



EQUITHERAPY

Volunteer Handbook

Revised October 2023

Wings of Hope Equitherapy

4200 CR 806 Cleburne, Texas 76031

817-783-3805- text/call



Welcome

Welcome to Wings of Hope Equitherapy (**WOH**) and thank you for joining us. Together we can provide a fun and exciting learning environment for our clients and their horses. It would be impossible for us to do this important work without you, OUR VOLUNTEERS! Thank you for volunteering with Wings of Hope Equitherapy. Your desire to share your skills, time and talent is greatly appreciated.

Be sure to like us on Facebook and follow us on Instagram to keep up with the latest and greatest.

Facebook

@wingsofhopehorses and @wingsofhoparoundupforriders

IG

@wingsofhopeequitherapy

Volunteer Coordinator Sandy Alvarado

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Purpose & Background

The Purpose of Therapeutic and Adaptive Horsemanship: Wings of Hope Equitherapy provides both mounted and ground based therapeutic horsemanship. Therapeutic horseback riding is for individuals seeking the physical benefits and movement from the horse to improve gait, flexibility, balance, focus and communication. Ground based horsemanship is offered for individuals seeking a combination of physical, social, or emotional benefits from the horse.

Mission: It is the mission of Wings of Hope Equitherapy to provide equine-assisted services for children and adults with unique physical, mental, and emotional challenges.

Core Purpose: To provide hope and healing through gentle horses and the love of God.

History: Wings of Hope Equitherapy was founded by Margaret Dickens and Patti Pace in 1996 as a ministry to provide inclusion for all through the love of God and gentle horses. The present facility opened in the spring of 2000 on 25 acres.

Clients: Wings of Hope Equitherapy serves clients with a wide range of physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive challenges. We teach children as young as the age of 4 and adults with no maximum age restriction with any type of diagnosed physical, mental or emotional challenge.

PATH International: All lessons are conducted under the standards and guidelines of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International. (*PATH Intl.*) to ensure a safe and professional standard of equine assisted services are provided.

Operations: Wings of Hope Equitherapy is a 501c3 non-profit organization and is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and maintains operations through a small number of staff, a wonderful herd of horses, and trained volunteers. We are funded through private and corporate donations, fundraising events, and grant writing efforts. Typically, horses are donated to the program, or the money utilized to purchase a horse is fundraised and donated.

Volunteer Opportunities

Several volunteer opportunities are available whether you volunteer your time in the arena or outside of the arena! All volunteers generally have the opportunity to volunteer directly with a horse and their client as a Side Walker or Leader. All volunteers participating in lesson activities must have the necessary strength, endurance, reliability, and communication skills to assist a client during the lesson and in an emergency situation.

Leader: A leader has the sole focus and responsibility of the horse during the lesson. A Leader is a person who is familiar with horses and their behavior and has gone through a specialized leader training to groom, tack, and prepare the horse for the lesson and utilizes a halter and lead rope to lead and guide the horse during a lesson.

Side Walker: All volunteers are initially trained as Side Walkers no matter their horse experience to enter the program with the opportunity to have a soul focus on the client. Side Walkers are trained to provide safety, stability, and encouragement as directed by the instructor to assist the client when needed. 1 to 2 Side Walkers may be utilized per client. Up to 4 clients may be scheduled for a lesson.

Volunteer Captains: Volunteer Captains have a demonstrated knowledge of and an in depth understanding of equine assisted services and both Wings of Hope Equitherapy and PATH International standards. Volunteer Captains serve as an extension of the instructor to ensure safety standards are upheld at all times. Volunteer Captains are utilized for training new volunteers and ensuring Leaders and Side Walkers are adequately prepared prior to the start of the lesson and ensuring time management.

Grounds & House Keeping: These volunteers help to maintain a well-groomed property and facility. You may be asked to help the staff with specific projects or tasks or help with organizing, cleaning, maintenance, lawn care, equipment operating, etc.

