



Volunteer Manual



Professional Association of Therapeutic
Horsemanship International

PO Box 233, Mebane, NC 27302 Phone: 919 304-1009
www.NCTRCriders.org

Welcome to NCTRC! On behalf of our clients, families, and our herd of horses and ponies, thank you for committing to our program as a volunteer! We could not fulfill our mission without your weekly commitment. We appreciate everything you do, and look forward to working with you to ensure that our clients receive the very best services possible!

Our Mission

The NC Therapeutic Riding Center (NCTRC) empowers children and adults with physical, mental, emotional and social challenges to create more active, healthy and fulfilling lives through equine assisted activities and therapies.

History

NCTRC was founded in 1977 by a group of people that we are proud to say remain involved today! The program moved around numerous farms in the Triangle area for many years, but has been in Mebane since 2008, and at our current facility since 2021. NCTRC has been accredited by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH Int'l) since 1984.

Our Clients

NCTRC serves clients from ages 2 and up with any disability or challenge that we can safely accommodate. Because of this, you may meet clients with a wide variety of disabilities at the farm. We ask that you help make the farm inclusive and welcoming to all by speaking to clients directly, regardless of their ability to respond verbally, and by treating everyone as you would wish to be treated. If you have questions on the best way to interact with any client, please feel free to ask a staff member or to follow their lead.

Programs and Services

NCTRC is proud to offer a variety of programs and services to our clients. Please note some of the subtle but important differences between the services we offer, so that you can help us by using the correct terminology. Please note that we do not use the term “equine therapy” as this would refer to therapies performed on the horses (which our vet does provide when needed!).

Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding: Therapeutic or adaptive riding lessons are taught by PATH certified instructors (CTRI). Clients learn horseback riding skills in a welcoming, fun, and supportive environment, with a goal of riding as independently as possible. Although clients may see improvements in balance, posture, etc, it is important to note that this service is not “therapy” and should not be referred to as such, because it is not conducted by a therapist.

Hippotherapy: Hippotherapy is a physical, occupational, and speech-language therapy treatment strategy that utilizes equine movement as part of an integrated intervention program to achieve functional outcomes. While clients may gain some riding skills as they work toward their therapy goals, they are receiving therapy, not learning to ride a horse. This therapy is performed by a

licensed therapist, and is considered a medical service, subject to HIPAA and other regulations; in many cases this service is billable to insurance.

Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP): EFP is therapy performed by a treatment team of a licensed mental health therapist, a PATH certified equine specialist, and a horse or horses. Clients work with horses and a therapist to accomplish their psychotherapy goals. Due to the confidential nature of the sessions, volunteers are typically not utilized during EFP sessions. Although we do not bill insurance for this service, it is also considered a medical service and subject to HIPAA. This service is one of the reasons that we ask that all visits to the farm be scheduled - as you can imagine, you would not want someone to stop by to observe your therapy session, and it is important that we are able to ensure privacy during these sessions.

Inclusive Summer Camp: NCTRC offers 3 weeks of summer camp to children ages 6-10 with and without disabilities. Activities include horseback riding, horse care, crafts and games. Camp is a terrific opportunity for children to have an intensive riding experience, and also to interact with a wide spectrum of other kids.

Veteran Services: NCTRC offers services at no cost to military veterans through the support of Wounded Warriors.

Volunteer Opportunities at NCTRC

Sidewalkers: Sidewalkers are an integral part of the volunteer team, responsible for helping set up the arena, welcoming clients prior to class, maintaining safety of clients during mounting and riding activities, and helping clients follow directions provided by the instructor or therapist. No horse experience is required.

Horse Leaders: Horse leaders are an integral part of the volunteer team, responsible for grooming and tacking the horse prior to the start of class, maintaining control of the horse during mounting and riding activities, and ensuring that the horse and barn are taken care of after class. The horse leader provides a safe experience for NCTRC clients and a pleasant, predictable experience for the therapy horse. Previous experience handling horses is required.

Additional Support: We provide services to clients, each of whom may need support from as many as 3 volunteers, so our needs for weekly class volunteers are significant. However, there are many other ways to be involved! Volunteers who cannot commit to a weekly schedule are always needed on our sub list, and fill in on an as-needed basis. Additionally, we need help with maintaining a 30 acre farm, speaking engagements, fundraising, board service, special events, and all sorts of other things! Please let us know if there are other ways you would like to be involved.

