

Welcome Volunteers, Parents and Students

We'd like to remind you of our barn rules:

- **Parents, family members and guests, please remember to stay in the waiting area unless specifically asked or invited by staff to come to the arena area.**
- **Please refrain from engaging in conversation with your child or any riders during their allotted lesson time. This can be extremely distracting to students, staff and volunteers who may need to listen for important lesson and safety instructions.**
- **Please remain behind the yellow chain in the barn unless accompanied by staff or volunteers. The stall area where horses are kept is off-limits.**
- **No smoking**
- **Everyone must wear a helmet when riding.**
- **No running or yelling.**
- **No dogs allowed (except assistance dogs).**
- **Fully enclosed shoes required.**
- **Children must be under adult supervision at all times.**
- **All indoor and outdoor horse paddocks, stalls and fields are off-limits.**
- **Access to the bathroom is located in a high horse traffic area. Please use caution. For safety, students or children must be accompanied by staff, volunteer or parent.**

Volunteer Job Description

Assists in the riding lesson program/special events in a variety of ways upon needs of program and determination of skills by Instructor, Program Operations Manager and Executive Director. Duties may include: session, Prepare and tack horses for lessons, Clean tack, Become part of the horse care team, Sit on a Center advisory board , Provide professional services such as accounting, legal support or any number of other invaluable “pro bono” work, Perform clerical work in the office, Organize fund-raisers or public relations campaigns, Work toward becoming a NARHA Instructor, Some dedicated volunteers eventually transition and become staff, mucking stalls and paddocks, cleaning barn areas, grooming/bathing horses, , prepare horses for shows, socializing with students/parents outside of the arena when time permits, ensuring that students follow proper and safety procedures, assist in fundraising activities, newsletter mailings, gate monitor, Reports to: Instructor(s), Executive Director, Program Operations Manager

Here are a few typical “job” positions that may bring you in direct contact with NARHA Center participants.

Side walker:

The side-walker (either one or two) walks to the side of a rider during a lesson or therapy session. This person is supervised by the instructor or therapist and may physically support the rider, or walk along side the horse as a spotter or to provide verbal direction or reminders. The main duty of a side-walker is the safety of the person for whom they are side walking.

Special Events Volunteers:

NARHA volunteers help at all types of special events such as at horse shows, fundraisers, and media events, Ride-A-Thons etc. At these occasions you will again be in contact with participants, their families and Center staff.

Barn Help:

A volunteer may become part of the barn staff- helping with all aspects of horse care such as feeding, mucking stalls, cleaning tack, repairing fences, medicating horses and other tasks.

Horse Handler:

Horse Handlers usually have previous experience with equines, but still must be trained to participate in riding lessons and therapy sessions. This generally requires that you lead the horse during the session and execute the direction given to you by the instructors or therapists. You may be called to walk at different speeds and execute different patterns in the arena. It is important to remember that as the horse leader your primary job is to focus on the horse, leaving the rider safety to the side-walker and the instructor/therapist. Obviously you also must keep a peripheral eye on the participant, but by focusing on the horse you directly ensure that the person is safe. A horse handler is also charged with encouraging quality movement in the horse.

Horse Training/Conditioning:

If you are a skilled equestrian, you may become part of the program of exercising horses, as well as training and screening new horses. There literally are hundreds of training methods and styles of working with horses. Depending on your background, you may have learned to do things a certain way. Be open to learning new methods. Find out what training philosophy is used at your NARHA Center and how the Center staff handles and manages their horses. While there are universal things to do around horses (such as not to stand directly behind one), techniques and practices of working with these animals can vary. It is important to follow the practices of the Center in order to provide consistency for the horses as well as the participants.

What Are The Traits Most Appreciated In A NARHA Volunteer?

Regardless of the job you are assigned, there are certain traits that make a person either suitable or unsuitable as a NARHA Center volunteer.

Effective NARHA Center Volunteers sign up as a volunteer with the notion of “service”. While they may also gain much enjoyment out of the experience, the primary motivation is to contribute their labor to a worthwhile effort.

Regardless of the task given, NARHA Center staff appreciates volunteers who confidently and efficiently do their jobs.