Volunteer Commitment

Operation Year: Wings of Hope Equitherapy is open September through May with minimal scheduled breaks for holidays and special events. Scheduled closures include New Year's Day, Memorial Day, 4th of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and during Chisholm Challenge at the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo.

Operations are modified during the months of June and July for summer programming and closed in August due to the heat. We do not follow any specific school calendar.

Absenteeism: For dates that you will need a substitute and know ahead of time, email volunteer@wingsofhopehorses.org or follow this link at www.wingsofhopeequitherapy.org/volunteerabsent. If you have an emergency or are ill, please call or text the office at 817-783-3805, as soon as possible, so that we may find a substitute and not cancel a client's lesson.

Weekly Time Commitment: Volunteers are asked to commit to a minimum of 1.5-2 hours weekly, preferably on the same day and time each week to provide consistency for clients and horses. If you are unable to commit to the same day and time but can commit to a flexible schedule that still allows the commitment of 1.5-2 hours weekly, arrangements can be made.

Court Ordered or Documented Community Service Hours: You must let the Volunteer Coordinator know that you are obtaining hours for community service. You *MUST* commit to a minimum of 30+ hours over the span of 3+ months to volunteer for documented community service hours. Persons with offenses including arson, theft, assault, sexual related crimes, unlawful restraint, or animal cruelty are not accepted and are ineligible to volunteer.

Paperwork (A11/23): Each volunteer will submit an initial application with signed waiver and releases as well as a background check authorization. Each year at the expiry date the forms will be renewed. The application will include but is not limited to name, address, phone number, date of birth, parent/guardian & phone number if applicable, name(s) of person with phone number to contact in case of emergency.

Volunteer Training

Initial Training: Wings of Hope Equitherapy provides initial onboarding training for every program volunteer as a Side Walker. This allows every volunteer to receive a foundation of training that is client focused, the core of the mission. This training consists of a combination of pre reading material, orientation and hands on training to provide an overview of orientation to the facility, specialty programs, and equine-assisted activities in general, the definition of volunteer and personnel responsibilities, emergency procedures, confidentiality parameters, safety rules & regulations, and an introduction to the population served at Wings of Hope Equitherapy.

Continual Training: Wings of Hope Equitherapy provides continual training for all volunteers through the duration of a volunteer's commitment. This ensures continuing education is provided to promote continual and consistent program outcomes for volunteers, clients, and equines.

Communication

Wings of Hope Equitherapy uses email and text as the primary methods of communication. Volunteer News emails are sent weekly from volunteer@wingsofhopehorses.org These emails will include sub-requests for the week and any new information you need to know. Make sure your current email is on file!

Emails: *Volunteer Coordinator:* volunteer@wingsofhopehorses.org

General Communication: office@wingsofhopehorses.org

Barn Phone: *Call or text 817-783-3805*

Weather

- Lessons will be held between 35° and 95° unless there is an advisory or warning from the National Weather Service or inclement weather not conducive to providing services in a safe setting.
- You will receive a phone call or text if lessons are canceled. *DO NOT ASSUME*, call if you have a question or the weather is inclement in your area, and you need to cancel.
- We will make every attempt to modify lessons safely with alternative accommodation.
- In the event the lesson is cancelled we will make every attempt to cancel within a minimum of 2 hours of your scheduled volunteer time.

Dress Code (A27)

- Lessons take place in a covered arena with a sand dirt mixture similar to walking on a beach, in addition to outdoors on the trail with natural terrain.
- Please dress accordingly, with long pants to protect your legs, conservative shirts that do not have a spaghetti strap, plunging neckline, or the showing of midriff.
- Closed toe shoes or boots are *REQUIRED*.
- Please refrain from large cowboy hats or caps that might be distracting or in reach of riders in addition to no dangling jewelry earrings, necklaces, bracelets, etc.
- In all cases use your best judgment and common sense when dressing for activities at the barn. Keep in mind the safety of yourself, the horse, and the rider. Be mindful of the

unique population you will be working with and the importance of representing Wings of Hope as a professional organization.