NCTRC Policies:

Commitment for Lesson Volunteers

For a one hour class, expect to be at the farm for 1½ to 2 hours to help with horse preparation, arena set-up, and clean-up after class. Volunteers should commit to attending the entire session. Volunteers are assigned to specific clients, and while we realize that absences will sometimes be necessary, consistency of volunteers is important to provide the best experience for our clients. Volunteers with excessive absences may be asked to step down to a substitute list position until their schedule allows commitment to a full session.

Attire

NCTRC provides volunteer T-shirts to wear during sessions, free of charge. Our logo T-shirts, sweatshirts, and hats are available for purchase. In order to present a professional appearance and to be easily recognized by parents and visitors, we ask that volunteers wear their NCTRC T-shirts to all classes (weather permitting) along with appropriate long or short pants. We request that all apparel is “barn professional” with no super short shorts or tops with spaghetti straps etc.

Footwear is very important for safety. We recommend sturdy shoes with reinforced toes, such as hiking boots or paddock boots, but sneakers are also acceptable. Sandals, flip-flops and soft-toed shoes like ballet shoes or Crocs are not acceptable. Leave dangling jewelry at home, and avoid perfume as it may attract stinging insects and can be irritating to riders with hypersensitivities and allergies. Sunscreen is recommended. Volunteers should not use cell phones while volunteering.

Please remember that we are serving a vulnerable population - **nametags and logo'd attire** are important so that volunteers can be clearly identified as trained and belonging on the farm, and parents can feel safe with who has access to their children.

Confidentiality Policy

Specific diagnoses and information about clients are confidential; medical records and progress reports are available to NCTRC staff only. Volunteers are given enough information about their assigned students to provide safe and useful assistance, but may learn additional information through the course of the session. **It is important to remember that any details about clients should be treated as confidential and not discussed casually or in public places.**

Social Media

To respect the privacy and safety of our clients, **we do not allow photography of classes, clients, or horses.** Please feel free to visit our Instagram or Facebook pages to share photos of the farm from there!

Our Horse Herd

Our equine partners are crucial to the success of our programming. NCTRC volunteers, clients, and guests are prohibited from using physical discipline on program or trial horses. Physical discipline may include, but is not limited to: slapping horses using an open hand or closed fist, smacking, punching, pinching, kicking, hard jerks using the leadrope, bit, or cross tie, using any object to hit or strike the horse, or any other cruel behavior towards the animal. Please bring any issues regarding horse behavior, or any other concerns, to a staff member, who will determine the appropriate course of action.

Please respect the relationship between NCTRC and horse owners. In many cases we have access to such special horses only through the generosity of their owners. Please respect the inherently sensitive nature of any health or behavioral concerns, and understand that **often staff cannot share details about the horses to honor the privacy of our horse owners/donors.**

Barn Hygiene

Please read carefully, particularly if you are active at more than one barn. Because many of our volunteers ride or keep horses at other stables in the area, therapeutic riding centers have a unique risk profile as a carrier of equine illness. There is no risk of these diseases affecting humans, and all horses at NCTRC are always fully vaccinated, but we do have elderly horses who are in a higher risk group than younger horses, and we are a central place for visitors from many area farms, and don't want to play a role in spreading illness. We ask that when possible, you dedicate clothing and shoes specifically to wear at NCTRC, and that you wash your hands before and after handling horses at our facility. **If you participate at another barn that has a suspected or confirmed outbreak of disease, please inform NCTRC staff immediately.**

Volunteering in Classes:

Cell Phones

When you arrive at the farm, we ask that you put your phone on silent or vibrate mode. Please refrain from cell phone use while in the arena or interacting with a client.

Due to privacy concerns, we do not allow photography of classes, clients, or horses.

Check-in

Please be sure to visit our iPad at the arena entrance to sign in when you arrive at the farm, and to check-out before you leave. You will sign in with your **primary phone number without area code** listed on your application. This information allows us to keep track of the people on the farm each day in case of emergency. We also track volunteer hours as many grants require us to provide this information. Please also pick up your nametag to wear while you are at the farm. After you sign in, you will find your volunteer assignment for the day on the clipboard hanging

right outside of the arena door. Please ask a staff member for any clarification or details about your assignment.

