

Volunteer Overview Course



HeadWinds Therapeutic Horsemanship LLC.

Welcome. You are participating in an educational experience brought to you by the PATH International for individuals who are interested in serving as volunteers at one of our more than 700 independently operated PATH Int. (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International) Centers in North America.

You may be totally new to the field of equine assisted activities, may already be a volunteer at a PATH Int. Center or may just be in the process of joining the volunteer ranks of an existing PATH Int. Center.

While there can be great variation in how local PATH Int. Centers are structured and in what type of programming they provide, it is our hope that the information we have gathered for you in this course will give you an overview of what you might expect – and what might be expected of you - as a volunteer at a PATH Int. Center.

The Goal of this Overview Course:

This course is intended to provide a general audience with a broad perspective of many aspects of serving as a volunteer at a PATH Int. Center. Completing this course should offer the prospective PATH Int. Center volunteer an excellent starting point and an understanding of what awaits them at a PATH Int.Center. It is important to understand that this on-line educational opportunity does not replace a more in-depth volunteer training at a PATH Int. Center, but certainly can be used as a supplemental component to a local volunteer training. In order to prepare a PATH Int. Center volunteer for service, theoretical background information such as is provided in this course must be supplemented with practical, hands-on education at the PATH Int. Center.

Please Note: Completing this overview course does not result in a certification. Local PATH Int. Centers will and should still require you to complete their own training process explaining the unique aspects of their work and facility.

Mission Statement

The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International is a membership organization that fosters safe, professional, ethical and therapeutic equine activities through education, communication, standards and research for people with and without disabilities.

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International headquartered in Denver, Colorado serves over 700 member Centers in North America and over 6000 individual members worldwide. Our services in equine assisted activities reach over 35,000 participants with varying ability levels of all ages. *PATH Int.* Individual membership comprise a group of individuals representing, riding instructors, administrators, therapists, volunteers, parents and participants.

PATH Int centers couldn't operate without dedicated volunteers. Most *PATH Int* centers are non-profit, tax-exempt organizations. Each Center is founded independently and has its own unique personality. All have chosen to become members of the national association and to comply with the standards set by *PATH Int* for our members. Becoming a member of *PATH Int* helps centers establish credibility and demonstrates a commitment to safety and professionalism.

PATH Int Centers serve people with a wide variety of cognitive, physical, emotional, social and behavioral challenges. The focus at *PATH Int* Centers is not on disability, but rather ability.

There are over 5,500 specially screened and trained equines that participate at *PATH Int* Centers. They comprise all breeds, sizes, ages and training levels. The average *PATH Int* horse is sound of mind and body.

Since 1969 *PATH Int* (formally known as NARHA) has grown from a small group of individuals who provide therapeutic riding for individuals with disabilities to

over 700 *PATH Int* Centers in North America offering a variety of different equine assisted activities for people of all ages with varying ability levels. *PATH Int* Centers have an exemplary safety record and are recognized internationally as leaders in the field.

Benefits of Equine Assisted Activities at a Glance:

At *PATH Int* Centers the term “equine” includes horses, but also may include donkeys and mules. While horses are the primary equine found there, some programs work frequently with the “long eared” members of the equine family.

The horse produces rhythmical, multi-dimensional movement that re-creates natural movement. The horse’s movement will facilitate activation of postural control, balance, motor and sensory systems.

- Because movement is so closely linked to other functions, the participant will likely experience other systemic changes such as those in levels of arousal, cognitive function, mood or behavioral responses.
- Equine assisted activities offer the opportunity to be in control of one’s own mobility.
- Equines allow a person to arrive at, perhaps a previously inaccessible, location with grace and elegance.
- The equine can often become an equalizer, offering people who move at very different speeds to get to their destination together.
- For individuals accustomed to clinical setting, the barn is a totally new environment and lets them “start fresh”.
- The relationship with a horse or donkey can serve as a “bridge” between a psychotherapist and a client
- Equines enable people with physical disabilities to be able to join with or successfully compete against those who have different physical function.
- Animals can model positive and negative personality traits for mental health clients.

An Introduction to *PATH Int* Programs

As a national association *PATH Int* has developed programs that are designed to benefit everyone concerned with equine assisted activities.

Accreditation

Accreditation is a voluntary program in which a *PATH Int* Center demonstrates compliance with over 70 stringent, professional standards through an onsite peer review. A *PATH Int* accredited center is awarded the designation of a Premier Accredited Center and must undergo the onsite peer review every five years. Centers who are too new to accomplish accreditation are designated as *PATH Int*

Centers. Centers who choose not to seek accreditation are designated as *PATH Int* Affiliated Centers.

Instructor Certification

Certification is a process that culminates in professional credentials for an individual NARHA Instructor of Therapeutic Horsemanship. Certification stays with the instructor no matter where they teach. All instructors at a *PATH Int* Center must be certified or directly supervised by a certified instructor. The following certification options are available: *PATH Int* Registered, Advanced, Master or Adjunct Certification. The criteria are based on five areas: equine management, horsemanship, instruction, teaching methodology, and disabilities.

Center Insurance

All *PATH Int* Centers should maintain liability insurance coverage. *PATH Int* membership and compliance with *PATH Int* standards can help a Center attain coverage.

Committees

As an association of grassroots members, *PATH Int* relies on the work of committees (such as Health and Education, Certification, Accreditation etc.) These committees consist of member volunteers, who contribute to the work of the national association and the development of the field. You will find that staff members or volunteers at your local Center may be or may have been on a *PATH Int* committee. All *PATH Int* programs were developed and are maintained by committees together with a small staff at the *PATH Int* office. In the future you may become interested in volunteering on a national committee.

Annual Conference

Held every November at locations around the United States, this conference offers lectures and demonstrations on new research and innovative approaches to equine assisted activities. The conference is open to all interested parties, with a reduced rate to *PATH Int* Individual and *PATH Int* Center members. The average attendance at a conference is 600 people.

Regional Conferences and Workshops

There are numerous *PATH Int* approved educational opportunities throughout the year in the eleven *PATH Int*. Regions. To find out about other educational opportunities in your area,

Publications

As a membership organization *PATH Int.* publishes several newsletters and one magazine in addition to the *PATH Int.* website.

PATH Int's STRIDES – a quarterly magazine providing education and information for members active in equine assisted activities.

PATH Int's News- an electronic newsletter mailed out twelve times year to all *PATH Int*

PATH Int Membership

PATH Int is a membership organization. Different levels include Individual membership, Professional membership and Spirit Club membership. As a *PATH Int* Center volunteer we encourage you to consider joining *PATH Int.* as a member. This will provide continuing education to you regarding equine assisted activities and you will be able to support the work of the national association. The easiest way to start with *PATH Int.* membership is at the Spirit Club level (click here to join).

Volunteers are an important part of any *PATH Int.* Center activity. Without the extra sets of hands to help riders sit tall, to groom and care for horses, or to type the newsletter, it would be difficult to operate a Center.

PATH Int. Centers take considerable care and effort to find, train and keep excellent and motivated volunteers. *PATH Int.* Centers offer an ideal volunteer opportunity for thousands of 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
- Intangible rewards in the smiles, progress in skill, and enthusiasm from everyone involved
- A chance to help others
- PE hours for home schooled students
- Service hours for service learning students
- Activities for clubs and professional organizations

What jobs are volunteers at local *PATH Int.* Centers asked to do?

Act as a side-walker for mounted participants in the arena

Lead horses during a riding lesson or therapy session

Prepare and tack horses for lessons

Clean tack

Become part of the horse care team

Sit on a Center advisory board
Provide professional services such as accounting, legal support or any number of other invaluable “pro bono” work
Perform clerical work in the office
Organize fund-raisers or public relations campaigns
Work toward becoming a *PATH Int.* Instructor
Some dedicated volunteers eventually transition and become staff
And on and on!

As a volunteer at a *PATH Int.* Center you have the right to...

...know your job duties
...feel wanted and appreciated
...enjoying your work

It is your right as a volunteer to expect adequate training, consistent communication and frequent heartfelt signs of appreciation.

Volunteer Requirements

Centers will have a list of volunteer jobs which may range from baking cookies for the bake sale, to side-walking or horse handling. Some jobs will require physical strength or height and may not be appropriate for young children. Each Center sets its own policies regarding specific volunteer requirements.

