since our horses are an integral part of the therapy team, their care is of the utmost importance. Barn tasks include:

- Stall and barn cleaning
- Daily turn out/in
- Basic first aid
- Completion of daily barn chores
- Working with instructor to make sure the correct horses/tack are ready for class

Sidewalker: The sidewalker (either 1 or 2) walks to the side of the rider during class. The sidewalker's primary responsibility is for the safety of the student during class. Sidewalker tasks include:

- Greeting the student as he/she arrives
- Remaining with the student and get his/her helmet fitted
- Assisting the student in balancing on the horse, utilizing special holds
- Following directions of the instructor during class and assisting the student only when needed to promote independence
- Understanding the special needs of each student



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- Mounting assists
- Understanding safety and emergency procedures

Horse Handler: The primary job of the horse handler is to deal with the horse, not the student. Horse handler tasks include:

- Grooming and tacking the horse before class
- Maintaining control of the horse
- Tack cleaning
- Understanding horse body language and horse psychology

****Horse handler requires special testing. If you have extensive horse experience and want to be a horse handler, please contact the volunteer coordinator.*

Ring Assistant: The primary job of the ring assistant is to help the Instructor with any special needs during class (i.e. bringing items into the ring, helping with games, switching out sidewalkers who need relief, etc.)

Team Leader: The primary job of the team leader is to act as a mentor to new volunteers and assist staff in a variety of ways, such as:

- Work with instructor on volunteer assignments for a particular class
- Work with volunteers regarding questions, concerns and attendance
- Report any concerns, questions, or needs to the Volunteer Coordinator and/or Program Director

Other Jobs: Because H&H is primarily a volunteer program, if you have any special skills, talents, please let us know – you never know what help we might need. Some of these jobs include:

- Office help
- Accounting & Legal support
- Fundraising & Computer skills
- Facility repairs & maintenance; General Contracting
- Artistic work & Photography
- Serving on Advisory Boards or Committees
- Musical skills & Entertainment
- Public Relations
- Special Projects from individual staff members



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General Volunteer and Ranch Information

Attire

Remember that you will be working in a professional setting. It is expected that volunteers will use good judgment in selecting appropriate clothing. When choosing your clothing – consider “Safety First” – inquisitive hands can pull off your jewelry, excessively baggy clothes can get caught on things, etc.

What to Wear:

- Comfortable clothes-appropriate to the season-that you don't mind getting dirty
- Sneakers or boots
- Sunscreen, bug repellent, sunglasses, hat or visor
- Hearts & Horses Name Tag
- Long hair needs to be tied back

What NOT to Wear:

- Jewelry (necklace, bracelet, hoop/dangling earrings) – stud earrings are ok
- Excessively tight or baggy clothing
- Perfumes that can attract stinging insects
- Bare midriff or other revealing clothing
- Open toe shoes, sandals, clogs
- Clothing with inappropriate slogans, decals, etc.

Confidentiality

We are a professional organization. Hearts & Horses is bound by a policy to maintain confidentiality of information regarding our students, staff, and volunteers. Any personal information you may become privileged to through your work at Hearts & Horses must not be shared with others. Confidentiality extends to security codes to the tack and vet supply room.

Commitment of Volunteers

At Hearts & Horses we are committed to strengthening the relationships between the volunteers and the organization. We have found that taking the time and care in training and supervising volunteers results in “repeat” volunteers. We believe it is important to develop and maintain a relationship of mutual respect with our volunteers. Hearts & Horses would not exist if we did not have our volunteers!

To each of you that agree to commit time, intelligence, energy, and talent to Hearts & Horses we ask that:

- you keep your commitment and are on time for your commitment,
- you listen to us and understand that the Instructor is in charge in the class environment. You accept feedback from Instructors regarding your work and understand that their goal is to offer the best and most effective riding experience for each student,
- you stay alert, listen, and learn from the other volunteers and Instructors,
- you give us your best effort, maintaining enthusiasm and goodwill at all times and
- you let us know if we are not recognizing you for your efforts as a volunteer.



