



# **Therapeutic Riding Volunteer Information/Hands-On Training Packet**

***SPECIAL TROOPERS ADAPTIVE RIDING SCHOOL***

***33148 K-22, Sioux City, Iowa 51108***

***712-239-5042 \* [www.scstars.org](http://www.scstars.org)***

**STARS has therapeutic riding classes in the evening Monday through Thursday. We have 5 sessions throughout the year which are 6 or 8 weeks long.**

**If you're interested in becoming a STARS Volunteer please contact  
Jerusha Goulette  
Volunteer Coordinator  
[jerusha@scstars.org](mailto:jerusha@scstars.org)  
712-239-5042**

The following pages contain information about the horses and the clients you will be working with at STARS. This information may seem overwhelming at first, but rest assured we will assist you every step of the way. We will have the training session, observation time, and will pair you with an experienced volunteer until you are completely comfortable with each and every task. We will never ask you to perform a task you are uncomfortable with, and encourage you to verbalize any insecurity. We will be with you to help you learn in a supportive, positive environment. We've been there too! Graciously donating your time is greatly appreciated. We can't thank you enough! Without your help our program would not be as successful as it is today.



## **HISTORY**

Since its inception by Sue and Dr. Mark Wheeler in 1984, STARS has quietly grown from a small start-up program to one of Siouxland's most established nonprofit organizations, while also becoming one of the oldest Equine Assisted programs in the Midwest. Today, demand for our specialized form of animal-assisted services is growing by leaps and bounds. The STARS program has been confidently making miracles since 1984. Our impact in the Siouxland area is wide-spread. Operating an effective therapeutic riding program requires specialized skills. STARS utilizes one of the most experienced teams in the country, with professional instructors certified through the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH). STARS adheres to stringent standards, ethics, certification, and credibility established by PATH as a leader of the equine assisted movement in the United States. Throughout our history, hundreds of clients have experienced the benefit of therapeutic riding and experienced significant physical, emotional, and cognitive breakthroughs. Our participants, volunteers, donors, and board members have become family, facilitating long-lasting and powerful change in the Siouxland community.

## **FACILITY LOCATION**

STARS is located 1.5 miles out of the Sioux City's Northside city limits, just off of County Rd K-22 (Hamilton turns into K-22 outside the city limits). 33148 County Rd K-22 Sioux City, IA 51108

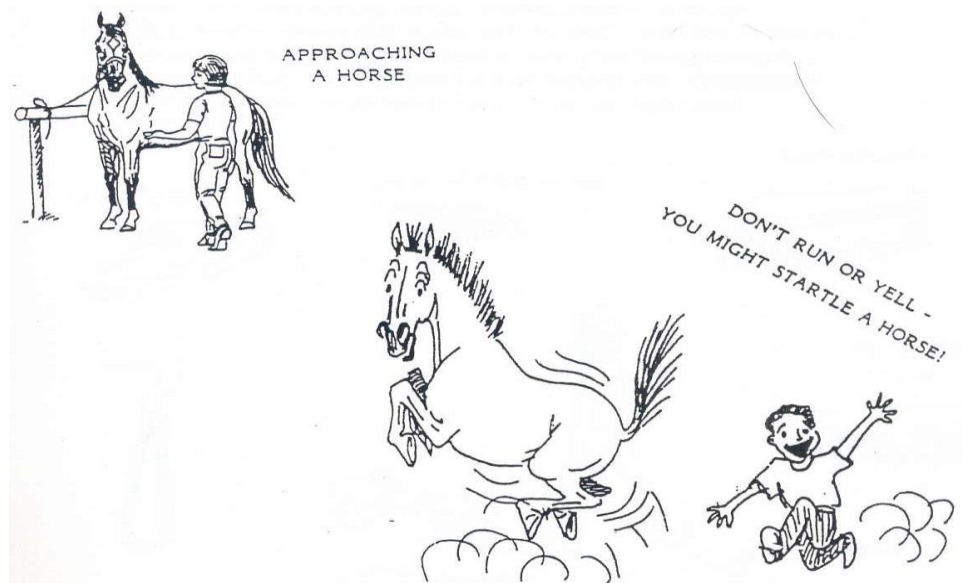
## **BENEFITS OF THERAPEUTIC HORSEMANSHIP**

The equine programs here at STARS are uniquely designed to meet the educational, behavioral, social and physical goals of people with disabilities. The experience of being in the presence of a horse automatically provides a constant stream of physical, mental, and emotional stimuli. Within our supportive format, the client is able to move and self-adjust in ways that create powerful opportunities for breakthrough moments in a short period of time. The natural aspects of the experience help clients to take initiative, explore solutions creatively, problem-solve, discover new strategies, and develop new strengths. With this immediate and unerring feedback, progress moves faster and with accelerated results. Clients come in excited and leave transformed with deep experience of reconnecting to their bodies in a powerful way. Since 1984 we've worked with clients experiencing physical disability and injury, mental health issues, developmental disabilities, and chronic illness. Our clients face challenges with cerebral palsy, spina bifida, brain trauma, stroke, paralysis; multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, arthritis, PTSD, depression, anxiety, obsessive/compulsive disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorders and others.

