



ROAMING PONY FARM LLC

Volunteer Handbook

Roaming Pony Farm
474 Will Dean Road
Springfield, VT 05156

Phone: 1-781-820-5648
Website: <https://www.roamingponyfarm.org>

Kelli Gerrior, Instructor

Programs Offered

Therapeutic Riding (TR): A specially trained (certified) instructor teaches horsemanship and riding skills to participants with cognitive and/or physical disabilities. The primary goal is to improve horsemanship skills, with secondary therapeutic goals of gaining strength, improving balance and coordination, gross and fine motor skills, self-confidence, and more. Participant ages range from four years through adult.

Therapeutic Carriage Driving (TCD): Students with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities learn to drive a horse or pony in a cart or carriage. Interacting with an equine via carriage driving provides an alternative to riding for participants who may be unable to ride due to weight, balance, physical limitations, fear of heights, or other issues. In addition to learning driving skills, participants gain entry to the world of horses and the rewards of interacting with a horse or pony. Participants' ages range from 12 years old through adult.

General Information for Volunteers

Volunteers are an important part of the Roaming Pony Farm team. The participants, horses, and instructor depend upon the generosity of volunteers to help us create extraordinary experiences for everyone involved. The following information provides volunteers with the basic knowledge of the policies and procedures to ensure your safety and success.

Available Volunteer Jobs

- Riding Lessons – Sidewalker
- Riding Lessons – Leader
- Driving Lessons - Horse Monitor
- Driving Lessons - Sidewalker #1
- Driving Lessons - Sidewalker #2

Clothing

For safety and comfort, volunteers should dress in close-fitting clothing. Loose, floppy clothing can get caught and tangled with equipment. Dress in layers that you can shed as you exercise, especially during cooler months. During the summer, dress for the varying weather. Sunglasses, sunscreen and hats are recommended when lessons are outdoors. Be sure your hat will remain secure on your head! You will be doing lots of walking and jogging on uneven terrain, so comfortable shoes are important. It hurts when a horse steps on your foot, so sturdy footwear is a must. Avoid dangly earrings or other jewelry that might hamper your movements, get pulled off by a rider, or distract the horse.

Weather

Lessons will operate in nearly all types of weather conditions; however, if temperatures are below 45 degrees or above 90 degrees, classes may be cancelled.

Minimum Age Requirements

Lesson volunteers must be at least 16 years old; however, youths under the age of 16 are welcome to assist with cleaning tack, sweeping the stable area, etc. Working with horses has potential dangers, so we ask that a parent or guardian sign a liability release for each volunteer.

Do volunteers get to ride Roaming Pony Farm horses?

We focus on the needs of our challenged riders and seek to provide a meaningful experience for them. Offering lessons or riding time to volunteers would be a strain on horses and staff. Experienced riders may, however, donate their expertise and time.

Volunteer Job Description – Lesson Volunteer

Objective:

To be an effective support as a Sidewalker or Leader as a member of the therapeutic riding lesson Team.

Qualifications Required:

- Minimum age of 16
- Physically capable of performing assigned tasks; standing, walking, jogging, arm extensions
- Able to lift up to 35 pounds (saddle) above the head
- Willing to learn and follow Roaming Pony Farm procedures
- Able to receive and accept constructive feedback
- Willing to communicate with other volunteers and staff via various methods
- Horse knowledge and experience helpful but not required
- Able to follow the directions of the instructor and support his/her leadership role
- Able to commit to a consistent volunteer schedule or be willing to substitute
- Able to hear, speak, and understand instructions in English
- Have adequate vision and hearing to ensure safety of horses and participants
- Able to adapt collaboratively and be flexible to changes
- Able to attend training and enrichment courses periodically throughout the year
- Able to perform emergency dismounts

Responsibilities

- Arrive on time when scheduled
- Assist instructor by leading or sidewalking with participants
- Assist with activities required at the end of the day or lesson
- Perform miscellaneous tasks assigned by staff
- Attend continuing education opportunities

Volunteer Benefits

- Satisfaction of helping your community
- Gain an understanding of what it means to live with a disability

- Learn about the care of horses
- Acquire community service experience for school, church, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, personal resume, etc.

Volunteer Job Description – Sidewalker

Objective:

To have primary responsibilities for the participant prior to, during, and after lessons.

Qualifications Required: (see also Lesson Volunteer Job Description)

- Horse knowledge and experience helpful but not required
- Able to communicate with a wide variety of people with special needs

Responsibilities:

- Assist participant with grooming and tacking of horse, if needed
- Communicate with participant and therapeutic riding lesson team regarding the needs of the participant
- Assist participant with mount and dismount as necessary
- Assist participant with therapeutic riding activities as directed by the instructor
- Verbal communication must be minimal so the participant can focus of tasks and instructor directions
- Assist with activities required at the end of the day and/or lesson
- Perform miscellaneous tasks assigned by staff

Important Behaviors to Remember

- Know about the horses you are working with
- If you open a gate, you close it
- Be aware of horses' natural instincts
- Approach horses from where they can see you
- Wear heavy boots or shoes when working around horses
- Do not move quickly or be loud around horses

Getting to Know the Rider with Special Needs

General Approach and Interaction

It is important to remember that every child or adult is an individual and wants to be understood, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Each has his/her own learning rate and style, unique personality, and temperament. Provide riders with an enriched experience with warmth and a favorable environment in which to learn and grow. All people, disabled or not, want to feel that they are not all that different from their peers.

