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Volunteer Information and Training Packet

Welcome to our corps of VTJR volunteers dedicated, enthusiastic, caring, responsible and knowledgeable people who work with our riding and equine rescue programs. This packet is designed to get you started as a volunteer. We also will train you at our sessions and we have additional information available if you wish to learn more - which we do encourage. Feel free to ask questions. We value our volunteers and believe you are the heart of VTJR.

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Important Phone Numbers:

Leslie Crown - Volunteer Coordinator
Home: 956-631-5666
volunteer@valleytrottersyouthranch.org

Greg Bozard - Executive Director
Mobile: 956-369-9278
greg@valleytrottersyouthranch.org

Abby Bozard - Mentor & Instructor
Mobile: 956-369-1078
abby@valleytrottersyouthranch.org

VTJR Office phone: 956-618-2128



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1. TIPS AND GUIDELINES FOR VTJR VOLUNTEERS

No matter what horse background you come from, or the extent of your experience, please be aware that there are special guidelines that must be followed when volunteering in our Equine assisted riding program, which may be contrary to practices you are used to. Please try and do things the VTJR way.

RELIABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY are two most important requirements for a volunteer. We depend on our volunteers and need a firm commitment for whatever time you feel you can give us. If you are unable to come at your designated time, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator (volunteer@valleytrottersyouthranch.org). Please note your duties begin 30 minutes before the session starts.

Calendar - Our schedule is posted on Google calendar (see References page). It is important to note the **classes are weather dependent**. If VTJR needs to cancel a session we will contact you approximately 1-hour the scheduled time. If in doubt, please call or email the Volunteer Coordinator.

Please remember to sign in and sign out each time you come. First, check in with the on-site volunteer greeter. Sign in tells us who is on the premises at any given time, which is important in case of an emergency. It also helps us to track the number of volunteer hours given to VTJR during the course of each week. These statistics are vital for grant writing.

Substance abuse and smoking policy: VTJR is an alcohol/drug and smoke free environment. Every member of the VTJR team is a role model for the riders who come to us.

Dress Code: Long pants and sturdy shoes are a must. We recommend that you remove jewelry (and leave it at home). Long hair should be tied back and a cap is a good idea. Barn facilities are not heated or air conditioned so dress appropriately for the weather.

A few other tips may be helpful:

1. Be sure to observe our confidentiality policy.
2. NEVER be alone with a rider.
3. Let the riding instructor handle the instruction; let the rider do the riding. Your job is to assist.
4. Horses love treats but if we feed them too much it distracts them from the lesson. Carrots or Alfalfa cubes are the only approved treats at VTJR. You may feed after the riders are dismounted and only with the permission of the instructor. Be very careful to protect a rider's fingers (and yours) if feeding a horse.
5. We want to hear from you! Please take concerns and suggestions to the Volunteer Coordinator or Program Director at the end of the session.
6. Go out of your way to be courteous and considerate of staff members, parents and visitors.
7. There is plenty to do at VTJR. Feel free to volunteer for jobs other than handling horses, such as tidying up, organizing tack or helping with special events or administrative work.
8. DON'T BURN OUT!!! Be prepared - the more you do the more we will ask you to do! So learn to say no and don't feel guilty about it. We want you to stay around for a long time.
9. THANK YOU for VOLUNTEERING!



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2. DUTIES AND ROLES

Paddock Master – Volunteer designated to assist Instructor in operation of lessons, assignment of horses, oversee grooming and tacking, clearing arena, setting up mounting block and ramp, opening/closing gates and similar tasks to ensure VTJR is ready to accept riders. Also keeps time and makes sure paperwork is completed (rider logs and instructor logs).

Volunteer Coordinator – Person designated to act as liaison with volunteers, assigns volunteers, keeps attendance logs, helps train volunteers, collects paperwork for volunteers (logs, releases and medical forms) and gives to Program Manager.