PATH Int. Centers will want to know if you have any conditions that may prevent you from working a full hour or more in a riding arena. Hot weather, deep footing in the arena combined with a known medical condition, could create an emergency situation for a volunteer. It would also inhibit the safe conduct of a lesson or therapy session and could endanger the participants. Be sure to indicate if you have high blood pressure, allergies (to bee stings, for example), heart conditions, seizure history, shoulder or arm weakness or other conditions that may be important.

Relax; there is a job for everyone regardless of special needs or conditions. However, the Center needs to know some basic information on all volunteers in order to gage their ability level and find the ideal position.

It may come as a surprise to you that not all *PATH Int.* Center volunteers are experienced equestrians. Horse experience is essential for leading a horse, but not necessary in many other volunteer roles. Many fine horse handlers begin with little or no experience and most *PATH Int.* Centers offer hands-on educational opportunities for you to learn more about horses.

Most importantly volunteers must be willing to commit themselves to a regular day and time for a certain number of weeks. They must also commit to notifying the volunteer manager as soon as possible if illness or time conflicts prevent them from performing their assigned duties. This notification is necessary so that a substitute may be found in time.

Some Centers may provide a volunteer sub list and volunteers may be asked to find their own replacement. Remember, the participants count on volunteers in order to be able to ride. Murphy's Law applies: If one volunteer is unable to come at their appointed time and does not give ample notice or locate a sub, several more will do the same for that particular lesson and might cause a rider to not be able to ride.

Feedback

Frequently tell the Center leadership how you feel and if you are enjoying your volunteering experience. If you have questions, problems, suggestions or concerns, do not be afraid to bring them up at an appropriate time.

Trial Period

A specific trial period for new volunteers is not unusual at *PATH Int.* Centers. At the end of this period, you may be asked to evaluate your performance. Take this time to understand your strengths and weaknesses and decide whether or not this volunteer opportunity suits you. You must understand from the beginning that equine assisted activities are not something in which everyone feels comfortable or functions adequately, even with the best of intentions. An unhappy volunteer can be detrimental to the program. You will know if you might be happier in a different position at the Center or if this volunteer opportunity is just not for you.

Criminal Background Checks

Some *PATH Int.* Centers now conduct criminal background checks on all staff and volunteers. While this pre-requisite to volunteering may seem unpleasant, it is a wise precaution to protect children and adults who may not be able to protect themselves.

Volunteer Training

PATH Int. standards outline training session requirements for volunteers. Most require one or more mandatory training sessions. A volunteer training session may consist of:

- Orientation to the facility, its programs, and equine assisted activities in general
- Volunteer responsibilities
- Emergency procedures
- Confidentiality issues
- Safety rules and regulations
- Introduction to types of disabilities seen in the program

Training sessions are diverse and may consist of the following:

- Explanation of the structure and objectives of the Center's programs
- Discussions on the participants with disabilities served by your Center
- Tour of the facilities, including the parking area, rest rooms, tack room, stable, arena,

telephone, first aid and lights.

Introductions of staff members who will be interacting with the volunteers

Explanation of equipment

Safety issues such as how to avoid blood borne pathogens and other possible infections when working at the center

Explanation and demonstration of horse handling, grooming and tying quick-release knots

Explanation and demonstration of handling techniques for participants, for example during mounting and dismounting

Use of role-play techniques to illustrate what to do in the following situations:

- a. Arrival and departure of participants
- b. Inside the stable area
- c. Mounting and dismounting procedures
- d. Elaboration on the differing roles of the side-walkers and leaders
- e. Practice exercises and games
- f. Confidentiality policies
- g. Appropriate verbal and physical interaction with riders

You may be asked to watch a lesson demonstration.

General expectations the Center will have of you may include:

a. **Attire:** Safety first. You will need to walk easily through loose footing, mud and manure. Working in close range to horses can result in getting feet stepped on. Closed shoes are a must. Consider boots. Sandals or clogs do not comply with PATH Int. standards. Pants that fall down are a hazard. You'll need both hands to help a rider. Minimize jewelry and you'll appreciate missing the experience of having inquisitive hands reach down to tug your earring. Dress for the weather and know where you'll be working. In the winter, only a lucky few ride in heated arenas. In the blazing summer sun, an indoor arena may seem like a blessing, but you'll still be hot. Bring a water bottle. Wear a hat and sunscreen if you are outside and want relief from the sun. Leave expensive jewelry or precious stones that could be lost in the arena at home.

b. **Appearance.** Remember that you will be working in a professional service setting. It is expected that volunteers use good judgment in selecting appropriate clothing that is not overly revealing (no bare midriffs or short shorts), tattered, or that depicts inappropriate slogans or decals. Consider that participants will sit high on the horse, looking down on you while you are side walking.

c. **Promptness, regularity and reliability** are your responsibilities. Instructors, therapist and most of all the participants depend on you to be there!

d. **Learn your role as an assistant** in relation to the instructor, therapist, participants and horses.

e. **Know and understand the tasks and expectations** of your job description.

Most *PATH Int.* Centers provide a Volunteer packet for you that may contain

- a. Schedule and attendance requirements
- b. Phone numbers of appropriate people in case of emergency, cancellation, weather, etc.
- c. Specific safety rules
- d. Job description
- e. Notes on major disability groups and how to provide the most effective support for participants.
- f. Name tag to wear. Some Centers require all volunteers to wear these nametags every time they volunteer.

Confidentiality:

Your *PATH Int.* Center staff makes every effort to maintain confidentiality regarding individual participants and their personal information. This can be difficult, since many participants are very open about their disability, medical history or personal challenges.

During riding lessons and therapy sessions you may be told information about participants in order to safely and effectively assist a person. This information generally is confidential.

Try to be discreet about confidential information you are told by a participant or their family members and absolutely do not pass on information you may be told during a session. Keep things to yourself even with other volunteers. It is very easy to start to discuss what medical problems “little Susie” has to cope with, but that really is not appropriate. If you are asked, “What disability does Mrs. Jackson have?” by a Center visitor, it is not appropriate for you to discuss it. Be friendly, but explain that confidentiality is part of your volunteer role at the Center and that this question should be best put to Mrs. Jackson herself, or may be taken to the Center leadership.

Limits of Confidentiality:

There may be situations where you feel it is necessary to reveal confidential information in order to keep someone safe. For example, a rider may tell you that she has a severe medical problem that day, but she really wants to ride. You may question the safety of that decision. Discreetly sharing the information with the Center staff is really your responsibility; you are not bound by confidentiality in this case. Your primary role is to keep the participants safe. Use your common sense. If anyone at the center tells you something that is troubling to you, such as threatening suicide (even in a flippant manner) it is your responsibility to tell an instructor or person in charge in a confidential manner.

The Terminology Maze

As you volunteer at a *PATH Int.* center, you may encounter different terminology used to describe the types of services or activities that are offered. Terminology is dynamic and every changing. Terms that were used to describe persons with disabilities fifty years ago

are no longer acceptable in today's society. Different regions or locations across the county even use different terms to describe the same thing.

Equine terminology may also differ from one geographical region to another. If you were a "horse person" on the east coast in your teens and moved to the west coast as an adult, the equine terms may be completely unfamiliar. Learn the specific equine terminology of your center. This course will present basic equine information, but remember that you need to learn the terminology and horsemanship methods used by your Center in order to provide consistency for both participants and horses.

Activity Terminology

There are two basic types of services that are offered at PATH Int. centers. One is Therapeutic Horsemanship and the other is Equine Facilitated Therapy. There may be many variations of this terminology used by centers. No matter what the service is called, there are several common factors with the activities provided at centers:

It is important that your center can accurately describe the services, activities, or programs that are offered.

It is important that you understand the differences in services so you can better explain what the center offers as well as how it affects you as a volunteer.

There are important differences between therapeutic horsemanship and equine facilitated therapy.

Therapeutic Horsemanship is provided by PATH Int. certified instructors. PATH Int. certified instructors are knowledgeable and experienced horsemen and women who teach horsemanship. Therapeutic Horsemanship includes the categories of:

Therapeutic riding
Therapeutic driving
Interactive vaulting

Each of those categories can include activities that focus on recreation, education, ground work, sport, or competition pursuits.

