

# **Valley Therapeutic Equestrian Association**



## **Volunteer Manual**

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**vtea.ca**

## **Welcome!**

We are pleased that you have chosen to volunteer at Valley Therapeutic Equestrian Association (VTEA). As a VTEA volunteer, you are an important member of our team and one who is greatly appreciated. Volunteer participation is one of the most important aspects of a therapeutic riding program. A well-prepared group of volunteers ensures that therapeutic riding will be both safe and beneficial to our riders.

VTEA offers three riding sessions per year for people with special needs. Our Fall Session begins in September, Winter Session begins in January, and Spring Session begins in April. During the Summer months we hold various events, including Summer Camps and Horse Shows. Classes run five days per week, Tuesday through till Saturday and are between thirty minutes and one hour long. VTEA is closed most holidays as we try to correspond our lessons with the school schedules. Throughout the year there are various horse shows, fundraising events, picnics and BBQ's.

VTEA receives Gaming Funds from the Government of B.C. on an annual basis. These funds help subsidize the cost of lessons making them more affordable to riders and their families. The actual cost of one lesson is \$55, VTEA charges less than half of that and relies heavily on fundraising activities and the generous donations of service groups, local businesses and community support to survive and grow. VTEA is a registered charity and donations are tax deductible. No matter what the amount, donations are always welcomed and greatly appreciated.

The horses are the backbone of VTEA and the program could not run without their loyal service. If you are interested in sponsoring a horse and/or rider or doing a group sponsor, please contact one of our VTEA Directors.

This Volunteer Manual has been prepared for you to answer some of the questions you may have. You may also use it as a resource to refer back to once in awhile. Please read it carefully, as it is important for the safety of our riders as well as yourself. If you have any questions at any time, please contact your Volunteer Coordinator.

## **1. Our History**

Since 1983, VTEA has provided individuals with disabilities a venue that would give them both therapy and personal growth through the realm of horseback riding. Horseback riding has long been recognized as an excellent means of providing psychological, physical, social and recreational benefits to children and adults with disabilities. VTEA provides approximately 80 lessons per week each session. The disabilities that affect the riders are as varied as the riders themselves. The riders include victims of accidents, amputees, people with cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, spina bifida and many other disabilities.

## **2. Benefits of Therapeutic Riding**

- Improves joint mobility and coordination
- Improves balance and posture
- Strengthening of muscles
- Relaxes spastic muscles
- Improves learning and concentration
- Mobilization of trunk and pelvis
- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Promotion of independence
- Improvement of social integration
- Access to recreation, sport and/or competition

### **3. Volunteer Information**

*"Thank you for your time and patience. It will probably take several lessons before you feel comfortable with the procedures and can really start to enjoy the rewards that your service will bring. We know the riders appreciate you, the horses appreciate your kind attention and VTEA could not operate without people like you. Hopefully you will find this volunteer experience a pleasant and meaningful way to spend a few hours each week."*

Volunteers must be a minimum of 14 years of age or accompanied by an adult. No experience is necessary, training will be provided by Instructors or experienced volunteers. All volunteers are asked to commit to a minimum of 2 hours per week, on the same day each week. In whatever capacity you volunteer, you will be a very valuable member of the VTEA Team. The Instructors greatly appreciate your input and feedback on the riders, horses, safety, program procedures and content. With your support, our program gets better each session and meets the needs of our riders more effectively. Volunteers are encouraged to seek information or assistance whenever they are unsure of the procedure.

The most important aspect of being a volunteer is reliability. Many of our riders require up to 3 volunteers to assist them, if these volunteers do not show up safety may be compromised and we may have to cancel the rider's lesson. Please inform us ASAP if you are unable to attend by calling the office.

VTEA requires approximately 70 volunteers to assist with lessons throughout the week. Volunteers are also encouraged to take part in fundraising activities, horse shows, public relations, building/barn maintenance and special events

As of September 2009 we will offer a Therapeutic Riding Assistant course which is available to all of our volunteers and parents. This eight-week course is offered for a nominal fee to cover printed materials and instruction time. A certificate will be issued upon completion of the course. For more information or to sign-up please contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

Lessons are taught five days per week. All lessons are taught by Certified Instructors

