



VOLUNTEER MANUAL

Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center

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www.cheffcenter.org

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OUR MISSION STATEMENT

To improve the emotional and physical well-being of individuals through the therapeutic use of horses, and to serve as an international training and education center for therapeutic riding programs.

We are delighted you are joining us to learn more about our volunteering program at the Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center. We depend greatly on our volunteers. They are the lifeblood of our program. As a non-profit organization, we could not possibly pay the amount of staff needed to work in the ring and barn with our students. When you volunteer at the Cheff Center, please know how very much all our staff appreciates your efforts. We could not do what we do without you!

Learning to be an effective Cheff Center volunteer is an ongoing process. Whether you have horse experience or not, some questions will come up. Please do not hesitate to ask if you are unsure about something. Safety is our number one priority.

Be sure to sign in each day you volunteer on the computer in the volunteer room.

ALSO: PLEASE REMEMBER THAT WHENEVER THE GULL LAKE SCHOOLS, (OUR DISTRICT), ARE CLOSED DUE TO WEATHER, SO IS OUR PROGRAM AT CHEFF.

In addition to volunteering in class, we have a list of ongoing projects for volunteers to do if they arrive early or want to stay late.

As you become familiar with our staff you will learn our names. However, please feel free to call our **Volunteer Coordinator at 731-4471**, if you have any questions regarding the volunteer program. Other staff members may be reached through our voicemail system. We welcome your questions and comments.

We recognize volunteers as crucial to the success of the Cheff Center's Therapeutic Riding Program. They are critical to our continued growth. It is a privilege and a responsibility to be a volunteer. Volunteer commitment must include the following:

- ❖ Support for the Center's Mission and Goals
- ❖ Support for staff, other volunteers, and horses
- ❖ Represent the Center with a positive image
- ❖ Support for current programming and future growth
- ❖ Have an ability to be a team player; to work with staff to implement programs throughout the organization.

Rules

1. You must have completed your liability packet before volunteering.
2. You must complete the orientation process before working with the horses.
3. If you are offered a chance to ride, all volunteer riding must be approved by an instructor and/or the volunteer coordinator.
4. Helmets must always be worn while riding.
5. Dogs are not allowed at our facility.
6. Volunteers must be accompanied by staff while in pastures with horses.

Thank you for volunteering. We welcome you to our Cheff Center family!

DISCRIMINATION DISCLOSURE

It is the policy of the Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center to provide equal opportunity for all persons and to prohibit unlawful discrimination because of age, disability, race, color, creed, religion, gender, national origin, or veteran status. This policy applies to all participants, potential participants, volunteers and employees.

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS

The Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center strives to provide the safest possible environment for students, patients, volunteers, visitors and staff. In an effort to maintain a safe environment, Cheff will conduct criminal background checks on all volunteers and employees.

The business manager is responsible for conducting the background checks. Criminal history information will be used for the purpose of evaluating candidates for employment and/or volunteer positions and shall in no way be used to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability or age. This policy does not automatically exclude from consideration for employment or volunteering all individuals with criminal convictions. However, Cheff Center does not accept individuals with a conviction of sex offender.

Failure to disclose criminal convictions or guilty pleas is grounds for termination of employment or volunteering.

THE CHEFF CENTER RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REFUSE THE SERVICES OF, OR DISMISS ANY VOLUNTEER IF IT IS DETERMINED TO BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE ORGANIZATION.

KEY INFORMATION

Volunteers must be at least 13 years old and physically fit to walk approximately one hour and jog occasionally. Volunteer roles will be determined by the instructor.

We ask that volunteers choose a time to volunteer and come at that time regularly each week.

Every volunteer is covered by our insurance while on the premises of the Cheff Center, so please inform us of any accidents, no matter how minor they may seem. All volunteers must complete liability forms before they can participate in a class.

The Cheff Center is closed at different times during the year. When in doubt please phone the center at **269-731-4471**, check our website at www.cheffcenter.org or our FaceBook page at www.facebook.com/cheffcenter.