Equine Assisted Therapy is provided by a licensed therapist. The type of therapist depends on the type of services provided. Equine Assisted Therapy includes the categories of:

Hippotherapy
Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy

In Hippotherapy, the movement of the horse is key to the therapy sessions. Hippotherapy can only be provided by Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists and Speech /

Language Pathologists.

In Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy, the interaction between the equine and the client is key to the therapy sessions. Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy can only be provided by licensed, credentialed mental health professionals.

The Team Approach

Different professionals from the areas of Therapeutic Horsemanship and Equine Assisted Therapy may work together to provide a team approach to services. Some may hold more than one certification, designation or license. However, there must always be a PATH Int. Certified Instructor present to oversee the safety of the equestrian interaction. In some cases an individual will be both a PATH Int. certified instructor and a credentialed therapist.

How do the different activities affect you as a volunteer? You may need to have different training depending on the type activity offered. If participating in Hippotherapy sessions, you might need more advanced training concerning how to better affect the horse's movement. If you are volunteering with driving, you may need to know more about driving than if you were volunteering with a riding session.

Whatever the activity and the training, you are an integral part of the team whether volunteering in therapeutic horsemanship or equine assisted therapy.

All NARHA Centers require:

Qualified equines, trained and conditioned for the specific tasks
A safe environment for humans and equines
Qualified equine professional/horse handler

All NARHA Centers:

Provide services to children and/or adults
Follow PATH Int. Standards

What the PATH Int. Center Staff Does

NARHA Centers all look different. Some may have large staff, some may have all volunteer personnel. There is no "correct" organizational plan and the organizational structure depends entirely upon the Centers needs, resources, and philosophy. Check with your Center to find out more about it's individual makeup.

However, there are a number of job titles that are often found at PATH Int. Centers. One person may hold many job titles (wears many hats, so to speak) or there may be designated positions with titles. The following will provide a guideline for what types of jobs are typically found at NARHA Centers along with a general job description.

This group will be your supervisors.

The Board of Directors: Sets policy and holds fiduciary responsibility for a nonprofit organization. These directors are selected for their skill, knowledge and ability to support the Center financially. Board members may, or may not, be actively involved in the day-to-day work of the NARHA Center. At many Centers you may “side walk” next to the board president.

Executive Director: The executive director manages not only the day-to-day affairs, but works closely with the board. This individual is responsible for the program and is responsible for maintaining safety and high quality. Other responsibilities may include fund-raising, coordinating lesson schedules and volunteer or barn management.

Program Director: At many Centers the lessons and management of instructors, therapists, participants, horses and volunteers will fall to a Program Director.

PATH Int. Instructor: The PATH Int. instructor is responsible for teaching the lessons, selecting and training horses, training lesson volunteers, caring for equipment, maintaining up-to-date referrals, assessment and progress forms as well as advising the Executive Director or Program Director. This person must have a solid background in horse-manship and equine management, knowledge of various disabilities and skills in therapeutic horsemanship techniques and teaching methodologies. This individual must be a responsible, creative, caring person who is able to work with people and is able to teach in a positive, patient and supportive manner.

Barn or Equine Manager: At many PATH Int. Centers there is a separate person designated as the primary horse caretaker. It is the responsibility of the barn manager to select, train and take care of every aspect having to do with the horses. Medical treatments, acquisition of horse feed, tack selection and scheduling of horses for lessons falls on this person. If you work with the Center horses, you most likely will directly work with this individual.

Volunteer Manager: Many PATH Int. Centers have a person assigned especially to recruit, screen, train and manage Center volunteers. This is the person who you will meet first when starting at the Center. Volunteer managers tend to be “people people”, who are there to help you find your way. It is this individual’s job to make sure that volunteers feel appreciated by the staff and stay at the Center for a long time.

Therapist: Physical, occupational and speech language therapists are specialists in

movement analysis and can enhance the services provided by the PATH Int. center team. Hippotherapy can only be conducted by a licensed physical; occupational or speech/language therapist.

Psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, nurses and other licensed mental health professionals are a different category of therapist that may be of assistance at a PATH Int. Center, especially those providing equine facilitated psychotherapy.

Considerations when working with people with disabilities

PATH Int. Centers provide services, programs and activities for individuals with physical, cognitive or psycho-social disabilities or challenges. It is imperative that you understand this responsibility and familiarize yourself with some basic rules of conduct.

General Considerations:

It would be impossible to summarize all of the diseases, syndromes, disabilities and other medical and psychological conditions that exist. As a PATH Int. Center volunteer you will meet individuals with common disabilities such as Cerebral Palsy, but also may encounter individuals who have rare medical conditions. Always remember that at PATH Int. Centers the focus is on a person's ability, not on their disability.

PATH Int. Centers serve individuals of all ages starting as young as two years old. Some PATH Int. Centers specialize in working with one type of participant, while others offer programming for a broad range of people. Many PATH Int. Centers will have a mix of participants of all ages.

When first starting as a PATH Int. Center volunteer, it can be tempting to try to find out as much as you can about the type of disability each of the individuals you are working with may have. You certainly will be told what you need to know in order to effectively help a participant, or to understand the goals of the instructor or therapist. However, do not be surprised if you are not told much about a participant. You also may not get answers to your questions, even if you ask. Understand that this is a component of confidentiality and that many people with a disability want to keep the details of their medical history private. You and the Center staff must respect that privacy.

There is no doubt that over time you will gain insight into medical issues from a very personal perspective. Many people you will deal with will readily share their stories and their daily progress. As a result, you will become much more knowledgeable about what it can mean to live with an illness or disability.

GLOSSARY OF PHYSICAL & COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

The following are brief, non-medical descriptions of disabilities and conditions of participants one might encounter at a PATH Int. Center and the beneficial outcome equine assisted activities can have. This is not intended as a comprehensive explanation of specific disabilities. Rather, it is a general overview with an explanation of how equine assisted activities can be beneficial.

Arthritis

Inflammatory disease of the joints

Types: Osteo, rheumatoid and juvenile rheumatoid.

Characteristics: Pain; lack of mobility; deformity; loss of strength.

Benefits: Gentle rhythmic movement to promote joint mobility and relieve pain.

Autism

A self-centered mental state from which reality tends to be excluded.

Characteristics: Unresponsiveness to the presence of others; withdrawal from physical contact; severely delayed and disordered language; self-stimulating behaviors; unusual or special fears; insensitivity to pain; unawareness of real dangers; hyperactive; passive; unusual behaviors such as smelling/tasting/licking/mouthing all objects; ritualistic behaviors; developmentally delayed; unusual response to sounds; clumsiness; social withdrawal; resistance to change.

Benefits: Interaction in a group setting stimulates interest away from self and toward others and the horses. Postural and verbal stimulation.

Cerebral Palsy

Brain damage occurring before, at, or shortly after birth. It is a non-progressive motor disorder.

Types and Characteristics:

Spastic - hypertonicity with hyperactive stretch reflexes, muscle imbalances and equilibrium. Increased startle reflex and other pathological reflexes.

Athetoid - extensor muscle tension, worm-like movements, abnormal posturing and slow and deliberate speech.

Ataxic- poor balance, difficulty with quick, fine movements and are often described as having a “rag doll” appearance.

Benefits: Normalization of tone, stimulation of postural and balance mechanisms, muscle strengthening and perceptual motor coordination.

Associated Problems: Seizures; hearing defects; visual defects; general sensory impairment; perceptual problems; communication problems; mental retardation; emotional disturbance; learning disabilities.

Cerebral Vascular Accident - Stroke (CVA)

Hemorrhage in brain, which causes varying degrees of functional impairment.

Characteristics: Flaccid or spastic paralysis of arm and leg on same side of body. May impair mentation, speech, sight, balance, coordination and strength.

Benefits: Promotes symmetry, stimulates balance, posture, motor planning, speech and socialization.

Developmental Disabilities (DD)

A general term applied to children functioning two or more years below grade level.

Characteristics: Varied, but can include slow physical, motor and social development.

Benefits: Provides arena for success, opportunity for sport and recreation, stimulates body awareness.

Down Syndrome

Condition in which a person is born with an extra chromosome, resulting in mental retardation and developmental delay.