1. All volunteers must fill out a "Volunteer Information Form" and a "Volunteer Liability Release Form" before doing any volunteer work for VTEA.
2. Please be on time. It is important that the horses be ready, so that the class starts on time. Volunteers should be at the Barn 15 minutes before the class is scheduled to begin.
3. If you cannot make it on a particular day, please call your Volunteer Coordinator or the Office as soon as possible. This will give us the chance to call emergency help if necessary.
4. If at any time you have questions or concerns regarding your volunteer service, please contact your Volunteer Coordinator. We value your input and wish to make your volunteer experience enjoyable and rewarding.
5. All volunteers are requested to park in the spots available outside the office. Please do not park outside of the arena or block access to barn/paddock gates.
6. Volunteers are required to sign in and out at the office in the Volunteer Attendance Book
7. Volunteers are required to wear name tags. Name tags are kept in the office, if a name tag has not been made for you please notify the Volunteer Coordinator or Office Coordinator.
8. Personal items such as coats and purses/bags should be left in your vehicles (VTEA is not responsible for lost or stolen items).
9. Please check for mail/handouts in the office and check the notice boards in the arena weekly.
10. VTEA is closed during snowstorms and unusual weather conditions. We try to call all volunteers by either e-mail or phone to keep you updated on the situation.

#### 4. Dress Code

- Wear comfortable clothing and footwear that you do not mind getting dirty.
- No loose, flapping clothing, such as scarves, etc. that may get caught up or startle the horses. Coats and jackets must be buttoned/zipped up.
- Keep jewelry to a minimum, no dangling/hoop earrings, loose bracelets, etc.
- Do not wear perfume as it attracts flies and some riders may be allergic.
- No open toed shoes or sandals.
- Gloves are required for leaders. Wear gloves rather than mitts because this allows you a better grip.
- It is advisable to dress in layers.
- Long pants are recommended, no flared/bell bottom jeans.
- No handbags, purses, cell phones or pagers in the arena.
- Long hair should be tied back.

#### 5. General Barn and Safety Rules

VTEA provides an excellent opportunity for those not familiar with horses to learn about and experience handling them in a controlled environment. The Instructors and some of our more experienced volunteers will be happy to help with any aspect of horse handling that you are uncomfortable with and will demonstrate the safe and correct techniques. Please do not hesitate to ask.

- Absolutely NO SMOKING in the barn or riding area
- Aisles should be kept clear at all times
- No running or shouting in the barn or arena always be quiet and calm around the horses.
- No photographs are permitted without the Instructor's permission. Some riders may not have photo releases and the flash may startle some horses.
- All gates and entrances to the riding arena must be closed at all times
- Although all tack is inspected regularly, please double-check each time you use it for worn stitching, ripped leather, etc. and report it to your Instructor or Barn Manager immediately.
- No pets are allowed in the barn area – if you **must** bring your pet to lessons – they are required to stay in your vehicle at all times (this is for their own safety and our horses)
- Never approach a horse from behind, always approach from the side so that they can see you and always keep a hand on the horse's body when you walk around them so that they know where you are.
- If you have friends or family that are coming to view the lessons, all spectators must use the viewing area
- The VTEA phone should not be used for personal phone calls
- Please familiarize yourselves with the location of the fire extinguishers
- Familiarize yourselves with the location of our first aid kits which are located in the arena and in the barn

## **7. Leaders and Sidewalkers**

Leaders and sidewalkers are both very important but have different roles and responsibilities. All leaders must wear gloves when leading. Please note that horse leaders must be 14yrs. of age, require their TRA Certificate or be an experienced horse handler approved by an Instructor to lead horses.

### **The Leader (Horse Handler)**

1. The sole responsibility of the leader is to maintain proper control of the horse. The leader must be able to anticipate problems and act in such a way as to avoid them.
2. The instructor will give the rider direction with the horse; the leader's job is to assist the rider in carrying out these instructions.
3. Riders must be allowed to do as much as possible with the leader helping only when necessary. The leader must help in guiding; stopping and starting the horse without making the rider feel that he is simply a passenger.
4. The horse handler should lead the horse from the near (left) side, at a point between the horse's head and the point of the shoulder. **DO NOT WALK IN FRONT OF THE HORSE**, dragging him behind you, or be so far back that you are in the way of the sidewalker. Both of these positions reduce your ability to control the horse effectively.
5. For your own safety, **NEVER WRAP THE LEAD ROPE AROUND YOUR HAND**. It may be difficult to free your hand in case of an emergency. Hold the rope in your right hand 10" to 12" from the halter and fold the excess in your left hand.
6. When you must halt, the leader should stand beside the horse facing the area between neck and head.