- ❖ When Gull Lake Schools are closed DUE TO BAD WEATHER, the Cheff Center will also be closed. Examples: snow days, tornado warnings. School closings and Cheff Center closings are announced on Channel 3 news also.
- ❖ The Cheff Center may be closed due to special occasions and/or fundraising events. Any closing dates outside of the regular schedule will be posted online and at Cheff.

If for any reason you cannot come at your regularly scheduled time, please call or e-mail us as soon as you know.

Recommended dress code:

- ❖ Comfortable walking shoes. (Boots are recommended – NO Sandals)
- ❖ Clothing may be determined by weather. We do ask that the clothes worn while at the Center are clean, do not have holes in them, and do not contain inappropriate language or potentially offensive pictures.
- ❖ **NO Cropped T-shirts, tank tops, tube tops or short skirts.**

IMPORTANT: Due to the fact that our students have disabilities, it is requested that the volunteers do not handle students unless instructed by a staff member. Handling a student without knowledge of their disability could be harmful to the student. When in doubt, please ask.

We also ask that you keep in mind that names of the students and their specific disabilities are not for public knowledge. Confidentiality is very important to us here at the Cheff Center and we ask that you respect the privacy of our students by not discussing them outside of the Center.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR WORKING WITH HORSES

- ❖ Never approach a horse directly from the rear. Always try to approach from the side, talking to him in a low voice. Keep your hand on your horse when walking around him.
- ❖ Always speak to a horse when approaching or touching him. Horses doze while standing up and may jump or kick out if startled so always talk in a clear, projecting voice.
- ❖ If the horse hangs back on the end of the rope, lead him a few steps forward before touching him with your hand.
- ❖ Use a long lead rope and lead the horse from the left side. Your right hand should be 6 inches from the halter and your left hand holding the rest of the lead. **Never wrap a lead rope around your hand, wrist, or body.**
- ❖ Walk beside the horse when leading, not ahead or behind him. Position yourself between withers and head.
- ❖ Do not allow yourself to become distracted. Watch where you are going and keep an eye on your student as well.
- ❖ If a horse pulls back, step back with him rather than pull against him. You cannot out-pull him. Push him back further then ask him to step forward.
- ❖ Pet a horse on his shoulder or neck. Don't play with his mouth or muzzle. This can encourage nipping.
- ❖ Always walk around your horse, never under the rope. Remind students of this too.
- ❖ When leading into a box stall, turn the horse so the he faces the door. Close the door leaving enough space for yourself, but not the horse before releasing the lead rope.

- ❖ Keep your head in the clear when bridling the horse. He may throw his head to avoid the bridle.
- ❖ Stand with feet well back in the clear and reach forward when saddling your horse.
- ❖ Adjust saddle carefully and **tighten the girth only enough to hold the saddle in place.** (It will be tightened again prior to the student mounting.)
- ❖ Always remove the lead rope before taking the halter off your horse. This may prevent him from pulling back. **Never remove a halter before the horse is completely in the stall or pen.**
- ❖ Keep reins and lead ropes off the ground.

VOLUNTEER POSITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Many students at the Cheff Center need assistance in riding their ponies or horses. This is when the volunteers take an active part in the program. The following paragraphs will explain in detail what is expected of you as a volunteer at the center.

THE LEADER:

The most important thing to remember when leading is to encourage the rider to do as much as possible on his own. The rider will not benefit from riding if everything is done for him/her. Help only when the rider cannot do it alone. The instructor will tell you how much help your rider will need.

Mounting with the block or lift:

Most students will mount using either the block or lift. You will bring the horse alongside the structure to be used by taking your position in front of and facing the horse and backing in, and stop where the instructor has indicated. Your primary responsibility for the duration of the mounting procedure is to keep the horse quiet and still. Once the student is on, you will proceed out of the mounting area into the arena, and stop once inside so that stirrups may be adjusted. After all of the adjustments have been made you may take your place at the head of the horse and proceed to a position designated by the instructor, or begin walking.