Relating to People with Disabilities

Being around people with disabilities may be a new experience for you. You may be overwhelmed at first with things you have never seen or do not understand. This is natural for most people. Allow yourself time to get used to being with the person who is disabled. Do not give up on being a part of the program without a fair try, for your experience can be very rewarding. At first you may want to do jobs that are not in direct contact with the riders. Feel free to talk with a staff member about this. This is common. If working directly with our riders is a hardship for you, consider helping Roaming Pony Farm in some other way, and indicate other areas where you would like to be helpful on your Volunteer Information Form.

Choosing Words with Dignity

When talking about a person with a disability, make reference to the person first, not the disability.

<i>Avoid</i>	<i>Use Instead</i>
Afflicted with blindness	Person who is visually impaired
Crippled	Person with physical disabilities, person who is physically challenged
Stricken with	Person who has
Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, crutches, etc.	Person who uses a wheelchair, crutches, etc.

The preferred terms focus attention on the uniqueness and worth of the individual, rather than emphasizing the disabling condition. The connotation of “disability” is very important to avoid. Words such as defective, deformed, invalid, lame, maimed, spastic, and crippled imply pity, infirmity, and a general lack of competence. People are neither invalid nor defective. People aren’t spastic, muscles are. By choosing words carefully, positive images can be conveyed about persons with disabilities. Each of us has to learn how to relate to others, especially if it requires new skills. Here are a few suggestions to assist in your relationship with a person who has disabilities.

- Relax and be yourself
- Explore mutual interests in a friendly way. For starters, talk about the horse and whether the person has ridden before.
- Speak directly to the person with the disability. Your attention should be on them and not the person escorting them. Find yourself a chair or crouch down at a comfortable distance, if needed to speak on the same level.
- If a person has difficulty speaking, allow them to finish their sentence. If you don’t understand what they are saying, tell them so. Don’t pretend you understood if you did not. Don’t be afraid to say, “I’m sorry, I cannot understand you. Please say it again.”
- Use conversation and social behavior that you might use in any new situation.
- Offer assistance when asked or when the situation requires it. Do not overwhelm the person with help, or insist on helping when they are managing alone. When a person is trying to increase their physical ability, effort on their part is necessary.
- Do not hinder the rider’s ability to expand their skills and independence, even when their movements may appear difficult to you.
- Respect the person’s right to independence and their request for the kind of assistance that they require.

- Be guided by the wishes of the person with the disability. Talk about the disability if it comes up naturally, but don't pry.
- Appreciate what the rider can do. Remember that the difficulties the person may be facing could stem from society's attitudes and barriers rather than from the disability itself. People with disabilities generally do not view themselves to be as handicapped as society perceives them to be.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take a person with a disability to accomplish something or respond to something. Be patient.
- Be sensitive to separating a rider from his or her wheelchair, crutches, or braces unless asked. Never move someone's crutches, walker, canes, service animal or other mobility aid without being asked.

Understanding Horse Behavior

Equine Senses

When developing relationships and working with horses, communication is key. It is critical to providing a safe environment in a therapeutic riding setting. Beginning a process of understanding horse senses, instincts, and implications 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. It allows him 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 not be carried in your pocket as horses may desire to go after them.
- Volunteers should not eat or have food in the arena.

Hearing

The horse's sense of hearing is also thought to be very sharp. The horse may also combine their senses of hearing and sight to become more familiar with new or alerting sounds. "Hearing and not seeing" is often the cause of the fight/flight response.

Implications

- Horses are wary when they hear something but do not see it. If your horse is acting nervous, talk to him 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 an unhappy, frightened, uncomfortable or threatened horse.
- Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest. The horse is tuned in to his environment.

- Ears that are laid back often communicate that the horse is upset and/or showing aggression toward another horse or person.

Sight

The horse's eyes are set on either side of the head; there is good peripheral (lateral) vision, but poorer frontal vision. A horse focuses on objects by raising and lowering its 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 over whether horses can see colors.

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.
- The horse has better peripheral vision; consider a slightly looser rein, enabling him to move his head when taking a look at objects.
- Consider two blind spots: directly in front and directly behind. The best way to approach a horse is to his shoulder. It may startle him 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 very sensitive to soft or rough touch from a person's hands or legs.

Implications

- Handlers should treat the horses firmly but gently.
- Each horse has areas that are more sensitive (especially flank and belly areas), and it is important to be familiar with them.
- Watch rider leg position. Riders may need appropriate assistance to reduce a "clothes pin" effect with their legs. Ask the instructor the best technique for handling this.
- 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

- A horse may lick or nibble while becoming familiar with objects and people. Do not allow this, as it could lead to biting.

Sixth Sense

Horses do have a “sixth sense” when evaluating the dispositions 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 their rider. At times there may exist a personality conflict between handlers and a horse. It is important to let the instructor know if you are having a difficult time relating to or getting along with a particular horse.