Volunteer Check In & Out Procedures (A12)

- Please arrive before class time to help prepare for the lesson.
 - Side Walkers must arrive 15 minutes prior to the start of the lesson.
 - Leaders must arrive 30 minutes prior to the start of the lesson.
- Be sure to sign in using your PIN on the tablet in the Volunteer Center or on your phone on Volgistics through the VicNet app when you arrive and sign out when you leave.
 - Your donation of time is considered an in-kind donation and allows us to report this to insurance, grants and funders as a donation.
- Bring your provided name tag and always wear it in the barn while volunteering.
- Check the tack list on the tack room door for your assignment
 - Help the instructor get the arena ready by setting out activities.
 - If you have been trained to groom and tack, you may help get horses ready for lessons.
- Clean the arena, put activities away, and check for any additional duties before leaving.

Side Walker Responsibilities (A34)

Side Walkers are trained to provide safety, stability, and encouragement as directed by the instructor to assist the client when needed. Different methods are used with individual riders depending on their unique needs.

Effective ways to Side Walk:

- Over the thigh hold: Place the arm closest to the client across the client's thigh and grasp the front edge of the saddle to apply steady pressure.
 - An over the thigh hold is always done when exiting the ramp, no matter the independence of the rider.
- Ankle hold: Hold the client's pant cuff or the back of their boot or shoe to provide steady pressure.
- Walk beside the rider to assist when needed and as directed by the instructor.
 - Give the client the support needed but not more than is necessary.
 - If there are two side walkers, the instructor will designate one person to verbally reinforce directions. Too much input can confuse a client.
 - Focus the client's attention on the task at hand.
 - Limit personal conversation but always include and engage with the client and their team.
 - Do not rest your elbow on the horse's back. It will encourage speed and for the horse to move away from the pressure you are applying on its back.
 - Stay at the client's side at ALL times!
 - Do not leave the client's side for any reason, do not pick up dropped activities. Stay at the client's side during a halt and during the walk or trot.

- Side Walkers should change sides one at a time if there are two, regardless of if there is one or two Side Walkers you must always ask the Leader to halt and come into the center of the arena or under the instructor's supervision before switching sides.
- Check often to ensure your client is balanced and in the center of the horse's back or in the position your instructor placed the client.
 - If the client is off center, ask the Leader to halt and inform the instructor. Do NOT ever shift the client or physically move the client without the guidance and assistance of the instructor in your direct presence.
- Side Walkers are not allowed to lead, enter a stall or engage with a horse independently without a trained Leader or staff member present.

Leader Responsibilities (A34)

A leader has the sole focus and responsibility of the horse during the lesson. The leader grooms and tacks the horse for the lesson, warms up the horse 10 minutes prior to the lesson, and maintains and ensures proper safety procedures as an advocate for the horse during lessons.

How to warm-up:

- Horses need to be in the arena and actively participating in warm up exercises 10 minutes before lesson starts.
- The warm-up period is a good time to check the horse for any lameness issues or other soreness.
- If you see a health, safety, or tack issue with the horse, please let the instructor know immediately.

Warm-up exercises:

- Follow me exercise -Place your hand on the lead 2 feet from the clasp. Hook your thumb in a belt loop or pocket. Walk the horse, making sharp turns until they find their place beside you, taking pressure off the lead line.
- Yield to pressure exercise- Face the horse and ask them to back up.
- Engage their mind exercise- Introduce the horse to each element in the arena such as rings, poles, games, activities, objects, etc.