Leading in the arena:

The leader may have a number of different responsibilities. The most important of these is to assist the student in maintaining control of their horse. Some students may only need help if the horse gets stuck or starts to go too fast, others may need the volunteer to do the majority of the work. If you are ever unsure as to how much help or what kind of help to give to your student, please ask an instructor. In some instances the volunteer may be asked to assist the student in focusing on the directions of the instructor.

Some Helpful Tips:

- ❖ It may be necessary to assist your student in maintaining appropriate space from the horse in front.
- ❖ An appropriate distance would be a minimum of 6-10 feet, though we often use the size of an elephant as a reminder.

- ❖ When the students are standing still, i.e. in line up at the beginning and end of a lesson, the volunteer should step in front of the horse to keep them from moving. You may allow the horse freedom to move his head but keep them from walking around. If they seem to be getting restless feel free to rub their neck and talk quietly to them.
- ❖ When working in conjunction with sidewalkers, sure to allow enough room for the sidewalkers as you proceed around the arena. Be sure there is enough room between the horse and the wall for the person to walk comfortably.

At the trot:

Often during a lesson the students will be asked to trot. As trotting is faster than walking, the leader will need to be more alert. Check to be sure the student is ready before trotting. They may hold the handhold with both hands if appropriate; they should have both feet in the stirrups and be in the center of the saddle. For horses that are reluctant to trot it may be necessary for you, as the leader, to help the student by beginning to jog and telling the horse to trot. It is very important to remember to stay between the horses head and shoulder when trotting. Falling too far back may make the horse feel as if it is being chased and they may subsequently go faster than is ideal. **START EASY AND KEEP THE TROT SLOW AND CONSISTENT.**

During the games:

The leader plays an important role in every game. The instructor will give rules for the game to be played. Watch your rider to be sure that they understand the directions. Then, feel free to talk to that student and pep him/her up for the game. It helps a great deal if the leader is excited about the game too. However, it is important to remember that it is the student who is to be playing the game, not the volunteer. Allow the student to do as much as possible on his/her own.

Dismounting:

Unless otherwise specified, the instructor will dismount the students. You will receive instructions as to whether you will bring your student out beside the ramp or remain in the arena. Throughout the dismounting procedure, as when mounting, the volunteer's primary responsibility is to keep the horse quiet and still. If the student is able to dismount without the instructor's assistance then the leader will stand in front of the horse watching the rider in the event any assistance is needed.

THE FLOATER:

As a rider progresses he may be able to control the horse in some situations, but may need some assistance in others. A floater remains in the same position as if leading, but the lead rope is tied to the saddle or removed. The floater acts as the safety net for the student.

THE SIDEWALKER:

In Therapeutic Riding it is the Sidewalkers who normally get the most hands-on responsibilities. He or she is directly responsible for the rider, and in that role, he or she has the capacity to either enhance or detract from the lesson. Your instructor will tell you how much physical and/or verbal assistance to give the student.

Some Helpful Tips:

- ❖ In the arena, the sidewalker should help the student focus his/her attention on the instructor. It is important to avoid unnecessary talking with either the rider or the other volunteers as too much input from too many directions is very confusing for the students. If there are two sidewalkers working with one student, one should be designated as the talker.
- ❖ When the instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process it. If they seem confused you may then help them. Ex. If the instructor says “Turn right...” and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say “right” to reinforce the command.
- ❖ It is important to maintain a position by the rider’s knee. Being too far forward or back will make it very difficult to assist with instructions or to provide security if the horse should trip or shy.
- ❖ There are two ways to hold on to the rider without interfering.
 - The most commonly used is the **Thigh hold**. The sidewalker grips the front of the saddle with the hand closest to the rider. Then the fleshy part of the forearm rests gently on the rider’s thigh. Be careful that the elbow does not accidentally dig into the rider’s leg.
 - Sometimes pressure on the thigh can increase and/or decrease muscle spasticity, especially with the cerebral palsy population. In this case the “**therapeutic hold**” may be used. Here, the leg is held at the joints usually the knee and/or ankle. Check with the instructor/ therapist for the best way to assist. In the event of an emergency, the arm –over-thigh hold is the most secure.
- ❖ Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider’s waist. It offers too much support so the student does not develop their muscles, and actually can pull the student off balance, making it more difficult to ride.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Falls in Class:

