



**renew**

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**therapeutic riding center**

**Volunteer & Personnel  
Handbook**

4271 60th Street  
Holland, Michigan 49423  
Ph: 616.510.4261

## ***Welcome to Renew!***

Thank you for choosing to volunteer with Renew Therapeutic Riding Center. Our mission is to enhance the well-being of individuals in our community through the physical, cognitive, and emotional benefits of therapeutic horsemanship. At Renew, each rider has the opportunity to go beyond their disability, inability, fear or reality. We encourage and support dreams by offering therapeutic horsemanship activities to fulfill our mission, striving to help riders develop their maximum potential in a caring and fun environment that empowers the rider in ways different from traditional therapy.

We depend greatly on our volunteers for everything we do. Volunteers make it possible for our program to continue to grow and serve the community – our mission would not be possible without you!

Renew TRC is a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited center, reflecting compliance with the highest industry standards in best practices in equine assisted activities and therapies. In keeping with this, we have established policies and procedures designed for the safety of Renew's riders, equine partners, volunteers, and visitors. This volunteer handbook is an outline of what is expected of our volunteers; please read carefully and adhere to these safety standards while volunteering with Renew.

We witness miracles on a regular basis and love to share what we do with others! This program would not be possible without our volunteers, and we appreciate all you sacrifice to volunteer with us. We know you will enjoy your role in our program as much as we enjoy having you.

*Thank you!*

*"But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31*

## WHAT WE DO AT RENEW

For more information on the benefits of therapeutic riding, see “Why Therapeutic Riding?” in the Appendix.

### A BIT OF HISTORY

Renew’s riding program began in 2009 as a result of a lifelong dream of founders, Jodi Geerlings and Phyllis DeHaan, to offer therapeutic riding lessons to those who could benefit from this service. In 2010, we found our home here, at Rusty Spurs Equestrian Center, when Jodi and Phyllis partnered with the Rozemas to begin therapeutic riding at this location. The name was then changed to Renew Therapeutic Riding Center, taking the notion of renewal from Isaiah 40:31.

In 2013, the Board hired Melissa Conner as Executive Director and as an Advanced Instructor, and Renew began another stage of growth, doubling our number of students and volunteers involved in the program. This growth necessitated searching for additional space and arena time than was currently available. In late 2014, Renew began a Capital Campaign to raise funds to build our own facility by repurposing a large enclosure at the south end of the property at Rusty Spurs. Due to the generosity of many, including a major grant of \$30,000 from the Community Foundation of Holland/Zeeland, the new barn, pasture, heated indoor riding arena, and outdoor arena were completed in January of 2016.

Renew is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and is governed by a Board of Directors. As a charity, we are dependent upon donations and grant money to meet our budget. Lesson fees cover approximately 40% of operating expenses. As we have grown to serve more students, our budget has grown in order to provide excellent care for our horses and to hire additional part-time staff to handle the larger workload. We continue to depend greatly upon volunteers for 95% of what we do on a weekly basis at Renew.

### RENEW TODAY

We have grown to provide over 2,000 equine-assisted therapeutic lessons per year in our newly completed barn, designed specifically for the services we offer. We accomplish this in partnership with our six equine staff members, as well as additional borrowed horses.

Our students are individuals of all ages with diverse physical, mental, and emotional challenges.

Instructors are certified by PATH, Intl. and we offer mentoring to others seeking instructor certification. For additional information regarding instructors, please refer to the job description in the Appendix or contact the Executive Director.

Trained volunteers assist the instructors in pursuing the objectives for each lesson. Instructors write lesson plans based on individual rider’s goals, document outcomes, and maintain progress notes for each session. All files are maintained securely on-site, in locked file cabinets in compliance with PATH Intl.

### OUR FACILITY

We are blessed to be located just south of the Holland city limits, with central access to many surrounding communities. We have our own barn, which includes a heated indoor arena, pastures, outdoor arena, and has access to parking and rest rooms in the adjacent barn at Rusty Spurs Equestrian Center. Our property address is 4271 60th Street, Holland, MI 49423.

