

Volunteer Handbook

Revised January 2021



24861 S. 88th Avenue
Frankfort, IL 60423
708.539.3078
Sojourntrc.org

Volunteers are the Backbone of all equine assisted activities and therapies!

Volunteer duties are varied and many. They include leading/handling a horse during a lesson, sidewalking with participants, grooming, caring for a lame horse, washing water buckets, and cleaning/mucking stalls.

Other volunteer activities that do not involve direct contact with horses include office help, cleaning viewing areas and bathrooms, preparing riders for their lessons, gardening, website manager and more.

All areas of volunteering are essential to running our service operation as smoothly as possible, and it is because of you, our volunteers, that we are able to do so.

Location

24861 S. 88th Avenue
Frankfort, IL 60423

Sojourn TRC is between Dralle and Monee-Manhattan Roads on the East side of the street.

Contact

708.539.3078
bmulry@gmail.com

WARNING
UNDER THE EQUINE LIABILITY ACT, EACH PARTICIPANT WHO ENGAGES IN AN EQUINE ACTIVITY EXPRESSLY ASSUMES THE RISKS ENGAGING IN AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR INJURY, LOSS, OR DAMAGE TO PERSON OR PROPERTY RESULTING FROM THE RISK OF EQUINE ACTIVITIES.

Program Volunteers:

Sojourn volunteers are encouraged to commit to at least one block at a regularly scheduled time. If for any reason you must be absent, please contact us as soon as possible to afford us the time needed to secure a replacement volunteer, especially if you are a horse handler or sidewalker. If absences become frequent, we may suggest an alternative volunteer activity.

Arrival:

Arrive approximately 10 minutes before the start of the lesson. You will be briefed, if necessary, of any changes that may have occurred regarding either the horse or rider.

Volunteer cards are available and we ask you to sign in and sign out. This is important for our record keeping in addition to providing evidence of volunteer hours for schools upon request.

Appropriate/professional attire

- ✓ Closed toed shoes
- ✓ No halter, tank, crop, or tube tops.
- ✓ No low cut necks
- ✓ T-shirts and polo shirts are acceptable
- ✓ No shorts, even in summer. Mid-rise to high rise jeans or breeches afford you the ability to move safely and with ease.
- ✓ Loose jewelry is not recommended as it may get caught up and damaged.
- ✓ Perfumes should be kept to a minimum.

Cancellations

Sojourn, generally, does not cancel lessons except in extreme circumstances. Canceling lessons prevents us from providing services to our clients and is costly on the program. However, we may cancel lessons for the following reasons:

1. Treacherous driving conditions

2. Holidays
3. Insufficient number of volunteers
4. The client/rider canceled
5. The instructor canceled

Should we have to cancel, we will make every effort to contact you via our FB Page, Text, and or Email.

VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

General Guidelines

Grooming Requirements:

Sojourn prefers that those individuals who groom horses have a horse background either with riding, showing, or owning a horse. One who grooms a horse must be able to 'read' its behavior, understand basic anatomy, and be able to let the instructor know if there is a problem.

Grooming protocol:

1. Cross tie the horse in the stall and/or aisle and keep grooming bag outside and slightly to the side of the stall to let others know you are grooming
2. Pick hooves
3. Use the curry comb in small, circular motions to lift dirt and grime
4. Use the hard brush in small, lifting motions to further lift off the dirt. Start from the neck and follow the direction of the hair growth as you continue to flick off what was previously loosened by the curry comb
5. Use a soft brush in long strokes to smooth everything out.

Tacking

Again, Sojourn prefers that those individuals who tack horses have a horse background. Tacking generally requires knowledge of how to secure a girth or a cinch. Here are some general basics around tacking:

1. After tacking, always ask a more seasoned volunteer in this area to check your work. Another set of eyes is always recommended.
2. Never put on reins until the horse is ready to enter the arena for his lesson.
3. While waiting in his stall, make sure the girth/cinch is neither too tight nor too loose as this can pose problems for the horse while it waits.
4. Cinches and girths should be adjusted so that they set just behind the horse's elbow on the girth line allowing for unrestricted movement of the shoulder.

Volunteer positions during lessons:

There are a couple of necessary requirements in order to be of assistance in the arena. It is important to understand that therapeutic riding is not synonymous with pony rides or cookie-cutter riding. Many of our riders enjoy trotting and cantering, which will require physical exertion on the part of the volunteers who handle/lead and sidewalk! Additionally, hearing and following instructor directives is equally important. Volunteers in the arena have 2 very fundamental requirements:

1. Must be able to keep up with the horse when it trots.
2. Must have good hearing so that the instructor does not have to yell out in the arena.
3. No side-bar conversations as the focus should always be on the goals and objectives pertaining to the rider's lesson.

Additionally, no cell phones are allowed during lessons. Complete focus is to be maintained on horse, rider, and instructor throughout the duration of the lesson.