How to lead:

- Hold the rope with the right hand 12"-18" from the clasp to allow the horse to move naturally.
- Make a figure 8 with the excess rope and hold the extra rope in your left hand. Never wrap it around your hand.
- Your pace sets the pace of the horse, be aware of your pace and the pace needed of your rider and their team and speed up or slow down accordingly.
- Make sure the lead rope is between the reins not over them

- Keep your shoulder even with the horse's cheek, the horse's cheek should be at your shoulder.
- The horse's head should not be behind you or in front of you.
- Wait for the client to initiate actions through verbal commands, leg or seat aids, cues and commands.
 - Do not give clients more support than they need or do it for them and take the opportunity from them.
- Keep your attention on the horse if there are side walkers it is their job to interact with the client, your focus is the horse.
 - Allow the side walker to give verbal cues to the rider.
- Keep a minimum of 2 horse lengths between horses and keep a safe distance from the horses around you.
 - You may circle to the inside of the arena if you need more room. Always inform the rider and side walkers before you make a turn to the inside.
- **DO NOT** let the horse's head get too low to the ground.
- Makes wide turns and transitions softly.
- Allow space for side walkers on either side
- At a halt stand just to the side of the horse's head and do not restrict the horse too much as this will allow the horse to relax but keep the horse engaged to prevent a spook or startle during the halt.

Mounting Procedures

- The leader is responsible for positioning the horse in the mounting ramp with their flank as close as possible and touching the outside of the ramp.
 - Stand quietly facing the horse, step back, giving the horse space while maintaining control.
- The instructor will position a side walker on the offside.
- Side walking begins at the mounting ramp and side walkers will always use an over thigh hold while exiting the ramp area.
- Stirrups are always adjusted in the arena only, never at the ramp.
 - Never put the client's feet in the stirrups until verbally instructed to do so by the instructor.
 - Stay by the client's leg/stirrup all the time unless requested by the instructor.

Dismounting Procedures

- Leaders will halt the horse in the location verbalized by the instructor for dismount and ensure the horse remains halted and still during the dismount process.
- When the client is dismounted if directed by the instructor the client will remove the reins, run up English irons, and loosen the cinch/girth.
 - If the client does not participate in this regimen the leader will be responsible for doing so prior to leaving the arena and entering the stall area.
- The Leader will not exit the arena until given verbalized consent from the instructor.

- The Side Walker(s) will assist the instructor as needed during the dismount process by being an offside, assisting with removing feet from stirrups, a rider's leg lift, retrieving adaptive aids such as walker, wheelchair, etc.
 - Do not leave the rider's side or leave the arena at any time until directed with verbalized consent of the instructor.
 - Walk the client outside of the arena and return them to their caregiver, if asked by the instructor.

Emergency Procedures (A25)

Unplanned Emergency Dismount: In the event of an emergency dismount for a mounted client all volunteers and clients will follow the direction of the instructor or personnel taking the lead in verbalizing the emergency procedures. All horses will be halted, in the event of a situation where a mounted rider has an unplanned dismount the leader will turn the horse towards the direction of the fall, not to turn the hind end or honches towards the rider who is dismounted on the ground. The dismounted rider is then moved away from the area to create a safe scene. If moving the dismounted rider is not feasible due to the need for assistive or adaptive aids the wheelchair, walker, UTV, etc. is brought to the scene. If moving the dismounted rider is not feasible due to visible or suspected injury or visible trauma the emergency procedure for calling 911 and/or providing First Aid is enacted.

Planned Emergency Dismount: In the event of an abrupt but planned emergency dismount the only the instructor or personnel may perform or direct an emergency dismount. All mounted riders will halt and keep a safe distance from the equine in question. The instructor, personnel, or appointed volunteer performs an emergency dismount by ensuring feet are out of the stirrups, reins or other objects that could pose as a safety hazard are removed from direct harm, and the rider is supported in a manner that allows the rider to disengage from the equine in question, and is assisted to the ground as gently and methodically as possible. The leader then turns the horse towards the dismounted rider if it is in close proximity to the dismounted rider and dismount team. The horse is then moved away from the area to create a safe scene.

Providing First Aid: In the event first aid is needed a personnel member will direct specific volunteer or other personnel to retrieve the first aid kit and AED which are mounted in the barn outside of the offices. The appointed person responsible for retrieving the equipment will verbalize back to the personnel requesting the equipment to ensure the request was heard and is in process. (*Personnel:* “Call out by name”- “Name” go grab the first aid kit and AED!
Response: Grabbing the first aid kit and AED!) A trained and certified personnel member then renders first aid upon arrival of the necessary equipment or supplies.