Keys to Success:

- Arrive on time and properly attired for the weather conditions.
- Introduce yourself to your client, fellow volunteers, and instructor or therapist.
- Learn along with with your rider, and feel free to ask questions at the appropriate time.
- Have fun! Cheerfulness is contagious.
- Be patient and empathetic, so you can adjust to your student's abilities, comfort level and goals.
- Limit extraneous conversation between yourself and other volunteers, or yourself and the rider, while the lesson is underway. This helps the rider focus on the lesson and creates a more productive sensory environment. Remember that some of our clients are overwhelmed by sensory input, so even a casual conversation between volunteers can detract significantly from a client's experience on the horse.
- Many of our clients have dietary restrictions, and so we do not provide or gift food snacks or candy.

Job Responsibilities for Sidewalkers

Sidewalker's primary responsibility is the client's safety. Sidewalkers have the most hands-on responsibility during lessons and therapy sessions, and are directly responsible for the safety of the client.

- Help with arena set up and welcome clients and their families.
- Assist clients with putting their helmet on.
- Consistently follow the instructor/therapist's direction with regards to the amount of physical and verbal assistance to provide to clients.
- Prompt the rider with physical or verbal cues as instructed.
- Maintain attention to the client throughout class to monitor for unsafe actions or loss of balance.
- Maintain position as a sidewalker alongside rider during periods at halt, walking, and trotting. Must be able to maintain therapeutic hold for up to 45 minutes, or ask to switch sides and proceed in a safe manner.
- Perform ankle hold and arm-over-thigh hold during walk and trot.

Sidewalker's job in mounting (getting on the horse) and dismounting (getting off the horse):

Mounting: Sidewalkers may or may not be asked to stand offside (on the right side of the horse and rider) in the mounting area. The instructor may ask you to put weight in the offside stirrup (right stirrup) to help balance the rider's weight when mounting the horse.

Dismounting: A student **should never dismount without an instructor helping.** At the end of the lesson, students are usually asked to standby, or to make sure that the rider's foot is outside of the stirrup before dismounting. The instructor will let you know what they would like you to do.

Effective Sidewalking

By Susan Tucker and Molly Lingua R.P.T.

Sidewalkers are the ones who normally get the most hands-on duties in therapeutic riding. They are directly responsible for the rider. As such, they have the capability to either enhance or detract from the lesson.

In the arena, the sidewalker should help the student focus his/her attention on the instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with either the rider or other volunteers. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing to anyone, and to riders that already have perceptual problems, it can be overwhelming. If you sidewalkers are working with one student, one should be the "designated talker" to avoid this situation.

When the instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process it. If the instructor says "turn to the right towards me", and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say "right", to reinforce the command. You will get to know the riders and learn when they need help and when they're just not paying attention.

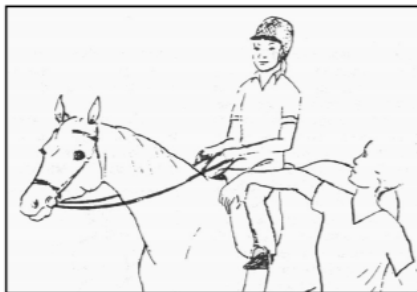
It's very important to maintain a position by the rider's knee. Being too far forward or back will make it very difficult to assist with instructions or provide security if the horse should trip or shy.

There are two ways to hold onto the rider without interfering. The most commonly used is the "arm-over-thigh" hold. The sidewalker grips the front of the saddle (flap or pommel, depending on the horse's size) with the hand closest to the rider. Then the fleshy part of the forearm rests gently on the rider's thigh. Be careful that the elbow does not accidentally dig into the rider's leg.

Sometimes pressure on the thigh can increase and/or cause muscle spasticity, especially with the cerebral palsy population. In this case, the "therapeutic hold" may be used. Here the leg is held at the joints, usually the knee and/or ankle. Check with the instructor for

the best way to assist. In the unlikely event of an emergency, the arm-over-thigh hold is the most secure.

Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider's waist. It is tempting, especially when walking beside a pony with a young or small rider, but it can offer too much an uneven support. At times, it can even pull the rider off balance and make riding more difficult. Encourage your students to use their own trunk muscles to the best of their abilities.



If the instructor chooses to use a safety belt on your rider, be very careful not to pull down on push up on it. As your arm tires it's hard to avoid this, so rather than gripping the handle firmly, just touch your thumb and finger together around it. This way you are in a position to assist the rider if needed, but you will neither give him unneeded support nor pull

him off balance. When you are ready for relief for your arm, ask the handler to move into the center to stop and trade sides, one at a time, with the other sidewalker. (Instructors: if your rider has serious enough balance problems to warrant a safety belt, you should probably be using two sidewalkers.)