We have several off-limits areas, which are indicated with yellow “Authorized Personnel Only” signs. These

are located at the pasture gate, by the feed and equipment area, and at the mounting area in the indoor arena containing the hydraulic lift.

The emergency phone is located in the office and has emergency phone numbers and directions to our facility located adjacent to it. The barn phone number is 616-510-4261.

First Aid supplies are located next to the mechanical lift, just to the right of the office door.

## **VOLUNTEER VISION**

The vision for the volunteer program is to:

- Foster professionalism, growth, and development in our volunteers
- Encourage teamwork between our staff and volunteers
- Provide equine-assisted activities to individuals with disabilities in order to develop maximum physical and psychological potential
- Have fun in a safe, secure environment

## **SAFETY FIRST (Barn rules):**

We respect the facility and express gratitude to the property owners and donors who allow us to operate at this location; as a result we care for the property and barn we use for program activities by maintaining a clean and safe environment;

- We only handle Renew horses and do not interact with the other horses who live next to Rusty Spurs Equestrian Center (unless we have permission and a borrowed horse agreement is in place)
- There is no smoking at the facility
- No running, roughhousing, or offensive language will be allowed
- Children should always be accompanied by a responsible adult
- Please park in designated parking spaces
- Always follow the instructions of the staff members
- Speak to one another with respect and love.

We are all members of the Renew family and agree to work in cooperation with one another to ensure safety for all.

## **WHEN YOU COME TO VOLUNTEER**

1. Please sign in as this helps us keep track of your hours.
2. Check the lesson schedule to confirm who you are working with.
3. Let a staff member know you have arrived and ask how you can help.
4. Greet students and parents as they arrive.
5. Assist in a lesson, as directed by the Instructor.

## WHAT TO WEAR

Modest clothing is always advised. Loose clothing can be dangerous or may get in the way, so please wear fitted clothing. No skirts please.

Layers that can be shed as you exercise. Bring a jacket, even if you feel you won't need it.

Comfortable, sturdy shoes. Open-toed shoes should not be worn.

Sunscreen and sunglasses during the warmer months.

## VOLUNTEER ROLES

There are many different ways that volunteers participate in our program. The primary role is by serving as a lesson volunteer. Lesson volunteers work directly with the instructor to provide assistance prior to and during lessons. Lesson volunteers report directly to the instructor in charge of the lesson. For scheduling or paperwork questions, please inquire with the appropriate staff member.

*See Job Description in the Appendix.*

The main responsibilities of lesson volunteers include:

- Providing support in the lesson
- Ensuring safety
- Reinforcing the instructor's teachings and intentions
- Leading the horse
- Side-walking
- Grooming and tacking the horse

In addition to lesson volunteers, we also have the roles available of administrative volunteers, greeters, and barn crew. For more information, please see the job descriptions in the Appendix, or contact the Executive Director.

## SIDE-WALKERS

Side-walkers walk beside the rider during the lesson.

The main responsibilities of side-walkers include:

- Assisting with mounting and dismounting
- Providing stability while ensuring the rider stays in the proper riding alignment while on the horse
- Providing a heel hold or a thigh hold for physical support
- Jogging alongside the horse during a trot
- Ensuring the rider is free of distractions in order to focus at the task-at-hand
- Putting the rider's safety as priority

Side-walkers are crucial in the event of an emergency.

\*Please note: During the lesson, side-walkers should only speak to the rider to reiterate instruction or for safety purposes. During the lesson, side-walkers should encourage the rider to focus on the Instructor, not distracting the rider from the task at hand.

### *HEEL HOLD*

Things to remember when providing a heel hold:

- Keep one or both hands on the rider's ankle or foot
- Keep the rider's leg and foot in the correct position while performing side-walker duties
- This hold is used with a rider who has problems pushing his or her legs forward or backward.