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Contact Information & Email Communication

Please keep all of your contact information current (email, phone number, address, etc.) The primary means of providing written information to all volunteers is email. **If you do not have email, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator frequently for updates.**

Dogs

For the safety of the horses and riders, dogs are not allowed to be brought to the property.

Emergencies

An emergency is defined, for our purposes, as any unexpected occurrence or set of circumstances resulting in a real or potential safety hazard, demanding immediate attention.

Before there is an emergency, be sure you are familiar with general safety procedures, which are posted in the barn. Also, know the locations of the following:

- Telephone for emergency use is in the tacking area of the small indoor arena
- Human First Aid Kits are located in the Wrangler's Rest Area and in the tacking area of the small indoor arena
- Equine First Aid Supplies are in the Vet Room
- Fire extinguishers are located in each indoor arena, each barn, the Wrangler's Rest Area and the office.

Important- The Emergency Information card is posted near the emergency phone in the tacking area of the small indoor arena. It is the policy of Hearts & Horses to call an ambulance if there is any doubt as to the seriousness of an illness or injury without delay.

Logging Volunteer Hours

Please be sure to log all volunteer hours in the logbooks located in the Volunteer Room. Please include your travel time and be aware that you can deduct your mileage on your tax return. Tracking volunteer hours is very important to our organization. The information assists us in applying for grants and recognizing your contribution to Hearts & Horses.

Before leaving the property please log your hours, return your nametag and read any announcements or notices on the bulletin board. If you have an encouraging word for another volunteer, a rider or staff member please share it on our "warm fuzzies" board. All of these items are located in the Volunteer Room in the indoor arena.



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Feeding the Horses

Hay and grain are only to be fed by the designated Hearts & Horses staff or authorized volunteers. Horse treats are to only be fed by participants if the instructor has included it in the lesson plan. Treats are to be fed out of the horse treat buckets. Staff and authorized volunteers may be seen using treats in training; however, no one else is authorized to do so.

Monthly Recognition for Riders & Volunteers

Please take part in recognizing outstanding contributions of other volunteers by completing a “Volunteer of the Month” nomination form. Please help us recognize the hard work and dedication of our riders by completing a “Rider of the Month” nomination form.

Parking

Parking for volunteers is to the south of the McKee indoor arena. Do not drive north of this arena. This area is reserved for horse traffic and staff only.

Private Residences and Surrounding Property

The large house, the caretaker cottage and neighboring property and are off limits to anyone except those residents.

Gates

All gates with the exception of main entry gate are to be kept closed and latched. If you see an open gate, please close it. If you are leaving the property after 5pm, you are responsible for closing the front entry gate.

Heaters

Heaters are to be used during the winter to take the chill off (to approx. 50 degrees). Use common sense when heating the barn. Make sure that all doors are kept closed, or closed quickly to keep the heat in and the cold out. It is also unhealthy for horses to get heated up and then be put out in the cold, so heat the space with them in mind as well. Instructors **ONLY** are responsible for turning on the heaters.

Smoking

For the safety, health, and pleasure of all who spend time at the ranch, smoking is only allowed on County Road 29.

Spectators

Family members and friends of riders and volunteers are always encouraged to visit and observe *quietly*. When lessons are in progress or horses are out, guests are required to remain in the appropriate spectator area and should always enter and exit through the designated area.



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Suggestions for Volunteers

As an H&H volunteer, your role is to be a helpful presence and support to the staff. Over time, you will develop friendships and personal relationships with H&H participants of all ages. This is a wonderful part of being an H&H volunteer, as it allows you to become part of the lives of a variety of people and lets you share your personal skills and talents.

Since H&H works with many children, you will get to know parents, grandparents and siblings of participants who may come along to observe a lesson or therapy session. You will get to participate in the rehabilitation of participants who may be recovering from injury, or share the progress and setbacks of participants who have particular life challenges.

H&H will provide all volunteers with training, where you will be introduced to specific guidelines and rules that we maintain to ensure that the extent of the relationship you have with our participants feels safe and appropriate for everyone.