During exercises, pay attention to your student. Sometimes volunteers forget that the riders are supposed to do the exercises and the sidewalkers are to reinforce and assist. The same applies to games. Don't get so competitive that your rider doesn't get to use his skills because you do it for him in an all out effort to win.

The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and grow to be as normal as he can possibly be. You are right at his side, so help the instructor to challenge him to the best of his ability.

Without you, these programs couldn't exist. We thank you for all you give and challenge you to be the best you can be.

Job Description for Horse Leaders

Horse Leader's primary responsibility is the horse. All of us come from different backgrounds with horses; we ask that you “check your discipline at the door” and handle our horses according to NCTRC standards. Therapy horses are crucial to our program, and because of the stress of their job, they have an extremely high burnout rate. Our horses may be handled by more than a dozen people over the course of a week, and consistency in handling is important for them to be comfortable and confident in their work. Inconsistent handling by different people is a leading cause of burnout in therapy horses.

Through the generosity of our donors, each horse has tack that has been specifically fitted to him/her and a Micklem bridle that is fitted. Leaders are responsible for ensuring that tack is adjusted properly and put away in the correct location. Due to dietary restrictions for many of our horses, horses should be fed only under a staff member's direction. We do not feed treats except in very specific training situations.

Job Responsibilities for Horse Leaders

- Bring horses in from the pasture and return them to the correct pasture in a safe manner.
- Groom and tack horses, following NCTRC's procedures of safe and gentle handling.
- Remain in position beside the horse's head, and lead at all times without wrapping the leadrope around your hand.
- Regulate the horse's speed at the walk and trot in a calm fashion, respecting the horse at all times and avoiding undue pulling on the leadrope.
- Maintain the horse at a halt for the length of time needed for mounting, dismounting, and periods of stopping during class.
- Follow directions provided by the instructor or therapist regarding walking on, halting, turning etc. while allowing the client to participate to their fullest ability. Leader should wait for rider to initiate action, such as asking the horse to walk or turn, whenever possible, in therapeutic riding classes.
- Demonstrate the ability to maintain safe spacing between horses as well as between the horse and barriers to allow for safety of the sidewalker throughout class.
- Show the ability to calm a horse that is anxious or has a heightened energy level.
- Ensure that horses have water and hay when they are in the stalls and that the water is dumped and stalls are picked when horses are turned out.

Cancellation Policies

Attendance

Consistency of volunteers is essential to keep classes running smoothly. We schedule the number of volunteers needed for each class time depending on the riding level of the rider. To ensure the safety of the riders, each volunteer is counted on to be there during that time.

We completely understand and are aware that occasional absences are necessary, however if volunteers do not show up or give us very late notice of their absence and we are unable to find a sub, our client cannot ride.

- For planned absences, volunteers should email the volunteer coordinator at least a week in advance (**volunteer@nctrideriders.org**)
- For unplanned absences, volunteers should **call or text** the farm as soon as possible: **(919) 304-1009**

Client Cancellations

Many of our clients, as a result of medical issues, may need to cancel unexpectedly and at the last minute. We will always do our best to notify you as soon as we are aware of a cancellation, but ask that on days when you are scheduled to volunteer, you check your phone, particularly if traveling a significant distance. We do always have other work to be done at the farm in the event that a client cancels, so your trip is not wasted!

Weather Cancellations

NCTRC will consider canceling classes when:

- The temperature is under 35 degrees or above 95 degrees
- Thunder is heard nearby
- There is a tornado warning or watch for the area
- Roads may be dangerous due to ice, sleet, or snow

Final decisions are made by NCTRC staff. NCTRC will attempt to make cancellation decisions at least 2 hours in advance of class to allow time to contact all client families and volunteers. NCTRC will cancel only in cases where we believe it would be unsafe to ride; our clients benefit the most from consistent participation.

Please call or text the farm number if you have any questions concerning cancellations.

Dismissal Policy

NCTRC values the contributions of our volunteers; we could not exist without you! However, we do reserve the right to dismiss a volunteer or guest. The following may result in dismissal:

- Inappropriate and/or abusive behavior towards humans
- Inappropriate and/or abusive behavior towards horses
- Failure to follow farm rules
- Failure to follow established safety procedures
- Use of tobacco, alcohol and/or drugs
- Consistently late or absent from designated class with no notification.