Characteristics: Broad flat face, slanted eyes, neck and hands are often broad and short. Usually hypotonic, have hypermobile joints and tend to be short and slightly overweight. Prone to respiratory infections.

Benefits: Riding improves expressive and receptive language skills, gross and fine motor skills, balance, posture, muscle tone and coordination.

Emotional Disabilities

A congenital or acquired syndrome often compounded by learning and/or physical disabilities incorporating numerous other pathologies.

Characteristics: Trouble coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relations. Behaviors such as short attention span, avoidance, aggression, autism, paranoia or schizophrenia may be exhibited.

Benefits: Increases feelings of self-confidence and self-awareness, and provides appropriate social outlet.

Epilepsy

Abnormal electrical activity of the brain marked by seizures with altered consciousness.

Types and Characteristics:

Petit Mal: Brief loss of consciousness with loss of postural tone. May have jerky movements, blank expression.

Grand Mal: Loss of consciousness and postural tone. Usually preceded by an aura. (Note: An active seizure disorder is a contraindication for horseback riding).

Hearing Impairment

Congenital or acquired hearing loss varying from mild to profound.

Characteristics: Communication difficulties - may use lip reading, finger spelling (manual alphabet) or sign language. Often "phase out" and have attention deficits.

Benefits: Stimulates self-confidence, balance, posture and coordination. It also provides appropriate social outlets and interactions.

Learning Disabilities (LD)

Catch-all phrase for individuals who have problems processing, sequencing and problem solving, but who appear to have otherwise normal intelligence skills.

Characteristics: Short attention span, easily frustrated, immature.

Benefits: Effects depend upon the particular disorder. Stimulates attention span, group skills, cooperation, language skills, posture and coordination.

Mental Retardation (MR)

Lack of ability to learn and perform within normal and acceptable levels. Degree of retardation is referred to as educable, trainable, severe or profoundly retarded.

Characteristics: Developmentally delayed in all areas. Short attention span.

Benefits: Stimulates group activity skills, coordination, balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Provides a structured learning environment.

Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Progressive neurological disease with degeneration of spinal column tracts, resulting in scar formation.

Characteristics: Most commonly occurs in the 20 to 40-year-old range. It is progressive with periods of exacerbation and remissions. Fatigues easily. Symptoms include weakness, visual impairment, fatigue, loss of coordination and emotional sensitivity.

Benefits: Maintains and strengthens weak muscles and provides opportunities for emotional therapy.

Associated Problems: Visual impairment, emotional ability, and impaired bowel and bladder function.

Muscular Dystrophy (MD)

Deficiency in muscle nutrition with degeneration of skeletal muscle. Hereditary disease that mainly affects males.

Characteristics: Progressive muscular weakness, fatigues easily, sensitive to temperature extremes.

Benefits: Provides opportunity for group activity, may slow progressive loss of strength, stimulates postural and trunk alignment, and allows movement free of assistive devices.

Associated Problems: Lordosis, respiratory infection.

Polio

Infectious virus disease.

Characteristics: Flaccid paralysis, atrophy of skeletal muscle, often with deformity.

Benefits: Strengthens non-paralyzed muscles, stimulates posture.

Scoliosis

Lateral curve of the spine with a C or S curve with rotary component.

Characteristics: Postural asymmetry. May wear scoliosis jacket or have had stabilization surgery.

Benefits: Stimulates postural symmetry, strengthens trunk muscles.

(Note: Severe scoliosis is a contraindication for therapeutic riding).

Spina Bifida

Congenital failure of vertebral arch closure with resultant damage to spinal cord.

Characteristics: Varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs coupled with sensory loss.

Problems: Infection, lordosis, scoliosis and hip dislocations.

Benefits: Stimulates posture and balance, improves muscle strength and self- image.

Associated Problems: Hydrocephalus, incontinence, urinary tract infection, lordosis, scoliosis and hip dislocations.

Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

Trauma to the spinal cord resulting in a loss of neurological function.

Characteristics: Paralysis of muscles below the level of injury - can be flaccid or spastic. Fatigue, sensory loss and pressure sores.

Benefits: Stimulates posture and balance, strengthens trunk muscles, is an option for sports participation and recreation.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Accidental injury to the head resulting in intra-cranial bleeding with death of brain cells.

Characteristics: Gross and fine motor skills deficits. Often have impaired memory, speech, balance and/or vision. May have psychological effects.

Benefits: Stimulates balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills, speech and perceptual skills.

Visual Impairment

Moderate to total loss of sight.

Characteristics: Insecure posture, lack of visual memory, anterior center of gravity, fearfulness, and developmental delay.

Benefits: Stimulates spatial awareness, proprioception, posture and coordination. Provides social outlet, structured risk- taking and freedom of movement.

Volunteer Contact With Center Clients:

Here are a few typical “job” positions that may bring you in direct contact with PATH Int. Center participants.

Side walker:

The side-walker (either one or two) walks to the side of a rider during a lesson or therapy session. This person is supervised by the instructor or therapist and may physically support the rider, or walk along side the horse as a spotter or to provide verbal direction or reminders. The main duty of a side-walker is the safety of the person for whom they are side walking.

Office Greeter:

If your job is more administrative, such as working in the office of a PATH Int. Center, then your interactions with families and participants would be more casual and conversational. You are there to interact with people, make them feel welcome when they first arrive and may have to ask them to fill out paperwork. Many great friendships have been formed in PATH Int. Center offices.

Special Events Volunteers:

PATH Int. volunteers help at all types of special events such as at horse shows, fundraisers, and media events, Ride-A-Thons etc. At these occasions you will again be in contact with participants, their families and Center staff.

If you have never had the opportunity to meet people with disabilities, this aspect of working at a PATH Int. Center can be intimidating and a little frightening at first. You may be feeling insecure about how to act or react to people who may look, sound, move and behave differently from what you usually expect. It can also be unsettling to meet a person who you know has a terminal illness or the parent of a teenage child who has cognitive limitations. What do you say? What do you not say? How should you react? What is the best way to help? These questions and the feelings of uncertainty they bring with them are perfectly normal and you need not be embarrassed about them.

Don't worry about making mistakes when meeting and communicating with a person who has a disability. Relax and let the person with the disability put you at ease. You will find that with experience and time, you will come to find ways of relating to individuals with disabilities and illness. After a while, you will come to know them as individuals and will reach the point where you will see them as friends and people first – without dwelling on the differences or constantly worrying about what to say or how to act.

Here are some basic suggestions on how to relate to individuals with disabilities:

A person with a disability is an individual first and is entitled to the same dignity, respect and considerations expected by anyone.

Treat adults as adults. Only call an adult person with a disability by his or her first name after asking for the privilege.

Do not “pat” people with disabilities on the head, shoulder or any other part of their body.

Only help a person with a disability if they ask for assistance. You may offer assistance, but if it is declined, do not be offended.

When assisting an individual with a disability always ask “how” you can help. Do not take over.

Always address the person with a disability directly. Do not speak “about” them as if they were not present.

Do not shout. Hearing aids make noises louder, not clearer. Blindness does not affect a person’s hearing.

If a person has difficulty speaking, allow them to finish their sentence. If you do not understand what they are saying, tell them so. Do not pretend you understood if you didn’t.

When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and tell them you are leaving before you walk away.

Do not make assumptions. A person with a disability is the best judge of what they can do unless they are substantially cognitively impaired.

Do not push a person’s wheelchair, grab their arm or try to help without asking first.

When speaking to a person with a disability who uses a wheelchair, find yourself a chair or crouch down at a comfortable distance so that you can converse on the same level.

Respect personal space, but when a person with a disability asks you for help, they may direct you to hold, lift or otherwise assist them in a very specific way.

When an assistant accompanies an adult with a disability, address the person with the disability directly, unless you are asked to do otherwise.

Never move someone’s crutches, walkers, canes, service animal or other mobility aid without permission.

When speaking to someone with a hearing impairment speak slowly, clearly and face them directly while speaking.

Do not make contact with a person’s service animal unless you ask the owner first. The animal has a job to do and must concentrate on their work.

“People” First Language

The individual is always placed before the disability. It is a “person with a disability”—not a “disabled person.”