It is important to keep in mind that “boundaries” are an important part of establishing relationships as a volunteer. While you will become a friend to many of the participants, you should also try to maintain a professional relationship. Remaining professional protects both you and the participant. While you may be asked to physically support a rider on the horse, it is usually discouraged to show physical affection to participants through touch. This is especially true of children. There are many ways you can show that you care and that you are happy to see the participants without touching.

However, boundaries go further than touch. You must prepare yourself for participants, who due to their disability or personality, may be difficult, possibly rude, or overly dependent and attached to you. Remaining professional will help you deal with those situations.

The key to building supportive, safe, and appropriate volunteer relationships is to help where you can, but to keep in mind that you are a volunteer – not a psychologist, counselor, or therapist. Know your limits and role. If you have a question or concern, please feel free to discuss it with a staff member.

Further, for your own safety and the safety of our students, please let H&H know if you have any medical conditions that might prevent you from working at certain tasks, i.e.: high blood pressure, heart condition, allergies (i.e. bee stings), etc. Heat, deep footing on the trails, combined with these conditions, could create an emergency situation.

The volunteers who come to H&H are a dedicated group. Their love, commitment, and enthusiasm are second to none. But when a volunteer signs up to help at H&H, there are all sorts of things to think about.



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Tips for New Volunteers

- Always be on time for your scheduled classes or other tasks.
- Call if you will miss a class. Otherwise, instructors and participants will be waiting for you.
- Be a cheerleader for staff, participants and the program.
- Leave the riding instruction to the instructor. You may want to yell “heels down, Suzanne”, “hold your head up, Billy”, but let the professional do his/her job. You are there to assist. What distinguishes effective class volunteers is that they develop a keen awareness of the instructor/therapist, the rider and the horse. They know when to interact and speak, but also know when to be quiet. Avoid constant chatting with the rider, do not have side conversations with other volunteers and keep focused on the goal of the class. It is a real skill to be an active participant without becoming a distracting presence.
- Make sure you follow all H&H rules, such as not feeding the horses treats. Encourage others to do likewise. Your example counts and you represent H&H.
- If you have a major concern about something (such as an H&H policy) or would like to have something explained to you, set up a meeting with the Volunteer Coordinator or Executive Director. Don't stew on things and do not participate in the “gossip mill” with other volunteers over something that bothers you.
- Know that all your support of H&H at classes, special events and other occasions is appreciated, even if you are not thanked on a regular basis.
- Food goes a long way – keep in mind that staff members, riders and other volunteers get hungry. Donations of delicious snacks are always appreciated.
- Make yourself useful by “finding” jobs, such as doing laundry, offering to fix fences, getting together a gardening group to do some landscaping around H&H, etc. Be creative, but always ask before you do something.
- **Don't burn out.** Volunteer enough of your time to get enjoyment, but not so much that you will feel overwhelmed and start to resent H&H. Be prepared that you may be asked to give more and more of your time if you turn out to be a talented volunteer.
- The Volunteer Coordinator may call you at short notice to sub for another volunteer or to participate in yet another weekend activity or special event. Learn to say “no” if you need a break or if you have other plans and don't feel guilty about doing so. It is the only way to keep yourself fresh for years to come.
- Whether working in the barn or assisting with a class – it gets very hot being outdoors in the summertime in Colorado. Make sure you drink plenty of fluids to keep hydrated.
- Again, due to the heat, if at any time during performance of your volunteer tasks, you feel you need a break to cool off – immediately advise a staff member, the instructor, etc. Do not continue if you feel ill.
- Always sign in upon arrival and sign out when leaving. This way H&H can keep an accurate record of your volunteer hours.



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Hearts & Horses believes that every volunteer contribution, whether large or small, is immeasurable in it's worth and value for our organization and, ultimately, our riders. Please accept our sincere thanks for your willingness to be a part of our organization! Please inform our Volunteer Coordinator of any questions or concerns you may have. Also be aware that many veteran volunteers are happy to answer questions and assist you in any way. Please be willing to do the same for future volunteers. We look forward to meeting and working with all of you!



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