



Renew Therapeutic Riding Center

Volunteer Handbook

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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, every individual has the opportunity to go beyond his or her disability, inability, fear or reality. We encourage and believe in dreams, and offer therapeutic horsemanship activities to fulfill our mission, striving to help riders to develop their maximum potential in a caring and fun environment that empowers the rider in ways very different from traditional therapy.

We depend greatly on our volunteers for everything we do. Lesson volunteers help us ensure that each rider has a safe, educational lesson in a fun environment. 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 that you sacrifice to volunteer with us. We hope you will enjoy your role in our program as much as we do.

Thank you!!

A BIT OF HISTORY

The riding program began in 2009 by founders, Jodi Geerlings and Phyllis DeHaan, as a result of a lifelong dream to offer therapeutic riding lessons to those who could benefit from this service. In 2011, we moved to Rusty Spurs Equestrian Center, where Jodi and Phyllis partnered with Tom and Kelly Rozema to begin therapeutic riding at this location. The name was then changed to Renew Therapeutic Riding Center, taking the notion of renewal from Isaiah 41:30.

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 served 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, 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 regular basis at Renew.

RENEW TODAY

We currently serve nearly 90 students each week and have a growing waiting list. Renew purchased 20 acres at 5080 146th Ave in the fall of 2018, where new facilities have been built. We have fully moved to this new space and now call it home. We are eager to keep growing and serving our community.

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

Instructors are certified by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Riding, International, 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 the individual rider's goals, and 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 able to be located just south of the Holland city limit, with central access to many surrounding communities. We have our own barn which includes a heated indoor arena, pastures, outdoor arena, with parking and restrooms on site. Our property address is 5080 146th Avenue, 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, sound box, and at the mounting area in the indoor arena containing the SureHands lift.

The emergency phone is located in the indoor arena on the north wall near the sound box. It has emergency phone numbers and directions to our facility located adjacent to it. The barn phone number is 616-227-3639.

First Aid supplies are located in the connector hallway of the arena and stall barn.

VISION FOR VOLUNTEERS

The vision for the volunteer program is to:

- Foster professionalism, growth and friendships 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 donors who enable us to operate at this location, and as a result we take care of the property and the barn that we use for program activities by maintaining a clean, safe environment.
- There is no smoking, running, roughhousing or offensive language.
- Children should always be accompanied by a responsible adult.
- Always follow the instructions of 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.

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. 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. 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 YOU COME TO VOLUNTEER

- Please arrive 15-20 minutes early and sign in.
- Check the lesson schedule to confirm who you are working with.
- Let a staff member know you are there and ask how you can help and assist in lessons as directed by the instructor.

WHAT TO WEAR

- Modest, close fitting clothing is advised. No skirts please.
- Layers that can shed as you exercise, bring a jacket, even if you feel you don't need it.
- Comfortable, sturdy, closed-toed shoes.
- Sunscreen, hat, and sunglasses in the warmer months.
- A water bottle.

VOLUNTEERS 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 volunteer coordinator. Lesson volunteers either serve as horse leaders or sidewalkers, those roles are explained below.

In addition to Lesson Volunteers, we also have the volunteer roles available of Administrative Volunteers, Greeters, and Barn Crew. For more information, please see the job descriptions in the Appendix, or contact the Program Manager.

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 and 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,
- Making sure not to distract the rider from the task-at-hand, and
- Putting the rider's safety as a 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 instructions 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 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, and
- 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 help maintain safety at the gate. 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.
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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, putting away their helmet and tack and 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.

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 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! Sidewalkers, focus is to be on the rider at all times. Horse leaders must focus on horses at all times.
- Please avoid unnecessary use of your cell phone while at the Renew barn in an effort to provide our students, families, and horses with our full attention
- Please refrain from taking pictures with students present out of respect for them and their families.
- If you bring friends or family with you to the barn, they are welcome to watch. If they interact with the horses at any point, a day guest waiver must be completed.

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 given specific permission by an authorized person to share information outside of the Renew TRC community.

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 personal communication 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 halter and leadrope. 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, many times a day by many different 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.

WHEN INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (OR ANYONE YOU MEET)

- Be yourself!
- Use people first-language, emphasize their abilities. For example, instead of saying the Downs kid, you could instead say the child with Down Syndrome. Or instead of the autistic student, you could say the student with autism. This helps remind us that each of us are first a foremost a person, and if we have a disability or diagnosis, that is one part of who we are.
- Volunteers never speak about a diagnosis or refer to a student by their diagnoses. Instructors will provide you with the necessary information about the student to aide in a safe and effective lesson.
- Speak to them at 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. If you're unsure how to react or engage with a rider, please ask a staff member for assistance.
- We should avoid labels because labels tend to define people and carry negative stigmas.