Falls in class are very rare, but can and do happen. If a student falls from his/her horse the rest of the class must stop immediately. One of the most important things to remember in this situation is to REMAIN CALM! The instructors at the Cheff Center are trained to handle emergency situations, so your job is to keep the horse you are working with quiet and your student as calm as possible.

- ❖ In the event of a fall it is your responsibility to ensure that the student with whom you are working is halted immediately and remains standing until given further instruction from the instructor in the lesson. **DO NOT BRING YOUR RIDER INTO THE CENTER OF THE ARENA!** If the horse from the fallen student is loose, the horses out on the rail provide a stopping point for that horse.
- ❖ If it is your rider who falls, your primary concern is to handle the horse you are leading; the instructor will handle the fallen rider. It is important that you move the horse away from the rider to ensure the horse does not step on the rider.
- ❖ The instructor will do a first aid examination. If the student is unhurt he/she may be escorted out of the arena and appropriately remounted. If the student is injured and requires emergency medical treatment the remainder of the class will be dismounted and escorted out of the arena. A volunteer or staff member will be sent to make the 911 emergency call.

Incidents occurring in the barn area:

This may include anything from being stepped on, to being bitten, to seizures. In all cases the incident should be reported to the instructor. As a volunteer it is your responsibility to keep the student calm. Move them away from the horse, except in cases of seizure, where you move the horse away. The instructor will assess the student and take appropriate action.

Fire:

If there is a fire during a class, it is important to REMAIN CALM!! The class will be halted immediately and the students will be dismounted. The instructor will escort the students out of the arena as quickly as possible. Volunteers will be put in charge of assisting with the dismounts and will be responsible for the horses. If time permits, you will take the horses out of the arena and turn them out into the paddock behind the barn. If possible, equipment may be removed. If there is not time to get the horses out safely, the volunteers are asked to simply remove the bridles and exit out of the arena as quickly as possible. Everyone should report to the front parking lot so that we may count to be sure everyone is safely out of the building.

Tornado:

The Cheff Center operates as usual in cases of Tornado watches. If, however, the watch is upgraded to a warning we do not hold classes. If the upgrade occurs during a lesson, the students are to be dismounted immediately. The instructor will escort them to the tornado shelter. (In this facility the designated tornado shelters are the men's and women's bathrooms in the barn.) The volunteers are responsible for assisting with the dismounting and for taking care of the horses afterward. If time permits, the horses may be taken and turned out into the outdoor paddock. If possible, equipment may be removed. If time does not permit, the volunteers should remove the bridles and let the horses loose in the arena. They should then proceed to the tornado shelters.

In any type of incident, whether it is horse related or weather related, we rely on our volunteers to help the students remain calm. This allows the members of the staff to do their jobs efficiently and increases the likelihood that the incident will not become a major disaster.

We recognize that volunteering at the Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center involves an ongoing process of training and learning. We welcome all questions and suggestions, and once again, thank you for your interest and help in volunteering!! We truly could not do what we do without you!

PLEASE SIGN AND DATE AND RETURN THIS PAGE TO CHEFF



Volunteer Agreement

I have read and understand the Volunteer Manual. I agree to the terms set before me. I understand that failure to follow these rules and terms may result in loss of volunteer privileges.

Volunteer Signature

Date

Staff Signature

Date