## **Approaching the Horse with the Client**

**Make sure your client has his/her safety helmet on before going near the horse.**

Always be aware of where your client is at all times. It is your responsibility that he/she approaches the horse in a calm, controlled and safe manner. Always consider the horse's limited field of vision. A horse cannot see directly behind or in front of himself without moving his head. Approach your horse at the shoulder or as near to the neck as possible so he/she can see you. Speak clearly and softly, calling the horse's name as you approach, because your horse may be sleeping. Extend your hand and gently touch him on the neck or shoulder, thus modeling for your client how to approach a horse.



## Basic Grooming and Tacking

**GROOMING:** Grooming is a very important part of your horse's health. A good work-over with a rubber curry comb and a brush will remove mud, dander, and dirt which could cause saddle sores. Grooming also gives your horse's coat a good shine, and makes your horse feel good. Not only is grooming important to the horse but it is also very therapeutic for the clients as they will work on fine motor skills, range of motion, following directions and much more. Be sure to encourage the clients to help with this task as much as possible.

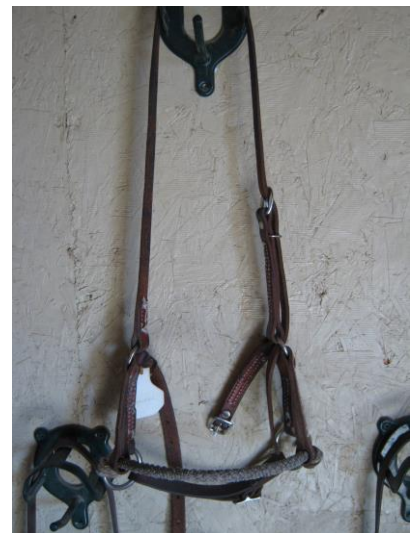
**RUBBER CURRY COMB:** Rubber curry combs are used on the horse's body in a circular motion (Wax On, Wax Off of the Karate Kid movie) to bring the dirt to the surface. Curry Combs should not be used on the face, legs, or any bony area of the horse.

**BODY BRUSH:** Used in the direction of hair growth to remove dirt. Brush in firm strokes to remove deep down dirt. Be careful on the face with this brush. You may also use this on the hard surface of the horse's hoof.



## Bridling

Here at STARS we don't use bits on our horses. Instead, we use what is called a side-pull. It works off the horse's nose and not their mouth. When you start to bridle, you should be on the left side of the horse. Then take the side-pull and put it in your left hand and reach your right hand up between the horse's ears, grab head stall (make sure the rope portion is on top of the muzzle) and gently pull up and bend horse's right ear forward easing the side-pull over the ear. Repeat the same thing with the horse's left ear. Our reins are not attached to the head stall. Snap them on to the side rings of the side-pull. As with all aspects of the program, it is important to encourage the client to do as much as possible. One of our main goals is to work on independence for our clients.





## Bareback Pad

Saddles are rarely used at STARS, we prefer using a bareback pad as it allows the rider to have closer contact with the horse and take advantage of the body heat from the horse. As with all tasks, it is important to allow the rider to do as much of the work as possible. Buckling the bareback pad works fine motor skills and sequential thinking. Gently place the bareback pad on the horse making sure the buckle on the girth does not accidentally hit the horse. The girth should be slightly snug. The instructor will always do a safety check to make sure the girth is tightened properly.