Never refer to a person by their disability, example “a paraplegic,” “a blind person”—the

accepted terminology is a “person who has paraplegia,” a “person who is blind.”

People are not “confined” or “bound” to wheelchairs. They “use” these devices for mobility and to enhance their freedom. It is more appropriate to say “an individual who uses a wheelchair.”

Completely avoid emotionally laden terms such as “suffering with a disease,” “afflicted with,” “burdened by” - a person with a disability may “have” an illness or may be “challenged” by a condition, but one should never assume that a person is suffering, burdened or afflicted.

When writing or speaking about individuals with disabilities always focus on ability, accomplishment and quality of life.

Avoid using “us” and “them” language when speaking of people with disabilities versus people who are able bodied. Statistics have shown that most able-bodied people will experience a disability at some point in their life. We are all *people* first.

Building supportive, safe and appropriate relationships

As a PATH Int. Center volunteer your role is to be a helpful presence and to support the Center staff in whatever way you are asked by the staff. Over time you will develop friendships and personal relationships with center participants of all ages. This is a wonderful part of being a PATH Int. 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 many PATH Int. Centers work with 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.

During your volunteer training at your Center, you will be introduced to the specific guidelines and rules that the Center maintains to ensure that the extent of the relationship you have with Center 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 (as with all relationships). While you will become a friend to many of the center participants, you should also try to maintain a professional relationship. Remaining professional protects both you and the participant. While you will be asked to physically support a rider on the horse, it is usually discouraged to show physical affection to center participants. 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 Center

participants who due to their disability or personality may be difficult, possibly rude, or overly dependant 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 Center volunteer – not a psychologist, a counselor or a therapist. Know your limits and role.

It is a fortunate Center that operates in a facility specifically designed to accommodate equine assisted activities for people with disabilities. Many Centers share space with other equine operations and adapt their needs to the available physical accommodations. There are a few things that almost all facilities have in common, though. If your Center doesn't have access to some of these locations, not to worry!

Horse shelter

Shelters are safe places in which horses can find relief from the elements. Horses always must have access to fresh water and a weather shield... a stall, a shed, a dense stand of pines, etc.

Stall. Some horses are sheltered for all or part of their day in a stall. A horse keeper provides clean bedding, fresh water and regularly scheduled feedings. There is usually one horse per stall. A stall is a wood walled structure within a building, usually a barn or a riding arena.

Pasture. Some horses spend all or part of their day in an outdoor pasture or paddock. A paddock is a smaller enclosure which may or may not include grass for grazing. Many horses can be kept together in a pasture or paddock, depending on its size and the horses' abilities to get along with each other. Some pastures and paddocks can get muddy during rainy seasons. A pasture should provide shelter in case of bad weather and free access to fresh water.

Some Centers regularly haul their horses in horse trailers to their activity site for lessons or therapy sessions, in which case, you can be sure they have shelter at home.

Tack storage. Riding a horse requires equipment. Equipment requires storage. The usual equipment used to ride a horse, a saddle and bridle, is called his tack. To "tack up" is to put a saddle and bridle on a horse in preparation for riding. The room designated for storing tack is the "tack room." Some Centers combine tack storage space with other equipment storage (feed, machinery, etc.) so they may have a different name for their tack room.

Ventilation. Healthy horses require lots of fresh air, even in the winter.

Facility Safety. It is always important for you to locate (equine and people) exits in case of emergency.

People Spaces

Observation area. Most Centers designate a comfortable area from which family and friends of participants can watch the activities. As much as possible, all observers should restrict themselves to this area for their own safety as well as that of the participants. Only trained volunteers and personnel should be in the barn and ring with riders or clients.

Volunteer lounge. Some Centers are able to provide a special place for their volunteers to relax. This is an area that could easily be combined with the tack room.

Administrative offices. Some Centers locate their administrative offices at the same site where activities occur.

Bathroom. PATH Int. Centers will offer accessible bathroom facilities, either indoors or outdoors.

Parking. Find out which areas are designated for volunteer parking. The most accessible spots are usually left for those participants who have limited mobility.

Other areas. As a new volunteer, some other facility features that you will want to locate are: the mounting block and/or ramp, phones, volunteer sign-in, fire extinguishers, horse and people first aid, riding areas, hose or wash rack, grooming supplies, and off-limits buildings.

Rules

Most Centers adhere to at least a basic set of safety rules. They generally address the most common safety risks, like behavior that frightens horses, fire and mounted activities. Barn rules might include the following:

- ~No smoking.
- ~Walk when around the horses.
- ~Speak gently.
- ~Be kind to horses and others.
- ~Always wear an approved riding helmet when mounted.

Become familiar with your Center's barn rules so that you can adhere to them as well as help participants follow them.

Emergency Procedures

Most Centers will have a set of procedures for emergencies. It is important to remember that the PATH Int. Instructor is in charge of carrying out emergency procedures during activities. During your training as a volunteer at your Center, you may practice mock scenarios, such as what to do if an accident occurs during a lesson or how to evacuate the Center. Keep in mind that practicing for these emergencies will enable you to act calmly and confidently should these situations occur.

What is your job when working with Center horses?

No PATH Int. Center will “turn you loose” with their horses without some screening and training. PATH Int. Center volunteers will be trained to work around horses, regardless of prior experience. However, if you do have an equestrian background, that can be very helpful. Be honest in evaluating your level of expertise and the Center staff will soon find a position that best suits you.

Riding:

Riding opportunities may or may not be available to volunteers at your Center. Check with your center for riding policies. Do not be disappointed if riding is not an option often due to the number of volunteers, too few horses, or not enough time. Some Centers may be able to offer volunteers formal riding lessons, or participation in an exercise program that requires testing of the volunteer’s skills. The Center staff would love to see you gaining horsemanship knowledge and should be able to direct you to a reputable equestrian riding program in your area.

Philosophy:

The beneficial interaction and relationship with the horse lies at the core of all PATH Int. Center work. Horses are valuable partners in a relationship. The health, safety and welfare of the horses are a prime responsibility of the PATH Int. Center leadership. Horses are not tools or “beasts of burdens”, they are valuable colleagues and are considered members of the team. You will find that PATH Int. Center horses are valued for their individual personalities and for the talents and aptitude they bring to this difficult work.

Barn Help:

A volunteer may become part of the barn staff- helping with all aspects of horse care such as feeding, mucking stalls, cleaning tack, repairing fences, medicating horses and other tasks.

Horse Handler:

Horse Handlers usually have previous experience with equines, but still must be trained to participate in riding lessons and therapy sessions. This generally requires that you lead the horse during the session and execute the direction given to you by the instructors or therapists. You may be called to walk at different speeds and execute different patterns in the arena. It is important to remember that as the horse leader your primary job is to focus on the horse, leaving the rider safety to the side-walker and the instructor/therapist. Obviously you also must keep a peripheral eye on the participant, but by focusing on the horse you directly ensure that the person is safe. A horse handler is also charged with encouraging quality movement in the horse.

Horse Training:

If you are a skilled equestrian, you may become part of the program of exercising horses, as well as training and screening new horses.

There literally are hundreds of training methods and styles of working with horses. Depending on your background, you may have learned to do things a certain way. Be open to learning new methods. Find out what training philosophy is used at your PATH Int. Center and how the Center staff handles and manages their horses. While there are universal things to do around horses (such as not to stand directly behind one), techniques and practices of working with these animals can vary. It is important to follow the practices of the Center in order to provide consistency for the horses as well as the participants.

Horse Behavior

Equine Senses

When developing relationships and working with horses, communication is key. It is critical to provide a safe environment for equine assisted activities. Learning to understand horse senses, instincts and body language is a step in predicting behaviors, managing risks and increasing positive relationships.

Smell

The horse's sense of smell is thought to be very acute and it allows the animal to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations.

Implications:

Allow horses the opportunity to become familiar with new objects and their environment by smelling.

It is recommended that treats aren't carried in your pocket since horses may attempt to go after them.

Volunteers might be discouraged from eating or having food in the arena.

Hearing

The horse's sense of hearing is also thought to be very acute. The horse may also combine their sense of hearing and sight to become more familiar with new or alerting sounds. The situation of a horse "hearing and not seeing" is often the cause of the fright/flight response. Note the position of the horse's ears (*pictures following article.*) Forward ears communicate attentiveness and interest. Ears that are laid back often communicates they are upset and/or showing aggression towards another horse or person.