Side-walker Qualifications and Responsibilities:

Qualifications:

- Able to walk/jog for up to an hour at a time (indoors and outdoors) on uneven surfaces.
- Able to hold arm raised and out to the side for extended periods of time
- Able to hear, speak and understand instructions in English
- Minimum age of sixteen years
- Horse experience preferred (this varies, but means that volunteer should be knowledgeable and comfortable around a variety of horses, and have experience working directly with horses)

Responsibilities:

- Help prepare riders for class (helmets), if necessary
- Assist with rider support during mounting and dismounting as necessary
- Walk next to the rider throughout the class and provide physical support as necessary
- Help the rider follow directions given by the instructor
- Not responsible for the horse



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TIPS FOR SIDE WALKERS... (Sessions w/ special needs children)

Side walkers are directly responsible for the riders.

Side walkers can be great help to the instructor. They will help the student focus attention on the instructor, assist spatial orientation, and help riders understand and implement the instructor's directions.

It's easy to get a bit too involved, and help too much. Try to allow the rider to process and execute instructions and try to leave teaching to the instructor. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing to anyone, and to riders who already have perceptual and attention problems, it can be overwhelming.

Try to avoid unnecessary conversation with either the rider or other volunteers. Do not discuss the rider in front of him or her except as necessary. Address the rider directly. (For example, ask the rider if his foot is in the stirrup, before you ask the other side walker to check.)

When a rider is mounting, the side walker acts as a spotter for the rider. The side walker should stand on the off side of the horse (opposite side from the rider) to assist the instructor and make sure the rider gets safely aboard. If a saddle is used, the side walker should pull down on the off side stirrup to help prevent the saddle from slipping.

Once in motion, it is important to maintain a position at the rider's knee. If you are too far forward or back, it will be very hard to provide security if the horse should trip or shy.

The most commonly used "hold" to assist the rider is the "arm-over-thigh" hold. The side walker grips the front of the saddle or pad with the hand closest to the rider. Then the fleshy part of the forearm rests gently on the rider's thigh. Do not press too hard – you are only there to help with balance. Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider's waist. It actually pulls the rider off balance, and makes riding more difficult.

If the rider should start to fall, ask the lead walker to halt the horse. Usually the rider can be gently put back into position. If there is no way to prevent a fall, try to soften the fall, and protect the rider from being stepped on by the horse. Wait for directions from the instructor.

If the side walker is experiencing any physical discomfort (shoulders often start to ache if you are going in the same direction for too long), tiredness from walking or jogging, or difficulties with the rider – notify the instructor immediately. If you are not comfortable in any way, an accident is more likely to happen.

If you have observations about your rider that you wish to share with the instructor, save them until after the lesson is over (unless you have an urgent safety concern). If the tack needs adjustment, alert the instructor and the lead walker will bring the horse to the center of the arena.



Lead-walker Qualifications and Responsibilities:

Qualifications:

- Horse experience preferred
- Able to halter, lead, cross-tie a horse; able to tack a horse
- Able to groom a horse without assistance
- Able to walk, and jog periodically, for an hour at a time (indoors/outdoors) on uneven surfaces
- Able to hear, speak and understand instructions in English
- Able to lift up to 20 pounds (saddle) above his or her head
- Minimum age of sixteen

Lead Walker Responsibilities:

- Check health and soundness of horse prior to class
- Assist Paddock Master to ensure horse is groomed, tacked and lunged, if necessary, in arena prior to class.
- Lead the horse during class, within a group including side-walkers, keeping primary focus on assigned horse (and not the rider) while maintaining communication with team
- Listen to and execute directions of the instructor
- Untack the horse after class (unless needed in the class to follow)

TIPS FOR LEAD WALKERS... (Sessions w/ special needs children)

The main responsibility of the lead walker is to control the horse. Side walkers are responsible for the riders; the lead walker concentrates on the horse. Most riders in our program are not fully in control of the horse. It is the lead walker who must help in guiding, stopping and starting the horse, yet without making the rider feel he or she is simply being led. The rider must be allowed to do as much as he or she is capable of doing, with the lead walker stepping in only when necessary.

When the rider is mounting and when the horse is halted, the lead walker stands in front of the horse. This makes a physical barrier and the horse will stand more quietly. Stand far enough away that the horse will not knock you if it tosses its head. You may wish to lightly hold the side pieces of the halter while standing.

Horse lead walkers should stand/walk on the side of the horse closest to the instructor – inside the arena. Lead walkers walk next to and even with the horse's head, holding the lead rope about 6 to 8 inches from the clip at the halter. The rest of the line is gathered in the far hand and NEVER COILED AROUND THE HAND.