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, 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
Staff List
Board of Directors Roster

APENDIX**JOB DESCRIPTIONS****Volunteer Job Description: Lesson Volunteer**

The role of lesson volunteers is a valued position at Renew. This position is filled by a volunteer who is willing to commit to be at the barn during assigned lessons and serves to ensure safety, support, and care for our students during their lessons under the direct supervision of a staff member. Specific responsibilities include:

- Communicate with staff member regarding schedule and any changes or change in availability
- Sign in and out in the Volunteer Sign In Book
- Follow all barn rules, including Confidentiality and Emergency Safety Procedures and rehearsals
- Dress appropriately to be in the barn (close toed shoes only, modest clothing, small jewelry only)
- Greet students, parents/caregivers, and other volunteers
- Attend required volunteer trainings based on Renew policy
- Serve as a horse leader under supervision of staff member if assigned
- Serve as a sidewalker or floater under supervision of staff member if assigned, providing support to the rider as directed
- When asked, mentor new volunteers in common practices of the program
- Assist with the setup and clean up of barn areas and the arena under direction of staff member
- Serve as a representative of Renew in the community

Thank you for your willingness to serve in this capacity! We appreciate having you as part of the Renew family!

Volunteer Job Description: Barn Crew Volunteer

The role of Barn Crew is a valued position at Renew. This position is filled by a volunteer who is willing, able and trained to provide care to the program horses on-site. The Barn Crew volunteer reports directly to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Specific responsibilities include:

- Communicate with the Volunteer Coordinator regarding schedule and any changes or change in availability
- Sign in and out in the volunteer log when on site
- Follow all barn rules, including Confidentiality and Emergency Safety Procedures and rehearsals
- Dress appropriately to be in the barn (close toed shoes only, modest clothing, small jewelry only)
- Greet students, parents/caregivers, and other volunteers
- Serve as a representative of Renew in the community
- Perform tasks as assigned to include (but not limited to):
 - o Care and feeding of horses following the written feed schedule
 - o Providing feed and turnout at prescribed times set by Barn Manager
 - o Communicating with staff by using the Communication Book in the office
 - o Promoting safety in all horse-handling practices

Thank you for your willingness to serve in this capacity! We appreciate having you as part of the Renew family!

Volunteer Job Description: Greeter

The role of Greeter is a valued position at Renew. This position is filled by a volunteer who is willing to commit to be at the barn during a block of lessons and is the first point of contact for all who arrive- primarily volunteers and students.

Specific responsibilities include:

- Make sure the Volunteer Sign In Book is ready and available
- Communicate with staff member regarding schedule and any changes for that day
- Organize helmets and inspect for cleanliness and safety
- Answer questions as they arise
- Ensure that the center telephone is in working order and in its proper place
- Greet volunteers as they arrive and make sure they sign in
- Greet students, parents, and caregivers as they arrive
- Wait with students until it is their lesson time in designated waiting area
- Communicate with instructor when all students have arrived for a class
- Accept payments for lessons and apparel and document as needed (using receipt book)
- Keep lesson attendance or make notes to communicate to staff (ex: follow up phone call needed to a parent, upcoming vacation, lesson time change needed, etc.)
- Make sure that every person who arrives at Renew feels welcomed and appreciated
- Give tours as needed
- Serve as a representative of Renew in the community

Thank you for your willingness to serve in this capacity! We appreciate having you as part of the Renew family!

Volunteer Job Description: Instructor-in-Training

The role of instructor in training is a valued job position at Renew. This position is filled by a Renew volunteer who is pursuing becoming a certified instructor with PATH Intl. The Instructor in Training is willing to commit to be at the barn during assigned lessons and who works with a team of volunteers to ensure safety, support, and care for our students during their lessons while providing a safe and effective therapeutic riding instruction to students in either a private or group setting.

Instructors report directly to the Program Manager.

Specific responsibilities include:

- Communicate with Program Manager regarding schedule and any changes or change in availability
- Arrive prior to the scheduled lesson time in order to receive any communication and make adjustments in lesson plans based upon volunteer availability, horse issues, or participant absences.
- Follow all barn rules, including Confidentiality and Emergency Safety Procedures and participation in rehearsals.
- Dress appropriately to be in the barn (closed toed shoes only, modest clothing, small jewelry only)
- Greet students, parents/caregivers, and other volunteers and treat all with dignity and respect
- Assist in providing leadership by conducting volunteer trainings as requested
- Conduct therapeutic riding lessons in a safe and effective manner, following PATH Intl. standards and Code of Ethics, under the direction of a staff instructor
- Maintain attendance, horse usage, and progress note records, under the direction and supervision of an instructor
- Serve as a representative of Renew in the community

Thank you for your willingness to serve in this capacity! We appreciate having you as part of the Renew family!

SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

1. Facility Safety

- All barn rules are to be followed, including respecting designated off-limits areas as marked by “Authorized Personnel Only” signs.
- The designated Emergency Phone is located in the farmhouse. All emergency numbers are posted adjacent to the phone.
- In the event of a fire in the building, please vacate using the closest safe exit. A staff member will call 911. No one is to re-enter the barn until cleared to do so by emergency personnel.
- In the event of a tornado, if possible, leave horses as they are (either in the barn or in pasture) and gather in the interior aisle of the large barn. Remain there until instructed .

2. Emergencies in Lessons

- If a student needs to be dismounted, be prepared to follow instructions from staff to safely perform and emergency dismount. Sidewalkers are responsible for dismounting the student safely if an instructor is not near enough to do so in an emergency situation (horse spook or stumble, saddle slip, rider off balance). Horse Leaders should stay with the horse and put as much distance as possible between rider and horse when an emergency dismount occurs.
- If a student is exhibiting unsafe behavior (such as a tantrum or removal of a helmet while mounted), volunteers should assist as best they can until staff can respond appropriately.
- During mounting and dismounting procedures, it is important for volunteers to follow the directions of the instructor. Sidewalkers should attend to students and Horse Leaders should attend to the horse only (not the student).
- When assisting with the lift, volunteers should follow the instructions of the staff member in charge. Only instructors should operate the lift, and the power should be off when not in operation.
- The first aid kit (human) is located in the feed room.

3. Emergencies with Horses

- Only trained and authorized volunteers and staff are allowed to handle, tack, feed and groom horses.
- If illness or injury are suspected in a horse, staff should be contacted immediately.
- When working around horses, it is important to use appropriate tone of voice, to walk, use appropriate touch, and to take care to not startle them (beware of loud noises, opening doors, etc)
- All volunteers should maintain safe spacing when working around horses and be respectful of the horse’s “personal space.”
- It is always preferred to walk in front of the horse rather than behind the horse to avoid the danger of being kicked.
- Emergency numbers and vet/farrier numbers are located adjacent to the designated phone in the feed room.

WHY THERAPEUTIC RIDING?

Horses That Heal

Therapeutic riding opens new pathways of physical, mental, and emotional rehabilitation. The rhythmic and rocking gait of the horse transfers a gentle three-dimensional movement to the rider that relaxes muscles, improves muscle tone, flexibility and balance, and enhances spatial awareness. Accompanied by a team of encouraging volunteers and a supportive horse, self-control, self-esteem, self-confidence, and independence grows. Rehabilitation becomes a joy rather than a chore.

Individuals with disabilities such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, neuromuscular disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, acquired brain injury, cognitive limitations, emotional challenges, autism, learning disabilities, and attention deficit disorder, can use riding and learning horsemanship skills to experience an overall improvement in their quality of life.

Healing Attributes of Riding

- Normalizes muscle strength and tone. Improves coordination, freedom of movement, balance, respiration, body awareness, tactile perception, and oral motor control.
- Enhances self-image and confidence. Increases acceptance of unfamiliar experiences. Develops loving relationships with team of individuals and the horse.
- Increases attending and safety awareness. Enhances comprehension and memory. Improves ability to plan sequence and follow directions.
- Improves interpersonal communication. Promotes family interaction and broaden social activity. Develops a recreational skill with opportunities to experience success.

Therapeutic Riding

At Renew, the objective is to teach adapted riding skills to the rider. Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl., *see pathintl.org for more info*) Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors conduct each lesson. The rider receives all the physical, cognitive, and emotional benefits in addition to learning how to ride with the goal of full independence.

Renew Therapeutic Riding Center Staff Members, 2020

Melissa Conner: Executive Director and Certified Advanced Therapeutic Riding Instructor, Equine Specialist for Mental Health and Learning, Lead Site Visitor and Faculty member for PATH Intl.

Shaina Strikwerda: Program Manager and Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Emily Hill: Administrative Assistant and Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Cassie Pelon: Communications Coordinator

Jael Ymker: Volunteer Coordinator

Michelle Chernoby: Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Phyllis DeHaan: Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Deb Mast: Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Kayla Tuinenga: Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Kelly Leikert: Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Renew Therapeutic Riding Center Board of Directors, 2019

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