### **The Sidewalker**

1. The sidewalker's prime responsibility is the safety of the rider. Some riders have poor balance, are nervous, have little or no muscle control in their legs and some simply require the support of having someone close by. Sidewalkers walk beside (and in the case of a trot - run beside) the horse and rider, ready to steady the rider if necessary. They position themselves just behind the rider's knees, ankle or pelvis, depending upon what the Instructor feels is necessary for their security. Instructors will direct you as to what support or hold is required for each rider.
2. If you are the only sidewalker for that rider, you should be on the opposite side of the horse from the leader, however if there are two sidewalkers, you will have to work as a well coordinated team to avoid stepping on one another's heels.
3. For the comfort of the horse **DO NOT** lean on any part of the animal or the saddle. If a hold is not required, walk with your arms at your sides.

## **8. Mounting and Dismounting**

1. Instructors must be present when riders are mounting and dismounting.
2. The rider must be wearing a belt and helmet; the Instructor will check the girth.
3. The leader should stand in front of and slightly to the side of the horse (halt position) while the Instructor directs each rider's specific mounting procedures. Sidewalkers will assist as directed.
4. Once the rider is mounted, the Instructor will let you know when to walk forward and enter the arena. Follow their instructions as there may be tack adjustments required when in the arena (i.e. stirrups, reins, sidewalkers, etc.)
5. Wait until the Instructor directs the dismount at the end of the lesson and again follow directions.

## **9. In the Arena**

There are a few important guidelines to follow in the arena, these are:

1. Stay at least one horse length behind the horse in front of you. If you find yourself getting too close and are unable to adjust your pace, cut across to a less congested area, or make a large circle in behind the other riders.
2. Avoid small circles and sharp turns; they may upset the rider's balance.
3. If it is necessary to stop for an adjustment, horse and rider should be brought into the centre of the arena. Do not stop on the track as it interferes with other riders. Let the rider know what is happening.
4. We encourage volunteers to get to know their riders. It serves as social interaction for both rider and volunteers. However, please keep conversation limited to before and after the actual lesson. Rider and volunteers should be focusing on the Instructor during the class.
5. If the rider in front of you looks as though he/she is slipping or having other difficulties, alert the leader and Instructor immediately.
6. During all exercises and games, it is important to allow the rider to control the horse as much as possible, the rider should be doing the steering as well as trying to encourage the horse to move on.
7. Accidents and medical emergencies can happen. If a rider has fallen or has another difficulty, halt immediately and follow the Instructors commands.
8. In the event of a rider emergency, the horse handler MUST stay with the horse. He should not drop the lead and run to the rider. The Instructor will aid the rider with assistance from the sidewalkers.
9. If asked to "unclip", detach the lead rope from the halter and stay with the horse and rider, walking in the normal leading position and carrying the lead rope. Make sure the rider knows he is "unclipped".

## **10. Emergency Rules**

- Stay Calm – follow instructions from your Instructor or Barn Manager
- In the case of a fallen rider, the leader must maintain control of the horse and move the horse away from the fallen rider. All other horses in the arena must halt. Follow the Instructor's directions.
- In case of a fire, place a lead rope around the horses' neck and guide them out to the back pasture. If the horse is reluctant to be led, place a towel or jacket, etc. over their head.
- If there are riders in the arena, take the horses and riders out through the main gate and follow your Instructors directions.

## **11. Taking Care of Equipment**

1. Please familiarize yourself with the tack room. Everything has a place and must be returned to its correct location after each use.
2. Volunteers will be needed to occasionally get together and give all the tack a good cleaning. This will be done under the supervision of an Instructor or the Barn Manager
3. Every time the tack is used it should be inspected for wear and cleaned of any incidental soiling. Report any problems with tack to the Instructor or Barn Manager.

4. A little extra time taken to ensure equipment is organized and well cared for will add tremendously to the smooth running of the program and make things easier and more enjoyable for all involved.

## **12. Points to Remember**

VTEA is always looking for volunteers. If you have other friends or family members that may wish to help out. Please have them contact the Volunteer Coordinator. We need help with our lessons, maintaining our barn, office work, housekeeping, fundraising, organizing events, working at concession stands, etc.

## **13. Glossary of Common Disabilities**

**Autism** – a lifelong developmental disability marked by difficulty integrating information from the senses, especially hearing and vision.

**Cerebral Palsy** - this is characterized by abnormal patterns of postures and movements and abnormal muscle tone. It is caused by damage or malfunction of the central nervous system in the fetus, infant or young child.