Implications:

Horses are wary when they hear something but do not see it. If your horse is acting nervous, talk to him/her in a quiet and calm voice for reassurance.

Avoid shouting or using a loud voice. This can be frightening to a horse.

Watch your horse's ears for increased communication. Stiffly pricked ears indicate interest. Drooping ears indicate relaxation, inattentiveness (easily startled), exhaustion or illness. Flattened ears indicate anger, threat or fear. Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest.

Sight:

The horse's eyes are set on either side of the head. There is good (lateral) peripheral vision but poorer frontal vision. Horses focus on objects by raising and lowering their head. The horse's visual memory is very accurate. Horses are thought to see quite well in the dark, due to the large size of their eyes. There is still controversy as to whether or not horses see in color.

Implications:

The horse may notice if something in the arena or out on a trail is different. Allow the horse an opportunity to look at new objects. Introduce new props that the horse may be unfamiliar with.

As the horse has better peripheral vision; consider a slightly looser rein, enabling the animal to move its head when taking a look at objects.

Although the horse has good peripheral vision, consider two blind spots: directly in front and directly behind. The best way to approach a horse is at the shoulder. It may startle a horse if you approach from behind or directly in front. The horse may be unable to see around the mouth area, which is a safety consideration when hand feeding.

Touch:

Touch is used as a communication between horses and between horses and people. Horses are sensitive to soft or rough touch with a person's hands or legs.

Implications:

Handlers should treat the horses gently but firmly

Horses have sensitive areas, it is important to be familiar with them (i.e. flank and belly areas).

Watch the riders' leg position. The rider may need appropriate assistance to reduce a

“clothes pin” effect with their legs. Ask the instructor/therapist what is the best handling technique.

Horses will often touch or paw at unfamiliar objects. For example, a horse may paw at a bridge or ground pole before crossing over it.

Taste:

Taste is closely linked with the sense of smell and helps the horse to distinguish palatable foods and other objects.

Implications:

Taste is closely linked with smell and touch; therefore, a horse may lick or nibble while becoming familiar with objects and people. Be careful, this could lead to possible biting.

Sixth Sense

Horses do have a “sixth sense” when evaluating the disposition of those around them. Horses can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good therapy horse is chosen for their sensitive response to the rider. At times there may exist a personality conflict between handlers and horses. It is important for the instructor/therapist to know if you’re having a difficult time relating or getting along with a particular horse.

The Horse’s Lifestyle:

In addition to understanding the horse’s sixth senses, we need to appreciate and increase our awareness of the horse’s lifestyle. This will assist us in responding appropriately to his/her reactions to situations.

Flight and other Instincts

Horses would rather turn and run away from danger than face and fight it.

Implications:

At a sudden movement or noise, the horse might try to flee. Speak to the horse calmly. A frightened horse that is tied up or being held tightly might try to escape by pulling back. Relax your hold or untie the horse quickly and usually it will relax. Be sure not to stand directly behind the horse.

If flight is not possible, the horse could either turn to kick out or face the problem and rear, especially in a tight area like the stall. A halter with a lead rope may assist with maintaining control while working around the horse in a stall.

If a horse is nervous or fearful it may be helpful to allow a more experienced horse handler to lead.

Most horses chosen to work in a therapeutic riding setting have less of an instinct to flee. However, the horse may look to you for reassurance. It is helpful if the volunteer remains calm and talks to the horse in a soothing voice.

Herd Animal

Horses like to stay together in a clearly defined herd or group with one or two dominant horses “in charge”, with the rest of the group living in an established social hierarchy.

Implications:

Be aware that a horse may not like being alone. This is a consideration when horses are leaving the arena or a horse loses sight of the others while on a trail ride.

Be aware that if the horse in front of a line is trotting or cantering, the horse that is following may also attempt to trot or canter.

If one horse spooks at something, the surrounding horses may also be affected.

For safety, it is recommended to keep at least one horse’s length between horses when riding within a group to respect the horses space and hierarchical order.

Being aware of horse behaviors is one of the best safety precautions that can be practiced at your facility. Knowing how to ready your horse can prevent an accident and increase the quality of your “mutual” relationship. If you ever are uncomfortable working with or handling an individual horse, please speak up.

Describing Horses

The horse industry uses unique terms to describe horses. As a volunteer with a NARHA center, it is helpful to know these terms. Over time these terms will become second nature to you.

Body Colors:

Bay. One of the most common colors in many breeds, bay horses have brown coats, with the brown ranging from reddish to almost black-brown. Bay horses have black manes, tails and lower legs.

Black. A black horse is born black and stays black with the exception of a few white hairs around the muzzle as it ages.

Brown. A brown horse has a dark brown coat (almost black) and a brown mane and tail.

Gray. Gray horses start out black at birth and change gradually to steel gray and then to varying degrees of white as they age. A mature gray horse may range in color from all white to freckled (or flea-bitten as the color is called.) A gray horse has black skin, even though his hair may be all white.

Chestnut. A chestnuts’ coats is all-brown, usually reddish, with matching manes and tails.

Many other colors and patterns of colors exist such as pintos, paints, leopard spots on

Appaloosas, duns, roans, sorrel colors, etc. Also, specific definitions of the more unusual colors can vary between breeds.

Markings

Another way to distinguish between horses is to note their markings. Markings on the legs and face are readily noticeable.

Face markings.

Bald – white on face that covers at least one eye
Blaze – wide white path down the front of the face
Stripe – thinner white path down the front of the face
Snip – quick white slash on tip of nose
Star – star-shaped white marking on forehead

Leg markings.

Coronet- white around the coronet band
Ankle- white up to the ankle
Pastern- white up to the pastern
Stocking – white to knees.
Sock or 1.2 stocking– white half way up the leg

Scars

While not officially markings, scars and other blemishes can help you distinguish between horses.

White hairs sometimes mark the site of old injuries like saddle sores or halter rubs or thickened skin on elbows.

Old injuries sometimes do not grow new hair. You will often see the line of a healed laceration on a leg.

Breeds

There is no “best” breed of horse to involve in equine assisted activities. A horse that provides equine assisted activities demonstrates an unflappable temperament, has a steady, even gait and has been trained for the activities that it will provide. Here are some common breeds, keeping in mind that many NARHA Center horses will have an unknown breed background.

Quarter Horse Link: <http://www.aqha.com/>

Arabian Horse Link: <http://www.arabianhorses.org/>

Appaloosa Horse Link: <http://www.icaainc.com/>

Parts of the Horse

Some terms that describe parts of the horse refer to joints (fetlock, poll), some terms refer to muscle groups (neck, chest, croup), some refer to bones (cannon, knee), and others refer to organs or other external parts (mane, eye, ear). Click here to see a diagram labeling the most commonly used terms. <http://www.agha.com/association/who/thehorse.html#>

As you are getting to know horse behavior, note the parts of the body that are associated with large muscles. These parts of a horse's body are less sensitive than other parts with thinner muscles, like the face, the underside of the belly and the legs. If a horse flinches when being petted or brushed on large, less sensitive muscle, that might indicate an injury.

Gender and Age

Horses are considered juvenile up to the age of six years of age. Between six and fifteen years of age is the "prime of life" for most horses. Middle to late-middle aged horses (twelve to twenty years of age) are the most common partners in equine assisted activities. While a few horses live into their thirties and occasionally into their forties, the life cycle of most horses concludes in the mid to upper twenties. But many horses can live and work happily into their late 20's. A 30 year-old horse is elderly. Some breeds of horses and ponies have longer life spans. Size, genetics and individual health seem to be factors in determining lifespan. A 30-year old pony is not uncommon.

Mare - A mare is an adult female horse

Stallion - A stallion is an intact, adult male horse

Gelding - A gelding is a castrated, adult male horse

Because of their highly unpredictable nature, stallions are rarely, if ever, used to provide equine assisted activities.