### *THIGH HOLD*

Things to remember when providing a thigh hold:

- The side-walker holds the front of the tack being used, with the hand closest to the horse,
- The side-walker's forearm rests gently over the thigh of the rider
- This hold is used for the rider who does not have the balance or trunk stability to stay on top of the horse independently.

## **HORSE LEADERS**

Horse leaders have many responsibilities and may be asked to do a variety of tasks. Some of these tasks include:

- Bringing in horses from the pasture
- Grooming and tacking horses for lessons
- Horses are led by the 'Taking the Lead' method (If you are unfamiliar with this method, please consult with an instructor)
- Warming up the horse in the arena
- Showing the horse the arena set-up
- Taking the horse from the grooming area to the mounting area
- Attending to the horse during mounting
- Leading the horse as directed by the Instructor
- Returning the horse to the stall or pasture after the lesson.

\*Please note: Horse leaders are not expected to interact with the rider. The focus of the horse leader should always be on the horse during lessons. \*When retrieving a horse from pasture, it's helpful to take a 'gate-buddy' to man the gate for you. Pasture gates need to be securely closed at all times.

### *MOUNTING*

Your rider may lead the horse to the arena with your assistance, or the Instructor may ask you to lead the horse into the arena.

Do not attempt to mount the rider yourself! The Instructor will do all of the mounting unless the rider is instructed to proceed without help, assist with the mounting procedure by following the instructor's directions.

During mounting, the horse leader should be positioned in front of the horse's head.

If the rider is standing with you as a sidewalker or horse leader, be sure that he or she does not go beyond the horse, but stands quietly beside you.

Always follow the directions of the Instructor throughout the mounting procedure.

## **DURING THE LESSON**

Sidewalkers may be asked to perform a physical support for the rider, be it a heel hold or a thigh hold.

Please only speak to rider to reiterate instructor's intentions. Do not distract the rider from their task at hand, which is learning new riding skills.

Notify instructor of any unusual rider's issues, such as excessive fatigue, exceptional agitation, emotional changes, profuse sweating or color changes.

Horse leaders, do not make any unnecessary sharp turns and be aware of the sidewalkers on the outside, allowing enough spacing between the fence and the horse. Also be aware of horse's speed.

Keep alert! Side-walkers are to focus on the rider at all times while horse leaders must focus on horses at all times.

### *DISMOUNTING*

Unless otherwise specified, the Instructor will dismount the student.

You will be asked to line up in the arena. The horse leader should remember to stand in front of the horse and wait quietly.

Instructor will dismount all riders one at a time. As sidewalker or horse leader, please stand quietly with your rider until all other riders have been dismounted.

Please remain with the student while feeding a treat. Put away their helmet and tack while waiting until they are returned to their parent or caregiver.

## **EMERGENCY DISMOUNTS**

Occasionally, emergency dismounts are necessary to quickly dismount students in emergency situations. Side-walkers should communicate and the student should be pulled off the horse by the waist to one side. The horse leader is responsible for getting the horse in the opposite direction of the student. Please see Safety and Emergency Procedures in the Appendix for additional information.

## **BASIC RULES FOR SAFETY WHEN WORKING WITH PROGRAM HORSES**

- Approach the horse from the side, not the rear. Talk to it in a low voice, and keep a hand on its body while walking around it
- Always use quiet voices and avoid sudden movements when working with horses
- All cell phones or other devices should be in either an OFF or MUTED position at all times when working with the horses
- Always speak to a horse before approaching or touching it
- Always walk around a tied horse never under it or over the rope
- After leading the horse to the paddock, turn the horse to the gate so that the horse faces the gate. Close the gate, then remove the lead shank. It is helpful to take a 'gate-buddy' with you to assist
- When saddling a horse – please do not tighten the girth. Renew's horses get used many times a day by numerous people. Because of this, we need to remember to be incredibly gentle when

tightening the girth. This means only tightening the girth so that it's barely touching the horse's belly. The Instructor will check and tighten the cinch or girth again BEFORE bringing the horse to the mounting ramp, and ensure that the saddle pad or saddle is tight enough so that it will not shift when the rider mounts