Do not drag the horse. Try a series of short tugs to keep a lazy horse moving. A horse will usually adjust its gait to yours, so if you walk faster the horse usually will walk faster too. (Follow the instructor's lead – some riders will need a faster pace, some slower.) If possible, the rider should help keep the horse moving.



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Lead walkers and side walkers should communicate; and lead walkers must be careful not to push side walkers into walls. With smaller horses it is hard to avoid getting stepped on by a side walker, but sometime adjusting your stride will help.

When the horse is asked to trot, the lead walker will have to jog alongside. Keep to a slow pace so the horse does not pick up too much speed. An elbow pushing in the horse's chest can be a useful gentle "brake."

When the instructor gives an instruction, please wait for the rider to process the information and attempt to cue the horse before you step in – assist, don't "do". Count to at least 30 before you step in: our riders need a lot of time to process directions.

Take the horse to the center of the ring to adjust tack or have a discussion with instructor, rider or side walkers. If you need to stop, try and get out of the way of the other riders.

Sometimes horses in the arena have different paces, if you need to pass, do so on the inside and make sure the other riders and lead walkers are aware of your intentions.

If a fall occurs, your job is to stay with the horse. Calm the horse as best you can and move it away from the rider, volunteers and other horses. Check the horse for injury and report any problems to the stable staff. You may need to complete an occurrence report.

Helmet fitting Guidelines

Proper helmet fit is the responsibility of the instructor, however you may be asked to help.

First, make sure you have the back in back – the manufacturers name usually is in the back and the brim, if any, goes in the front.

Ask the rider to remove or adjust hair clips, hats, caps, ties, and other items that might make the helmet fit uncomfortably.

Once on the head, there should be no more than 2 fingers (width) and no less than one between the eyebrow and the helmet.

The helmet should be snug enough to be secure. When you move it up and down, the skin on the forehead should move with it. Some models allow adjustment from outside the helmet, for others you will have to remove it.

The harness clips under the rider's chin and the strap should be snug but comfortable.



3. TIPS FOR WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE DISABILITIES

If you have never had the opportunity to meet people with disabilities, you may feel insecure or uncertain about how to interact with the people you meet while working in this program. What do you say? What is the best way to help? These kinds of questions are perfectly OK and we have prepared these tips to help you feel more comfortable.

Don't worry about making mistakes when meeting and talking with a person who has a disability. Relax and take your cues from the person. With time, you will find ways of relating to our riders as individuals, and will come to know them as individuals and friends without dwelling on their disabilities or how to act around them. You also will find you value and celebrate their abilities more than their disabilities.

Here are some basic suggestions about relating to people who have disabilities.

A person with a disability is an individual first and should not be defined by their disability. He or she is entitled to the same dignity, respect and consideration expected by anyone.

Treat adults as adults. Address an adult in the same manner that they introduced themselves. If a rider introduces himself as James, address him as James (not Jimmy).

Do not "pat" people with disabilities on the head or shoulder, or any other part of the 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 a person with a disability always ask how best to help; do not take over. When the person gives you specific directions, follow their instructions.

Always address a person with a disability directly. Do not speak about them as if they were not present. Do not ask an aid or caregiver a question when the person can answer it themselves.

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 to understand if you don'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 that limit people. A person with a disability is the best judge of what he or she can do or try to do (unless they are substantially impaired cognitively).

Do not push a wheelchair, grab an arm, or provide physical assistance unless requested or without asking permission.

When speaking to a person in a wheelchair, stand upright, making eye contact, do not crouch down to be at their eye level.



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4. TREATMENT OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

As a volunteer who works with the riders, you will be given enough background information so you may be sensitive to the riders' needs. Occasionally, more detailed information might be given to you or you may become aware of it indirectly or even inadvertently.

All of the circumstances of a rider's life, condition, disability, actions or behavior are considered confidential. Under **NO** circumstances are you to divulge this information to anyone other than **VTYR** Personnel, and then only as necessary to aid the rider.

If you have questions, please feel free to ask your **VTYR** Instructor, the Paddock Master, Volunteer Coordinator, Program Manager or Executive Director.