A foal is a baby horse of any sex

A filly is a young female horse

A colt is a young male horse

Height

Horses are measured in units called "hands". A hand is four inches. To determine a horse's height, a measuring stick is used. Height is measured from the ground to a horse's withers. (see [link to horse parts](#))

The term "horse" describes an equine that is taller than 14.2 hands

The term "pony" describes a full grown equine that is shorter than 14.2 hands

Except! Some breed standards disregard the horse/pony distinctions. For example, all miniature horses, even though VERY short, are officially horses. Icelandic horses rarely get taller than 14.2 hands, but all are recognized in their breed as horses.

Horses require frequent handling and grooming. As a PATH Int. Center volunteer you may be trained to participate in many activities that require close contact with equines on the ground. The skills required for these activities must be learned while “doing”. However, since these skills are crucial for many PATH Int. Center volunteers, here are some general guidelines for working with horses while grooming, tacking and leading.

Grooming

Grooming is healthy as clumps of dirt, if left under tack, can lead to painful sores. Horses also use grooming to socially interact with their herd. Although sometimes a cursory grooming is all there is time for, a horse will really enjoy a leisurely scrub session.

Handling a Horse

Most horses participating in equine assisted activities readily accept being handled and enjoy their interaction with their humans.

Catching a Horse

Before approaching a horse, make a little noise. Horses sometimes sleep standing up, or sometimes they just daydream. Say the horse's name (“Hey Buster”), whistle or whatever it takes for him to turn his head toward you. He'll usually stand patiently while you approach. Sometimes he'll even turn to face you. If he turns his hind end to you, retreat and find help.

Haltering a Horse

Have the halter and lead line in hand. Hold the halter at the top of the headstall. Stand beside the horse's neck on his left side facing forward. Holding the halter with the throatlatch piece dangling down, put your hands on each cheekpiece. From underneath the horse's jaw, bring the noseband up around his muzzle, keeping the headstall forward of his face. When the noseband is snugly around his nose, slide your hands up the cheekpiece on his near side and carefully fit his ear under the headstall. Ears are made of cartilage, so are flexible and it does not hurt the horse to maneuver them gently. Reach around and fit his other ear under. Pull his forelock out. The headstall should sit behind his poll, the bony bump between his ears. Secure his throatlatch. Snap the lead line onto the ring at the bottom of his noseband.

Leading a Horse

Let's start with safety

Always wear sturdy shoes when working around horses. No matter how careful you are, it is possible you will get stepped on.

Never wrap the lead line around your hand or any part of your body or run it through your belt loop. If the horse moves unexpectedly, you will wind up with a rope burn, broken fingers or worse.

Never wrap the lead line around any part of your body or throw it over your shoulder.

Never let the lead line drag on the ground

How To:

Horses are usually led from their near side or their left side. This tradition originates from the time when soldiers carried long swords on their left sides and had to keep them from tangling in their horse's legs. Stand beside the horse, just in front of the shoulder and face forward. Place your right hand under the horse's chin and hold the lead rope about six inches from the halter.

Hold the leadrope 6-8 inches from the halter. It is important not to interfere with the horse's movement by holding too closely to the horse's head. For leisurely activities such as grooming, minimal control is needed.

Carry the rest of the lead rope in your left hand, zigzagging it back and forth, not looping it around your hand. As you walk, keep your eyes on your destination, not on the horse... your horse needs to know you have a plan. Stepping forward, a gentle pull with your right hand will signal your horse to move. To stop, stop walking and pull back into your horse's chest gently with your right hand. To turn right, extend your right hand straight out from your side and push the horse's head away, following with your body. To turn left, move your body to the left and bring his head along with your right hand.

Resist the urge to watch the horse while you are leading and look in the direction you are both going in.

Grooming Tools and Their Uses

Here are some safety tips when grooming.

Tip 1: When grooming, brush with one hand and keep your free hand against the horse. You will be able to feel the horse move easily. You'll also be able to feel if the animal flinches as if in pain. Then you'll know to look for a scrape or sore spot, but the horse might just be indicating that the part you are brushing is delicate and to take care.

Tip 2: To move to the other side of your horse, never “sneak” under the neck or belly, no matter how much you trust the horse. Go all the way around his head or close around his hind end, keeping a hand on the hindquarters.

Tip 3: Resist the urge to kneel down to get to those really low spots. You can not get up quickly enough in an emergency.

How To:

Brushes have lots of different names. Check with your Center to determine if they use a different name for the brushes listed below

Curry Comb: Start with a curry comb. Lots of horses really enjoy a thorough scrub. Rub in circles. Start at the front and work back. Use this tool only on the large muscles and stay away from the face and lower legs. Use a curry gently over any bones, like the withers; and on thin skin, like the underside of the belly.

Hard Brush: Flick the dirt that you just scrubbed up away with the hard brush. Its stiff bristles are also good for working down the legs. Again, start at the front and work to the rear. A hard brush is too hard for the face and use it tenderly on the thinner skin.

Soft Brush: A soft brush is used in long, smooth strokes to lay the hair flat. Most horses would like you to soft brush their faces for about three hours – they seem to think it feels that good!

Hoof Pick: Can you imagine working all day with a stone in your shoe? Even a little stone wedged into the right place will make a horse very uncomfortable. To pick out a hoof, face the horse’s rear. Run your nearest hand down the leg, maybe applying a little squeeze down the back. Your horse is expecting this and will lift its leg. Be ready to take it. Hold your hand under the hoof to support it while you remove all the dirt. A horse also appreciates resting its hind feet on your thigh while you work. Pry all the dirt from the grooves around his frog, but take care not to dig into the frog. This is the most sensitive part of a horse’s hoof. When finished, let the hoof down gently and remember to move your foot out from underneath!

Equestrian equipment catalogs contain pieces of leather with assorted buckles made for every purpose under the sun. Each different piece has a different name. If you are new to the field, you will need to familiarize yourself with the names of these strange looking objects, how one puts them on the horse and what their purpose is. Even if you are not the horse handler, you will need to know the names of the most common equipment.

Equipment Check

Horse equipment is usually made of leather, nylon or canvas and is subject to extreme stress and weather conditions such as sun, moisture and dirt. For safety's sake, equipment must be inspected, cleaned and maintained regularly. Signs of wear and tear include straps stretched thin, cracked or brittle leather, missing or loose stitches and fraying cloth and should be brought to the attention of the Center staff supervising the activity.

Proper Fit

Equipment should fit a horse correctly – not too tight, not too loose. Equipment should be checked regularly for proper fit. If you notice any equipment that pinches, rubs or seems to cause a horse discomfort, have your instructor check it before proceeding.

Adaptive Equipment for Therapeutic Riding

Many NARHA Centers use a variety of special equipment. You may not find all of these items at every NARHA Center, but all assist in accommodating some special needs. While it is the NARHA Instructor or barn manager who decides what tack to use on a horse, it will help for you to understand some of the equipment. The therapist and instructor will also determine the use of special equipment at the initial rider assessment.

Headgear

A safety riding helmet is the single most important piece of equipment. Careful fit is essential. The head is crucial to balance. An ill-fitting helmet will make proper balancing more difficult and will fail to protect the head during a fall. Overly large helmets are dangerous and uncomfortable. They may slip, obscure vision or fall off.

PATH Int. standards require that all participants and personnel at a Center are required to wear protective headgear that is certified for horseback riding while mounted or driving.

Helmet Fit

It is important to understand that the posture and balance of a rider will be directly affected by the fit of the helmet. A properly fitted helmet should be snug. Some helmets come with spacers--pieces of foam with sticky or hook-and-loop tape backs, which aid in fit.

The well-fitted helmet should stay on the head when harnessed without rocking or moving. A good way to check a helmet's fit is to have the rider bend down at the waist and shake his head. With the manufacturer's suggested adjustments, the helmet should feel secure to the rider.

How to Help A Participant With Their Helmet:

If the helmet harness has laces at the back of the neck, check them frequently. This feature is designed to keep the cap from coming down in front and breaking the nose if the rider is hit from behind. Try these fitting steps with your next session of riders:

Place the helmet on the head sliding it front to back. It should sit level on the head at above eyebrow level. Allow it to rest so there are two fingers between the eyebrows and the edge of the helmet.

Make sure the helmet is centered correctly and fasten the chin strap. Just be sure it's tight enough so the helmet doesn't slip off in a fall.