## Mounting At the Ramp or Block

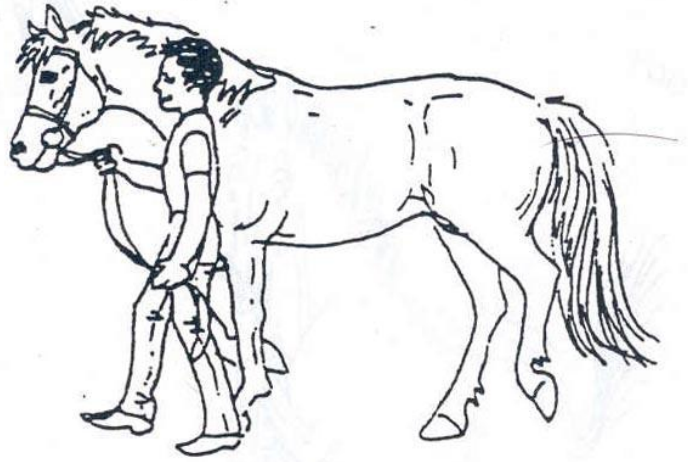
The instructor will ask the leader to bring the horse into the ramp and position horse close to the ramp/block by gently pulling horse's head towards the ramp/block and stop when instructor asks. The off side (right side) volunteer will assist the instructor with the mount. Depending on what kind of mount, the instructor will tell the volunteer how to assist the client. This is the most potentially hazardous part of the whole class. As a leader and side walker it is VERY important to listen to the instructor, pay attention to your horse and client the whole time and never assume anything.

## The Leader

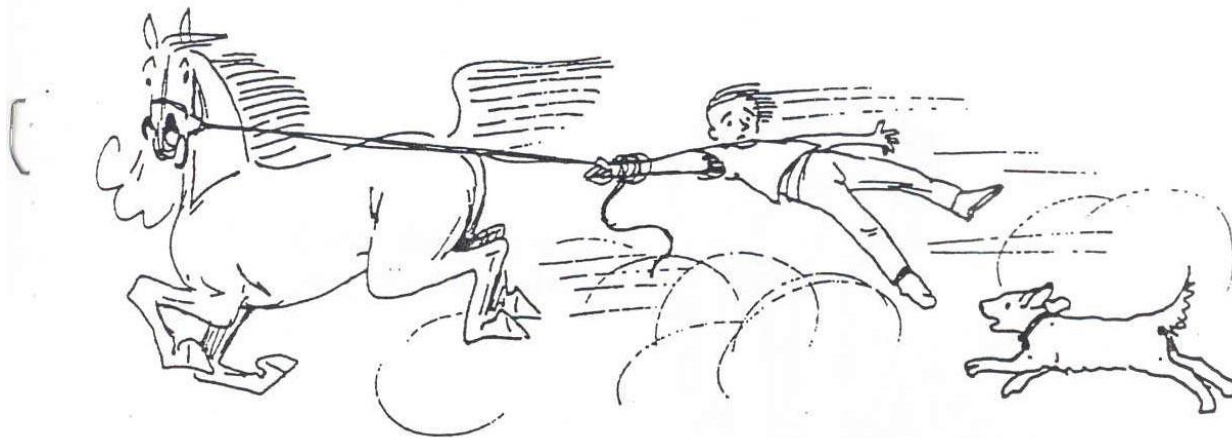
Leaders are assigned by the instructor at the beginning of class. As a leader you are responsible for the horse, his/her comfort, wellbeing, and behavior. A leader's first responsibility is the horse, but he/she must also be aware of the instructor, the student, the positions of the side walkers and any potential hazards in the arena. Be patient and maintain concentration. Conversation should be kept to a minimum to avoid confusion for the student and side walkers who need to comply with the instructor's directions. Allow clients time to fulfill commands. Some clients need extra thinking time, extra reaction time, or a clear repeat of the instructions.

### How to Lead a Horse or Pony

1. Position yourself at the left side of the horse's front shoulder.
2. Check to see that the lead is not over the top of the reins, but that it comes from between the two reins and under the neck or left rein.
3. Hold the lead in your right hand **6-12 inches** from the connection to the halter. Allow slack when the horse is obeying. Fold the excess lead rope into your left hand in a figure eight or "butterfly" shape. Never wrap the lead rope around your hand. Never stick your fingers under the halter or through the rings. Don't allow the rope to hang below your knee level.
4. Start with a verbal command, such as "Walkon." Do not drag or pull on the horse's head. Gently apply pressure in the direction you want your horse to go. If your horse does not comply, try gentle pressure to one side or the other. Usually they will then take a step and you can continue in a forward direction.
5. Keep hands and arms away from the horse's head and mouth.
6. The size and speeds of the horses varies. You will have to adjust your steps accordingly so you are not pulling him forward or pulling him back.
7. Encourage the client to do as much guiding as possible. If they have difficulty getting the horse to respond to the commands, you may need to assist as a last resort. Give them time and repeat the instructions to encourage their success with the horse. The instructor will give you assistance in encouraging your client to be as independent as possible. Remember that independence for our clients is one of our goals.
8. Keep at least two horse lengths between your horse and the other horses at all times. If you find yourself too close to the horse in front of you, make a large circle towards the center of the ring, cut across the arena, or slow or stop the horse. Make sure you let your client and side walkers know what you are doing.
9. Pay attention to your horse, your client, your side walkers, and your instructor. Keeping in mind not to run your side walkers into cones, the wall, fence, etc.
10. When turning make sure you make large turns so your client is not thrown off balance. Also inform your side walker of what you are doing.
11. When your horse stops, place your body directly in front of the horse as a psychological barrier. Hold the lead loosely, but be alert as he may try to eat grass or move away.
12. If the horse is restless, calmly reinforce the "Whoa" cue, and rub them on their neck. Do not rub the face or nose, as this often causes the horse to throw its head up therefore, unbalancing the client.
13. Praise the horse often; **NEVER** punish or discipline. If your horse fails to comply to your directions, lead him into the center of the ring and allow the instructor to handle the situation.