VOLUNTEER DISMISSAL POLICY

Without the skill, energy and commitment of our volunteers we could not run our programs. However there are occasions when the needs and skills of a volunteer cannot be matched with our work.

In order to maintain safety and excellence in our programs, we reserve the right to dismiss a volunteer if we determine that the volunteer cannot safely and effectively perform the duties assigned to them. This decision will be made by the Instructor, the Volunteer Coordinator and the Paddock Master, as a committee. The decision is in the full discretion of committee. If any one of these three people determines that a safety issue is presented, that person may ask the volunteer to immediately stop work.

In the case of concerns about a volunteer, we will attempt to retrain or reassign the volunteer, but may dismiss the volunteer without retraining if the committee determines appropriate.

Failing to disclose a felony or misdemeanor conviction or a health or fitness issue on the volunteer forms will be grounds for immediate dismissal, as will presenting for duty intoxicated or chemically impaired.



5. EMERGENCY HAZARDS AND SAFETY PROCEDURES

First Aid

- Complete human and equine first aid kits are kept on site in the horse trailer adjacent the arena.
- A completed Emergency Information Sheet is posted on the information center.

Fire

- Paddock Master* will call 911 (if stable staff has not done so)
- Instructor* will require that all horses stop
- Instructor will supervise dismounting
- Volunteers (side-walkers) will escort riders and visitors out (through rear exit or front exit)
- Paddock Master will find wheelchair and bring to exit
- Lead walkers will move horses away from dismounted riders and then lead horses out of stable
- All personnel* and participants* will assemble in clear area designated by Instructor
- Paddock Master and Volunteer Coordinator* to count heads and if possible conduct sweep of premises for stragglers
- Instructor will complete Occurrence Report (See Section 3)

Loose horse

- Instructor will require all horses to stop
- Volunteers will stabilize riders or assist in dismounting as advised by instructor
- Volunteers will escort participants and other horses from area if advised by Instructor
- Instructor will complete Occurrence Report

Rider fall

- Instructor will require all horses to stop
- Volunteers will stabilize riders or assist in dismounting as advised by Instructor
- At Instructor's direction, lead-walker will move horse away from fallen rider
- Instructor will determine whether arena is to be cleared
- Instructor or volunteer trained in first aid will check the scene and fallen rider and determine need to call 911
- Paddock Master will call 911 if necessary
- Instructor or volunteer trained in first aid or CPR will administer care and/or CPR as necessary
- Instructor will complete Occurrence Report

Slip and Fall

- Instructor or volunteer trained in first aid will check the scene and fallen person and determine need to call 911
- Paddock Master will call 911 if necessary
- Instructor or volunteer trained in first aid or CPR will administer care and/or CPR as necessary and clear area if necessary
- Instructor will complete Occurrence Report



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Medical Assistance

- Paddock Master will call 911. Directions to our facility are prominently posted on information center.
- Instructor or Paddock Master will look up patient's medical authorization in rider form book and call parent or caregiver (if applicable) and physician. Paddock Master will show form to ambulance and hospital personnel. Paddock Master will accompany patient to hospital if necessary.

Off Limits

- Offices are off limits to all participants and personnel.
- Stable aisles are off limits to all participants and personnel except Instructors, Paddock Masters and volunteers designated by Instructors or Paddock Master.
- The arena is off limits to all except Instructors, Paddock Masters, volunteers and riders.
- Parents, caregivers and other observers are not permitted in the arena unless they are acting as a volunteer and have completed necessary paperwork.

Weather Emergencies

In case of weather that the instructor determines is dangerous – for example thunder or high winds, or downpours that upset the horses – the horses will be halted and the riders dismounted. Riders will be assembled in an area to await transportation.

Horses Adjacent to Arena

Whenever a horse is being moved in or out of the arena, all riders will halt until the horse is safely in or out of the arena.

Fire Extinguishers

Fire extinguisher is located in the barn.

6. WEATHER AND EPIDEMIC CLOSING POLICY

Weather

No riding if temperature is or is predicted to be 100 degrees Fahrenheit or above. No riding if high temperature for the day is predicted to be 35 degrees Fahrenheit or below.

Epidemic

In the event of an epidemic or pandemic, such as H1N1, VTJR will follow the guidance of the city health officials for school closings.