- Keep all reins and lead lines off the ground to avoid the horse stepping on it. NEVER wrap the rope around your hand or wrist; instead, fold extra lead so it makes an 8-shaped loop in your hand
- Never leave a horse unattended in its stall with a bridle or hackamore on its head, with or without reins attached

## **SAFETY REMINDERS**

Safety is of utmost importance! We have many procedures in place to ensure the safety of our students and volunteers. We will review and rehearse fire and tornado emergency procedures at least annually for all participants and volunteers. Please see Safety and Emergency Procedures in the Appendix for additional information.

### *FIRE PROCEDURE*

In the event of a fire, a staff member will alert everyone in the barn to enact the Fire Safety Procedure. Students, volunteers, horses and guests will gather on the track at the South end of the property. A staff member will call 911 and the lesson will continue, if possible, once the fire safety personnel have indicated it is safe. Please see *Safety and Emergency Procedures* in the Appendix for additional information.

### *TORNADO PROCEDURE*

In the event of a tornado, all personnel and horses will remain in the barn. People should gather in the center aisle of the Rusty Spurs barn if possible. If time does not allow, then remain in middle of indoor arena at Renew. Please see *Safety and Emergency Procedures* in the Appendix for additional information.

\*Please note: If a tornado is spotted, no attempt to bring the horses inside should be made!

## **OTHER SAFETY CONCERNS**

Please refer to the Risk Management policy located in the Appendix for additional information on safety issues. If you have any concerns or input, please contact the Executive Director or a member of the Board of Directors.

Unless directed to do so by a staff member, please do not go into an "Authorized Personnel Only" area. These off-limit areas are marked for your protection and for the protection of all program participants.

## **WHEN INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

- Be yourself! Act as you would when meeting any other new person. Be enthusiastic and genuinely interested in them.
- Put people first, not their disability! The key is to remember that people have disabilities. Their disability does not define them as a person. (i.e.: Claude "suffers from depression," instead of Claude "is depressed.")

- We should avoid labels because labels tend to define people and carry negative stigmas.
- Speak to all students at their physical age-appropriate level. Or, in other words, don't 'talk down' or use a high 'sing-song' voice to them due to cognitive limitations. Also, don't assume a participant does not know something. Speak clearly and methodically, and be sure to allow time for processing and for a response before moving on in the conversation.
- Exercise patience and understanding. Remember that behavior can be a means of communication.
- Emphasize abilities and not their limitations. (i.e.: Jane "uses a wheelchair," instead of "Jane is wheelchair bound")
- If you are unsure how to react or engage with a rider, please ask a staff member for assistance.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY**

All program participants, including volunteers, guests and personnel, agree to uphold the Renew TRC Confidentiality Policy regarding maintaining the integrity and keeping confidential who participates in the program and what occurs at the center unless give specific permission by an authorized person to share information outside of the Renew TRC community.

## **DISMISSAL POLICY FOR VOLUNTEERS AND GUESTS**

In accordance with PATH Intl. Standards, Renew TRC has a policy to dismiss any volunteers or guests who become disruptive to horses, staff, or program participants. This includes not following barn rules, using disrespectful or foul language, having uncontrolled behaviors, violating the confidentiality policy, or exhibiting actions or language that endanger horses, volunteers, staff, property owners, neighbors at adjacent facility, horse owners, or program participants. This policy is to ensure that the culture and environment at Renew TRC remains safe and secure for all stakeholders and participants.

Once a dismissal occurs, the individual involved will not be welcomed back to the facility unless approved in writing by both the Executive Director and the Board of Directors.

If a dismissal occurs, staff members will complete an Incident Report and the Executive Director and Board of Directors will be notified.

## **Appendix**

Job Descriptions

Safety and Emergency Procedures

Why Therapeutic Riding

Risk Management

Policy

Staff List

Board of Directors Roster