Horse Leader/Handler

Horse handling is an extremely important part of therapeutic riding. The horse handler must be able to 'read' each horse she or he handles, hold the rope appropriately and lead from both sides if necessary. The basics of handling are:

1. The handler's body should be somewhere between the horse's head and shoulder. The area within the neck is preferred.
2. There should be about a foot to a foot and one half between the hand and the ring of the halter.
3. When halted, the handler should stand in front of the horse at a slight angle.
4. The lead rope is held in two hands. The remainder of the rope is to be held in a 'butterfly' manner to ensure the lead rope is not dragging and posing a threat to the handler tripping.
5. Horse handlers must be aware of their current position in space in addition to where they are headed with the horse. Handlers should be aware of the obstacles that may be set up in the arena and allow enough room for two sidewalkers to move with ease.
6. Horses tend to get uncomfortable with crowding. The handler is to ensure there is plenty of space between and among horses. The general rule of thumb is to not be less than three horses in front, behind, and to the side.

7. The handler is to maintain a 'flat' presence during the lesson. The horse at work is not considered a pet. The horse may not be allowed to rub against the handler. Instead, it is best to **keep the horse moving** in a calm and rhythmic manner.
8. The instructor may notice that the connection between a horse and handler is not optimal or that the handler is unable to control a horse with ease. She may ask someone to step in and substitute and require more training so that the handler becomes more able to direct the horse. This should not be taken personally as it takes some time to be a handler who can work with many different horses and the varied temperaments that come with them.
9. It is important that the handler follow the directives set forth by the instructor in the arena. The instructor will often prep volunteers regarding each lesson before riders are mounted and, often during the lesson.

Sidewalkers and Spotters

The primary role of the sidewalker and spotter is to ensure the safety of a rider by walking alongside the rider, who is mounted atop a horse. There may be one or two sidewalkers depending on the needs of the rider. Following are some general guidelines with regard to sidewalking and spotting.

1. It is important to stay within the area of the rider's knee. If the volunteer is too far forward or too far behind the rider's knee, safety could be compromised for the rider and possibly the volunteer. For this reason, sidewalkers need to be in good enough shape to be able to keep with the position at walk or trot, and in rare instances, canter.
2. If a rider is assigned two sidewalkers, it is important that those volunteers apply the same level of support in hold and pressure on both sides. In general, light pressure is best.
3. There are 3 types of holds that may be used during a riding lesson that include the thigh hold, the ankle hold, and the thigh and ankle hold:
 - a. **THIGH HOLD:** grip the front of the saddle for hold and gently lay your arm over the rider's thigh above the knee. This hold is used when there are 2 sidewalkers and not recommended with one sidewalker. It is important to take care not to press the elbow into the thigh of the rider or on the horse.
 - b. **ANKLE HOLD:** Using the hand closest to the rider, place hand behind the rider's heel.

- c. **THIGH & ANKLE HOLD:** Hold the thigh as indicated in the thigh hold. For the ankle, place the hand farthest from the rider over the top of the ankle just behind the stirrup.
 - d. Never hold a rider by the waist as it tends to throw the rider off balance.
- 4. Some riders do not require an actual hold. Instead, the sidewalker(s) walk near the knee of the rider and provide words of encouragement per the instructor's direction. Sidewalkers in this capacity are acting more as spotters.
- 5. Sidewalker(s) and Spotters should never have their hands in pockets.
- 6. If a horse or rider knocks over or drops a manipulative, do not stop to pick it up, the instructor will do so when appropriate.
- 7. In some instances, sidewalking can be extremely physically demanding. In these circumstances, sidewalkers should carefully switch sides, one at a time, with another volunteer.

Mounting and Dismounting

In most cases, instructors dismount riders to the ground or ramp. There are two main different mounting and dismounting techniques: croup and crest.

Additionally, mounting and dismounting may be done from the lift. Mounting and dismounting are very specific and only the instructor and fully trained volunteers are responsible for those tasks.

The following description of mounting and dismounting is credited to:

Path International Instructor Education Guide (2019 PATH International all rights reserved).

Croup Mount:

- 1. Bring the horse to the mounting ramp or mounting block. The horse handler is heading up the horse and making sure the horse is still and quiet.
- 2. Make sure stirrups are down
- 3. The rider approaches the horse and holds the reins, then placing both hands on the pommel (front) of the saddle.
- 4. The rider places his left foot in the stirrup. The instructor or designated volunteer may block the rider's left foot to keep it stable.
- 5. The rider pushes upward and swings his right leg over the horse's croup. If necessary, the rider may receive assistance from the instructor or volunteer with regard to swinging the leg over and helping the rider's leg clear the horse's croup.

6. There should be a volunteer on the offside designated to place weight on the offside stirrup while the rider is in the process of mounting to prevent the saddle from shifting sideways.
7. The rider will move from the mounting area where adjustments can be made in addition to a second safety check.

Crest Mount:

1. Bring the horse to the mounting ramp or mounting block. The horse handler is heading up the horse and making sure the horse is still and quiet.
2. Make sure stirrups are down.
3. With assistance, the rider backs up to the edge of the mounting ramp with her back to the horse.
4. The rider places one hand on the instructor's shoulder and reaches for the back of the saddle with the other hand.
5. The offside volunteer assists the rider in sitting sideways on the saddle, facing the instructor.
6. The rider then swings her right leg over the horse's neck as she is assisted in facing forward from the sideways position. Support from the offside volunteer and instructor may be required in order to provide support to the rider's hips or back.