**Cerebrovascular Accident (CVA, Stroke)** – a hemorrhage to the brain. The resultant condition is hemiplegia, characterized by loss of voluntary movement on one side of the body accompanied by disturbances of postural tone. There may also be associated difficulties of understanding or expressing one's thoughts.

**Developmental Delay** – a term used to describe those individuals who are delayed in their cognitive development.

**Downs Syndrome** – the single most common chromosomal cause of developmental delay. It is the genetic defect caused by the presence or absence of a single chromosome, the loss or gain of part of a chromosome, or a defect in a single gene or gene part, which makes it impossible for the individual to develop normally. It affects many aspects of physical development.

**Head Injury** – an external injury to the head that results in brain damage.

**Hearing and Speech Impairments** – a hearing impairments can be one of the most difficult challenges because it is not always recognized by others. Speech may be imperfect due to inability to hear sounds correctly and slow responses to commands or questions give false impression of developmental delay.

**Hydrocephalus** - this condition is sometimes known as "water on the brain". People with hydrocephalus have abnormal accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) in the brain. It is characterized by a large head but a normal sized face and in 60% of cases is associated with varying degrees of developmental delay.

**Learning Disability** – a minimal brain dysfunction found in people with normal intelligence. Often manifested as a problem with reading, writing and mathematics.

**Multiple Sclerosis** – a progressive disease occurring in adults. It affects the nervous system in the brain and spinal cord resulting in muscle weakness, change in muscle tone, decrease in coordination and loss of balance and may often be accompanied by fatigue.

**Muscular Dystrophy** – a progressive deterioration of muscle tissue occurring in childhood and adolescence. There are different types of this disorder but basically there is a progressive degeneration of certain groups of muscles. The cause of this disease is unknown but frequently can be hereditary. The most common variety appears at about 5 years of age beginning with clumsy walking and a tendency to fall.

**Spina Bifida** – a defect in the structure of the bones of the spine with an incomplete closure of the vertebral canal resulting in weakness in the lower limbs. It occurs in .1% of the population and is treated by almost immediate surgery to close the cystic swelling surrounding the unprotected spinal cord. Usually there is weakness or paralysis of the body below the defect. The lower limbs are limp, paralyzed to varying degrees and the feet are usually deformed. There may be incontinence, for which surgical adaptations are made, usually involving a bag worn externally to contain urine and/or feces. People with Spina Bifida have typical intelligence and tend to be ambitious and independent minded.

**Spinal Cord Injury** – an injury to the neck or back which causes disruptions of their nerve pathways in the spine leading to motor and sensory impairments.

**Paraplegia** – an injury below the low thoracic spine resulting in weakness in the lower extremity.

**Quadriplegia** - an injury above the upper thoracic spine resulting in weakness in both the upper and lower extremities.

**Visual Impairment** – there are varying degrees of visual impairment. The condition may be congenital (present at birth) or may be progressive. Blindness may be present at birth, or sight may be lost later through disease or accident.

#### **14. Tips on Helping People with Disabilities**

1. Offer help when it looks as though it might be needed but do not insist on it if the individual refuses aid.
2. Don't pamper people with a special need, they do not wish to be treated as though they are totally dependent on others.
3. If a physically challenged person falls, ask if they required assistance. If they need assistance they will tell you what is the easiest way to get them back on their feet.
4. Crutches and wheelchairs are necessary accessories. Please do not take them away from that person unless they indicate they would like to have them out of the way
5. Relax. No matter what you do, if you are friendly and sincere the person with special needs is going to like you.
6. Have fun. Talk about the same things you would with any other person. Having a special need does not necessarily limit one's interests or dampen a sense of humor.
7. Let common sense and consideration be your guide and you will never err seriously. People who are challenged are people first and should not be defined by a disability or special need.
8. Please do not ever talk to a parent/guardian/Care Worker as though the person with a special need is not there or cannot hear what you are saying.
9. Provide physical demonstrations as well as verbal instructions. Speak clearly and look at the person you are speaking with.
10. Remember every person is an individual and every individual learns in a different way.
11. Break a skill down to very basic parts.
12. Use simple, clear directions.
13. Ensure you have the individual's attention before giving instructions.
14. Set expectations and goals which are realistic
15. Give reinforcement, motivation and encouragement; verbal praises, smiles, etc.
16. Help manually. Hand over hand if necessary.
17. Ask staff for assistance if confused or unsure.

Thank you for choosing to spend your time volunteering with VTEA, we hope you will find working with the horses and riders an enjoyable experience. Our program could not function without the valuable time you provide.