Calling 911: In the event 911 is called a personnel member will direct specific volunteer or other personnel to call 911. In the event a volunteer is appointed they will enter the volunteer center to use the designated emergency phone and will follow the posted 911 procedures and follow the prompts of the dispatcher. The appointed person responsible for calling 911 will verbalize back to the personnel requesting the call to ensure the request was heard and is in process. (*Personnel:* “Call out by name”- “Name” go call 911!
Response: Going to call 911!)

An additional volunteer or personnel member will be appointed to approach the front gate at the end of the driveway and the roadway to be on the lookout for emergency personnel and to assist or direct their arrival to the appropriate location on the property upon arrival.

Emergency Evacuation- In the event of an emergency that requires evacuation, leave the building by the closest exit available and in an orderly manner. Employees and any participants on site will meet in the parking lot for a headcount. In the event of a fire or emergency near the parking lot, evacuations will take place at the front gate or in the Discovery Trail for a contained area when necessary.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality Statement: I understand that all information (written and verbal) concerning participants, volunteers, staff, or stakeholders at Wings of Hope Equitherapy are confidential and will not be shared with anyone without the expressed permission of Wings of Hope Equitherapy or directly by a participant or their parent/legal guardian.

- You may not approach any Wings of Hope Equitherapy client in public, outside of the facility/barn.
 - Should a client approach you, you may or may not choose to engage, but this is **ONLY** to be initiated by the client or parent/guardian.
 - This is to include in the physical presence or in a virtual presence, including social media.
- You may not take photos of or with any Wings of Hope client, volunteer, employee or horse, without the consent of Wings of Hope Equitherapy while on the premises.
 - If permission for photos is granted you must receive additional permission to post on social media, digital media or printed media.

Dismissal Policy (A10)

Conditions that may lead to dismissal of volunteers or guests:

- Failure to comply with any of Wings of Hope Equitherapy policies or procedures
- Use of drugs or alcohol or inebriation while on the property
- Disruptive or inappropriate behavior
- Threat of violence or the safety of others
- Mistreatment of persons or animal
- Theft of property
- Repeated No Show/No Call
- No longer suitable for volunteer activities

Safety Rules

Safety is Wings of Hope Equitherapy's top priority. Clients, family members, volunteers, staff and visitors must comply with the safety rules.

- All people riding horses will wear ASTM/SEI approved helmets and appropriate footwear. (*A30)
- No cell phones are allowed inside the arena except for the Instructor and Volunteer Captains.
- No pets allowed.
- No treats, feed, or hay are to be given to the horses unless authorized by an employee.
- The mistreatment, abuse, or verbal suggestions of abuse toward any human or animal will not be tolerated and may result in dismissal from our programs.
- Please remember to keep our facility clean by disposing of trash properly
- Expectant mothers are not able to volunteer, manage, or be around our equine partners for safety precautions.
- When background checks are run, the following offenses are not permitted: Arson, theft, assault, sexual crimes, unlawful restraint, or animal cruelty.
- All arena gates are closed securely during all lessons. In the event a gate needs to open for any reason while a lesson is in progress and clients are mounted anyone exiting the arena must have the consent and verbalized authorization of the instructor to exit. Upon reentry a person must announce “gate” to make sure everyone in the arena is aware that a gate is momentarily opening and closing.
- Observe and refrain from entry of any location with posted restricted area signage.
 - No wandering on the property.
- Family and guests are requested to sit quietly on the bleachers or in the waiting areas.
 - No leaning or climbing on the arena rail.
 - Unattended children may not attend a lesson with a volunteer.
- Smoking is prohibited anywhere on the Wings of Hope Equitherapy property.
- Handguns are prohibited
 - Pursuant to section 30.06, penal code, a person licensed under subchapter H, chapter 411, government code, may not enter this property with a concealed handgun. Pursuant to section 30.07, penal code, a person licensed under subchapter H, chapter 411, government code, may not enter this property with a handgun that is carried openly.