Croup Dismount:

1. If the rider is using reins, the horse leader holds the mount, or the rider may, depending on the skill level of the rider. If the rider is in a lesson where she is being led by a handler, then the handler heads up the horse. The handler or horse leader's role is to keep the horse calm and quiet throughout the dismount.
2. The rider removes both feet from the stirrups.
3. If the rider is wearing a safety vest or safety belt, have a volunteer available to assist in removing the vest or belt so that the rider does not get caught up on any part of the saddle.
4. If using an English saddle, pull the stirrup iron forward to ensure no part of the rider's shoes or clothing gets caught up, or worse, to prevent the iron from striking the rider in the face.
5. The rider puts both hands forward near the horse's withers and slowly swings her right leg up and over the horse's croup. The offside volunteer may need to help the rider's leg clear the horse's croup.

6. The rider then slowly slides her feet toward the ground. The instructor or trained volunteer should ensure that both of the rider's legs are underneath her body. Assistance may be provided if necessary.
7. If a walker or wheelchair is required for the rider to exit the arena, have a volunteer available with the equipment to ensure a safe exit.

Crest Dismount:

1. If the rider is using reins, before dismounting, the rider will turn the reins over to the horse handler/leader. The reins are to be moved up higher on the horse's neck, toward the head, to prevent the rider's leg from getting caught up in the reins.
2. The rider takes her feet out of the stirrups.
3. The offside volunteer stands ready to support the rider's back as the instructor guides both of the rider's legs over the horse's crest (neck). The offside volunteer is available to help the rider raise her leg high enough to clear the horse's crest.
4. The rider, with help from the offside volunteer supporting the rider's back, and instructor, spotting the front, will end up sitting sideways on the saddle, facing the instructor.
5. The rider should have her left hand on the cantle and the right hand on the pommel to support her own balance.
6. As the rider begins her dismount, help her roll to her right hip and guide the rider's hips so as to face the horse's head.
7. Continue guiding the rider's dismount so that both feet land away from underneath the horse.
8. If a walker or wheelchair is required for the rider to exit the arena, have a volunteer available with the equipment to ensure a safe exit.

Again, mounting and dismounting a rider is particularly important and should be conducted by the instructor and/or with volunteers who have been specifically trained in these procedures.

Rider Fall and Emergency Dismount

If the rider should fall from a horse, the horse handler/leader will move the horse a safe distance away from the rider. The sidewalkers will keep the fallen rider relaxed and calm. All other riders in the arena will stay at halt. The instructor will assess the rider's needs and act accordingly.

Emergency Dismounts

An emergency dismount may be called by anyone who feels that there is a possible imminent danger to the rider, volunteers, and/or horse. Should an emergency dismount be deemed necessary, the general procedures should be executed as follows:

1. The horse handler controls the horse.
2. Remove rider's feet from stirrups.
3. The sidewalker's body should face the rider's left side.
4. The sidewalker should wrap her arms around the rider's waist.
5. Pull the rider's back toward sidewalker's chest in a hugging manner.
6. Pull the rider a safe distance away from the horse.
7. The horse is led safely away from the dismounted rider with particular attention to keeping the horse's hooves away from the rider.
8. The instructor will then assess the situation and determine how to proceed.

Professional Behavior

Sojourn TRC is a 501(c)3 business that is required to adhere to professional standards. All volunteers and staff are required to maintain a demeanor that respects other individuals' boundaries.

Volunteer Dismissal Policy

Sojourn Therapeutic Riding Center reserves the right to dismiss any volunteer for any reason including, but not limited to:

1. The work and/or barn environment is detrimental to a volunteer's health.
2. The volunteer is unable to complete assigned tasks due to emotional instability and difficulty coping.
3. Constant absences
4. Behavior that could lead to harm of people, animals, or property.
5. Not following Covid-19 Policy (social distancing, refusal to wear mask or wear mask correctly, etc.)

Covid-19 Policy and Guidelines

1. All volunteers MUST wear masks.
2. Volunteers are not to congregate. Sidewalkers will wait in the arena.
3. Horse handlers may go to the assigned horse and bring them to the line-up in the arena.

4. Assigned groomers, after grooming the horse, will place grooming tools in a bucket for disinfecting.
5. Assigned volunteers will be disinfecting tack between riders.

Riders, Parents, Volunteers, and all who enter Sojourn TRC

- ⦿ Please do not attend if you are not feeling well.
- ⦿ Temperatures will be taken upon entry. Temperatures must be below 100.4
- ⦿ Wash hands or use hand sanitizer when entering the barn.
- ⦿ Maintain social distancing of 6 feet or more.
- ⦿ If you test positive for Covid-19, please inform Sojourn at your earliest convenience.
- ⦿ Respond to Covid-19 Questionnaire.

Disinfecting Procedures

Sojourn TRC has hired Fresh Air Experts to deep clean and disinfect viewing area, kitchen, bathrooms, laundry room, and tack room. Sojourn continues to use their product for sanitizing in between deep disinfecting.