The Horse’s Lifestyle

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

Flight as a Natural Instinct

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

Implications

- At a sudden noise or movement, the horse might try to flee. Speak to the horse calmly.
- A frightened horse that is tied up or being held tightly may try to escape by pulling back. Be sure not to stand directly in front of or 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 space like a stall. A halter with a lead rope may assist in maintaining control while working around a horse in a stall.
- If a horse appears frightened or fearful (note the position of the ears as described under Hearing), it may be helpful to allow a more experienced horse to lead.
- Most horses chosen to work in a therapeutic riding setting have less of an instinct to flee. 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 herd or group. One of two horses will be dominant and a pecking order will be established among the rest.

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 the front of a line is trotting or cantering, the horses 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 in a group, to respect the horses’ space and pecking order.

** Being aware of horse behaviors is one of the best safety precautions that can be used in your facility. Knowing how to read your horse can prevent an accident and increase the quality of your “mutual” relationship.*

Problem Solving and Grievance Procedures

Roaming Pony Farm wants to assist in solving problems and settling grievances quickly and fairly. We believe the best way to settle a disagreement or problem is to discuss the issue and find a way to reach mutually agreeable solutions. The grievance procedure can be used if you believe that you have been discriminated against due to race, creed, color, sex, or sexual orientation, or if you feel that your rights as a volunteer have been violated.

Conduct and Dismissal of Volunteers and Guests from Roaming Pony Farm

Roaming Pony Farm relies greatly on volunteers as important members of the team providing services to our clients. We also recognize the extreme importances of the safety and well-being of our clients, volunteers, staff, guests, and animals. All volunteers and guests are expected to follow Roaming Pony Farm’s rules and policies and may not engage in disruptive, unsafe, or inappropriate behavior.

No-Show Policy

Roaming Pony Farm is always grateful for your time and endless energies. Without your diligent work, care for the clients and horses, and committed time, we would not have a successful program. We depend on you, and trust that you will follow through on the scheduled time to which you have agreed. When a volunteer does not show up for a scheduled class, it creates problems and can force us to cancel a rider. Any time a volunteer does not call ahead to inform the staff they cannot make it to a scheduled class, and does not report to the class or commitment, it is considered a no-show situation.

Three Strikes Policy

After three (3) consecutive no-show occurrences within a 6-month period, the volunteer will be removed from the current schedule and sub list.

Emergency Policies

Risk Management procedures are posted in the barn and available for review. Some general information is below.

General

1. There is to be No Smoking anywhere on the property. Signs are posted.
2. Off-limit areas to all but staff are posted. Areas are paddocks, equipment sheds, feed room, tack room, and hay sheds.
3. Do not touch the electric fence unless you are sure it is off.
4. Never place items near heating elements.
5. Watch for traffic in parking area and on the road. Posted speed limit is 5 mph.

6. In the event of an incident or emergency in the arena, participants, guests, and parents/guardians must stay calm and follow the instructor's directions.
7. Emergency procedures will be reviewed and practiced annually with mandatory attendance for staff and volunteers. Current participants, caregivers, and guests may attend if desired.

Hazards specific to the use of equines

1. Do not work horses alone if it can be avoided.
2. Do not let horses trap you with no means of escape.
3. Never wrap a lead rope around your hand. Always fold the excess.
4. Do not stand directly behind a horse.
5. Maintain a safe distance of 2 horse lengths between horses.
6. Volunteers and staff should be aware that wildlife may appear in the surrounding fields.
7. When leading a horse through paddock gates, open the gate toward the paddock, lead the horse through with one hand while closing the gate behind the horse with your other hand.

Horse Behavior-Related Emergency Procedure

- Stop the horse.
- If sidewalker is present, and a dismount is necessary, instructor will direct the sidewalker to perform emergency dismount.
- If there is a leader only, leader will regain control of the horse.
- If rider is independent, instructor will call aloud simple instructions in a confident tone.
- Remember to stay calm and use a soothing tone of voice.
- Reassure a horse that is scared or nervous.
- Recognize horse's symptoms of imminent rolling, including pawing, lowering of head, and/or bending of knees. Dismount rider as trained during volunteer orientation. Move away from the horse quickly.
- In case of a loose horse, horses should be stopped immediately and the loose horse caught. If necessary, the instructor will ask for all riders to be dismounted from their horses.
- In case of a stepped-on foot, call out instructions and help move the horse from the person's foot. Injury will be treated as required.
- If a horse pulls back when tied, clear away from the horse until it stops struggling. Try to calm the horse with your voice. All tie areas are equipped with emergency release clips.
- Instructor will file a Horse Report on behavior, and training issues will be addressed by staff.

Injuries in the arena:

If a rider, volunteer, staff member or spectator is injured and needs immediate care:

- Stop all riders if injury is near class.
- If serious, instructor will designate a volunteer to call 911. Emergency information is posted by the tack room door.

- Instructor assigns a staff member or volunteer in the ring to reassure and dismount riders, or move mounted riders to the far end of the arena.
- If the rider is down, leave them down.
- Perform first-aid procedures as trained.