If there is a laced harness at the back, undo it before fitting the helmet and re-adjust it after the helmet is on. Place the harness below the small bump at the back of the rider's head. If the harness is U shaped, adjust the neck or chin strap firmly so the helmet doesn't rotate on the head when pushed up at the front or back edge.

Practice fitting a helmet on a fellow volunteer first.

Ask the rider how the helmet feels. For the rider whose head is a difficult size, try placing the foam spacers inside the helmet at the trouble spots.

Mounting Ramps

The mounting ramp is most often located outside the arena. Mounting ramps are constructed so that participants with crutches, walkers and chairs can get to the mounting level and that the instructor, therapist or side-walker can walk down the ramp as the horse departs.

Safety Stirrups:

The Peacock is available at most tack shops. It is equipped with a heavy rubber band on the outer side of the stirrup. In a fall, the pressure of a rider's foot releases the rubber band. (ART)

The Devonshire Boot is a leather covering that completely encloses the front opening of the stirrup. To prevent the foot from slipping through the stirrup many Centers have different sizes available so that the foot remains in the correct position.

Safety Belts

It is preferable for side-walkers to use the thigh hold over a rider's thigh rather than hang onto the rider by handles on a safety belt. Hanging on to handles inevitably pulls the rider off balance and tires the volunteers' arms.

If the use of a safety belt is recommended by a therapist, the belt should be at least three inches wide and constructed of sturdy webbing material. Sometimes a leather reinforcer is

added to prevent the belt from folding. The belt should fasten at the front with one or two straps with buckles. It should have two handles of sturdy, fairly inflexible material that can be easily used from either side of the horse. A safety belt is sometimes used to allow for extra support of the rider or client. Specific direction will be given for the correct use of the belt by a side-walker.

Saddles

Different types of saddles provide specific benefits. Instructors carefully consider what purpose they want the saddle to serve. For example, a rider with a spinal cord injury may need a saddle which will provide maximum support and stability; such as a Western saddle, English saddle, Australian stock saddle or dressage saddle. It is important that a saddle is well balanced and fits the horse and rider properly. When assessing the type of saddle a rider needs, NARHA Centers consider:

How much support and stability a rider needs (deep-seated saddle versus a flat saddle)

- Desired postural alignment
- Desired leg position
- Physical abilities and restrictions (such as leg flexibility)
- Mounting and dismounting procedures necessary

Soft Saddles

For some small riders or clients, a racing saddle or a treeless saddle is used to provide close contact with the horse while allowing the use of stirrups. A pad allows the rider's legs to adapt to the horse's body, whereas a saddle requires the rider's legs to adapt to it.

Pads

Sometimes it is better to use a pad attached by a non-elastic overgirth rather than a saddle. A variety of pads may be used to bring a rider closer to the warmth and movement of the horse, and to develop better balance and pelvic mobility. A pad allows the horse's body to adapt to the rider's legs, whereas a saddle requires the rider's legs to adapt to it.

Surcingles

Pads are attached to the horse by several methods: a non-elastic strap, an anti-cast surcingle or a vaulting surcingle. A strap surcingle will secure a pad to the horse and will not interfere with the rider's leg position.

A vaulting surcingle is best used for vaulting activities. It has two handles which may be helpful for weight-bearing through the arms, movement exploration for children and in developing midline awareness.

Seat Covers for Saddles

A saddle cover or overpad is useful to help prevent chafing problems and to protect the

saddle in instances of incontinence. Ready-made gel seat covers and synthetic sheepskins are available, and several companies offer a seat saver that covers only the seat of the saddle, leaving the flaps free.

Bridles

The horse should wear the bridle and bit best suited to its temperament and training. To protect the horse's mouth from uncoordinated hands, the halter may be used in place of a bridle, provided it fits well. Snap hooks can be added to reins for easy switching from bridle to halter as needed. Most horses perform as well in a halter as in a bridle (some perform better!), given an enclosed riding ring or arena. The use of mechanical hackamores and Bozells are not recommended.

Reins

Many adaptations may be made to reins to aid individual riders. The reins can be made adjustable from the bit for use by a number of riders. Snap hooks can be added for easy exchange among riders. Non-leather reins can be made from a material that will break or have a quick-release.

Ladder reins and loop (Humes) reins enable riders with little hand strength or control to adapt reins to the proper length. Color reins may be used for riders who need help with maintaining correct rein length.

It is the responsibility of the instructor and Center staff to decide what tack is to be used for which rider and on what horse. As a volunteer you should expect detailed instructions each time you participate in preparing a horse for a lesson or therapy session. Even if you have a lot of equestrian experience, always defer to the tacking instructions that have been given to you.

Administrative jobs that may be assigned to you

There are many jobs that need to be done at PATH Int. Centers, such as answering the telephone, returning phone calls, scheduling lessons, filing, filling out paperwork, ordering horse feed or other equipment, doing Center maintenance or cleaning bathrooms and kitchen areas. All of these jobs may fall onto willing volunteers.

Using your specific skills when doing general Center work

During your interview or on your application, let the staff know what special skills you may have that could help the Center. Are you a bookkeeper, a paralegal, a plumber, an artist or a person who really likes to cook? You may be surprised what skills can be valuable to the PATH Int. Center.

On the other hand, some volunteers do not want to do the same thing during volunteer hours that they do at their regular job. So if you are an attorney during the week, when you are at the Center you may simply want to clean stalls. You decide maker on what skills you wish to use during your volunteer time.

What Are The Traits Most Appreciated In A PATH Int. Volunteer?

Regardless of the job you are assigned, there are certain traits that make a person either suitable or unsuitable as a PATH Int. Center volunteer.

Effective PATH Int. Center Volunteers sign up as a volunteer with the notion of “service”. While they may also gain much enjoyment out of the experience, the primary motivation is to contribute their labor to a worth while effort.

Regardless of the task given, PATH Int. Center staff appreciates volunteers who confidently and efficiently do their jobs.

Knowing your place. This trait is very valued in a volunteer. Even as an experienced volunteer, it is vital to always keep in mind that you are not a therapist, or riding instructor or veterinarian (unless you happened to have the credentials for these professions). It can be problematic if volunteers start to interfere with a lesson, a therapy session or cause discord in the barn because they think they “know better” than the staff.

Effective PATH Int. Center volunteers love participating in lessons and therapy sessions as horse leaders and side walkers. What makes these particular jobs such fun is that you actually get to interact with participants. What distinguishes the effective lesson 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 lesson. It is a real skill to be an active participant without becoming a distracting presence.

It will come as no surprise to you that anywhere people gather in groups, there may be a certain amount of “politics” among the Center staff, board or within the volunteer corps. There will be issues and discussions, possible conflict and challenges. As you become part of your PATH Int.centers’ family, you will have to make choices in how you will handle and participate in the dynamics of your center. The best suggestion is to retain a neutral and enthusiastic presence and not get overly involved in center politics. Above all, refrain from undermining your center leadership; do not become part of negative “cliques” and try to be a positive force if people around you should become involved in inevitable interpersonal conflicts.

Ten Tips for NARHA Volunteers:

The volunteers who come to PATH Int. Centers are a dedicated group. Their love, commitment and enthusiasm are second to none. But when a volunteer signs up to help at a PATH Int. Center, there are all sorts of things to think about. Here are some tips for new PATH Int. volunteers.

Always be on time for your lessons or other tasks.

Call if you will miss a class. Otherwise instructors and participants will be there 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 her job. You are there to assist.

Make sure you follow all Center rules, such as not feeding horses from the palm of your hand (doing so can make them nibble and nip at everyone in expectation of a treat). Encourage others to do likewise. Your example counts and you represent the Center.

If you have a major concern about something (such as a Center policy) or would like to have something explained to you, set up a meeting with the Center administrator. Don't stew on things and do not participate in the “gossip mill” with other volunteers over something that bothers you.

Know that all of your support of the PATH Int. Center at horse shows, special events and other occasions is appreciated even if you are not thanked on a weekly basis.

Make yourself useful by “finding” jobs, such as taking center dish towels home for laundering, offering to fix fences, getting together a gardening group to do some landscaping around the Center etc. Be creative, but always ask before you do something.

Food goes a long way – keep in mind that staff members, riders and other volunteers get hungry. Donations of delicious snacks are always appreciated!

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 the Center. 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 horse show 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.