Knowing your place. This trait is very valued in a volunteer. Even as an experienced volunteer, it is vital to always keep in mind that you are not a therapist, or riding instructor or veterinarian (i.e. discussing the physical condition/use of a horse) (unless you happened to have the credentials for these professions). It can be problematic if volunteers start to interfere with a lesson, a therapy session or cause discord in the barn because they think they “know better” than the staff.

Effective NARHA Center volunteers love participating in lessons and therapy sessions as horse leaders and side walkers. What makes these particular jobs such fun is that you actually get to interact with participants. What distinguishes the effective lesson volunteers is that they develop a keen awareness of the instructor/therapist, the rider and the horse. They know when to interact and speak, but also know when to be quiet. Avoid constant chatting with the rider, do not have side conversations with other volunteers and keep focused on the goal of the lesson. It is a real skill to be an active participant without becoming a distracting presence.

It will come as no surprise to you that anywhere people gather in groups, there may be a certain amount of “politics” among the Center staff, board or within the volunteer corps. There will be issues and discussions, possible conflict and challenges. As you become part of your NARHA centers’ family, you will have to make choices in how you will handle and participate in the dynamics of your center. The best suggestion is to retain a neutral and enthusiastic presence and not get overly involved in center politics. Above all, refrain from undermining your center leadership; do not become part of negative “cliques” and try to be a positive force if people around you should become involved in inevitable interpersonal conflicts.

Attire and Appearance

- Safety always comes first. You will need to be able to walk through loose footing, dusty or wet sand footing and manure.
- Working in close range to horses can result in getting feet stepped on; closed toe shoes are a must. Wearing boots or durable tennis shoes are your best option.
- You’ll need both hands to help a rider. Do not wear dangling or loose jewelry.
- Dress for the weather and know when you’ll be working. In the winter, you may be exposed to rain and cold. In the summer sun you will need layers of clothing, sunscreen and may opt for a hat that will stay securely on your head. Bring a water bottle.
- Leave expensive jewelry or valuable items at home.
- Cell phones are to be turned off or left in your car/cubby.

- Refrain from using perfumes as some scents can attract bees or bother riders with sensory stimulation issues.

Remember that you will be working in a professional service setting. It is expected that volunteers use good judgment in selecting appropriate clothing that is not overly revealing (no bare midriffs or short shorts), tattered, or anything that depicts inappropriate slogans, or decals.

- Consider that participants will sit high on the horse, looking down on you while you are side walking, along with male riders, parents and visitors to whom we want to present a clean, professional appearance.

Ten Tips for NARHA Volunteers:

The volunteers who come to NARHA Centers are a dedicated group. Their love, commitment and enthusiasm are second to none. But when a volunteer signs up to help at a NARHA Center, there are all sorts of things to think about. Here are some tips for new NARHA volunteers.

Always be on time for your lessons or other tasks.

Call if you will miss a class. Otherwise instructors and participants will be there waiting for you.

Be a cheerleader for staff, participants and the program.

Leave the riding instruction to the instructor. You may want to yell “heels down, Suzanne”, “hold your head up Billy”, but let the professional do her job. You are there to assist.

Make sure you follow all Center rules, such as not feeding horses from the palm of your hand (doing so can make them nibble and nip at everyone in expectation of a treat). Encourage others to do likewise. Your example counts and you represent the Center.

If you have a major concern about something (such as a Center policy) or would like to have something explained to you, set up a meeting with the Center administrator. Don't stew on things and do not participate in the “gossip mill” with other volunteers over something that bothers you.

Know that all of your support of the NARHA Center at horse shows, special events and other occasions is appreciated even if you are not thanked on a weekly basis.

Make yourself useful by “finding” jobs, such as taking center dish towels home for laundering, offering to fix fences, getting together a gardening group to do some landscaping around the Center etc. Be creative, but always ask before you do something.

Food goes a long way – keep in mind that staff members, riders and other volunteers get hungry. Donations of delicious snacks are always appreciated!

Don't burn out! Volunteer enough of your time to get enjoyment, but not so much that you will feel overwhelmed and start to resent the Center. Be prepared that you may be asked to give more and more of your time if you turn out to be a talented volunteer. The volunteer coordinator may call you at short notice to sub for another volunteer or to participate in yet another weekend horse show or special event. Learn to say “no” if you need a break or if you have other plans and don't feel guilty about doing so. It is the only way to keep yourself fresh for years to come.