Farm Rules:

We want everyone's experience at NCTRC to be safe and enjoyable. For this to happen on a working horse farm, we need everyone to follow the farm rules:

- Children must be supervised by an adult at all times
- The following areas are off limits:
 - All machinery and equipment, including the shed which contains a wood burning stove
 - All pastures, with the exception of trained horse leaders bringing in a horse.
- Do not lean or climb on fences or gates. Be aware of electric fencing.
- Proper footwear must be worn when around the horses
- Smoking, drinking, and weapons are prohibited
- Do not feed any animals without NCTRC permission and supervision; many have restricted diets
- Dogs are not permitted on the farm without prior permission, with the exception of service animals
- Approved riding helmets must be worn when riding on the property
- Visitors are welcome by appointment only
- The farm is located in a neighborhood of private residences; in an effort to keep our neighbors happy with a commercial entity, we ask that everyone observe these rules. Please do not exceed 10 mph on our road. Please note that due to ongoing challenges with unscheduled visits, we will not be publishing the address of the farm or sharing it outside of scheduled appointments.

Emergency Dismount

An emergency dismount may be necessary in the event of a sudden storm, tornado, fire, loose horse, horse emergency, or personal injury. The sidewalkers are responsible for safely performing the emergency dismount while the leader is responsible for keeping the horse still and calm. The onside sidewalker is on the left side of the horse, behind the leader, and the offside sidewalker is on the right side of the horse, opposite the leader.

Leader and two sidewalkers:

- Instructor calls "emergency dismount"
- Onside volunteer takes the rider's foot out of the stirrup and calls "foot clear"
- Offside volunteer takes the rider's foot out of the stirrup and calls "foot clear"
- Offside volunteer removes the rider's hands from the reins, places the reins forward on the horse's neck, and calls "hands clear"
- Offside volunteer lifts the rider's leg over the back of the saddle and calls "leg clear"
- Onside volunteer pulls rider off and away from horse and calls "rider clear"

Leader and one sidewalker

- Instructor calls “emergency dismount”
- Offside volunteer takes the rider’s foot out of the stirrup and calls “foot clear”
- Offside volunteer removes the rider’s hands from the reins, places the reins forward on the horse’s neck, and calls “hands clear”
- Offside volunteer pulls rider off and away from horse and calls “rider clear”

Emergency Evacuation of the Arena

Below are some recommended guidelines to be applied as necessary in the event of an emergency.

Sidewalker

- Tell the rider that an emergency dismount is required
- Perform emergency dismount
- Accompany client to exit designated by instructor

Horse Leader

- Bring the horse to a halt and remain standing until the area is cleared
- If the horse is moving erratically, once the rider has dismounted, move the horse away from the rider’s path to exit the area.
- Remove horse to location specified by the instructor

Instructor/Therapist

- If no emergency dismount is required, have the client clear feet from stirrups and dismount
- Instruct class on where clients should exit and location to report to (see map). Immediate shelter is available in the barn.
- Instruct leaders on where to put the horses.

Specific Emergencies

Below are recommended guidelines to be used in the case of emergency. In any situation, your instructor or therapist will give specific instructions.

Major Weather Emergency

- The client is dismounted
- Leader takes horse to the emergency pasture gate
- Sidewalkers usher clients and clients’ family members to the barn aisle
- Instructor stays with leaders until the horses are out, then leaders and instructor go to the barn aisle

Medium Weather Emergency

- The client is dismounted
- Leaders move horses to the barn and place in stalls – untack if horse is calm
- Sidewalkers usher clients and clients' family members to the barn
- Instructor oversees group

Fire

- The client is dismounted
- Volunteers move horses and riders as far from the fire as possible
- If the fire is small, instructor designates a volunteer to get a fire extinguisher
- If the fire is large, instructor designates a volunteer to call 911

Personal Injury

- Instructor designates a volunteer to call 911 if necessary and follows First Aid protocol
- Instructor directs removal of uninjured clients, horses, volunteers, and family members from the immediate area. Sidewalkers should escort clients and family members to a safe area, and horse leaders should remove horses from the area.
- Instructor designates a volunteer to go to the road and direct emergency personnel. If horses are still in the vicinity, emergency responders should be directed to turn off lights and siren upon entering the driveway.