14. When preparing to trot alert your sidewalkers and client. Say “Trot”, and then begin to jog in place tugging gently on the lead in a “give and take” manner. Do not yank on the lead. Stay to the left side of your horse. When you want him to slow, say “walk” calmly and gently pull back on the lead until he walks.
15. Use common sense. If you have a concern immediately bring the horse to the center of the ring, halt, and signal an instructor for assistance without alarming the student



## The Side walker

1. Assist the client in getting their helmet on.
2. Assist the client in grooming and tacking the horse.
3. When the instructor calls for your client, escort him/her to the mounting block or ramp.
4. Stand on the right side of the horse to assist the client in mounting. The instructor will let you know how much assistance is needed.
5. Foster independence by assisting only when necessary. Be alert, but allow the client the opportunity to gain strength and balance on their own.
6. Stay right beside the client. If they drop a beanbag or any thing they may be holding, **do not** stop and pick it up. The instructor can pick it up for them. Dropping behind and running up to the client, you may startle the horse and unbalance the client.
7. If you are actively assisting and become tired, inform the leader to come to the middle. At this time ask the instructor for assistance.



8. If you have an unstable client use the one arm over the thigh hold and place the opposite hand around the knee or ankle. Keep in mind always – do not rest your elbow on the client or the horse’s back. Make sure you don’t pull the knee or ankle out.
9. If back support is necessary for your client, place an open hand on the middle of his/her back and the opposite hand on the knee. Keep in mind always - do not rest your elbow on the horse’s back or push or pull on the client.
10. Instructor may ask you to retrieve crutches, walkers, or wheelchairs prior to dismounting a client.
11. After instructor has dismounted the client, assist them with the removal of tack and help them put tack in its proper place, and assist them to the waiting area.
12. Provide psychological assistance by encouraging, calming, praising, and reassuring the client. Be helpful and reinforce the instructor’s cues.
13. Please keep chatting with other volunteers in your team to a minimum. It can distract the client and the other volunteers from the job at hand.
14. If the client wants to “chat”, try to get him to redirect his attention to the instructor. An example might be: “Good listening, Jillian” or “What is Julie (instructor) saying?”
15. Be involved and have FUN with the client. Be sure they do as much as possible without your help.
16. Allow time and encouragement to fulfill commands. Allow extra thinking time, extra reaction time, and repeat instructions when necessary.
17. If asked by the instructor to assist the client in steering or stopping, place your hands directly over theirs on the reins and help them appropriately.

## **Dismounting**

The instructor will dismount the clients. You will receive specific instructions. Keep the horse quiet while standing in front of him. Side walkers assist clients in removing tack, and the leaders take the horse back to his tie up area.

## **Additional Thoughts**

Falls are rare, but they can and do happen. In the event of a fall the leader stays with his/her horse. Carefully and slowly move the horse in a safe direction away from the client. The instructors and side walkers will attend to them. Stay calm, and listen for instructions. Treat the fall as a normal part of working with horses, and do not discuss until after class, and then only with an instructor or other volunteers. This helps keep the other clients and volunteers composed and focused. The instructor will remount the client on the horse immediately, if possible. Our goal is to create an environment of safe and fun riding therapy.



**Do not let go of your horse for any reason.** If you are leading another client, focus your attention on your horse and them. Keep calm and positive, while distracting your client away from the fall and towards you. The client will become fearful if they know you are upset or frightened. Humor or praise for the client is an excellent tool in this situation. Most accidents are not serious, but if one is, it is more important than ever that you stay calm and focused.

After class rethink the situation and discuss it with the instructor. Could we have handled any part of the situation better? What did we learn from this experience? If you are unsure of any aspect of the accident, please ask the instructor

STARS is constantly striving to improve and give the very best experience possible. You as a volunteer are a valuable and welcome tool in aiding us towards this goal. Your willingness to help, your dependability, and your gift of time is highly valued by STARS. If you have any suggestions, a compliment, or any comment, please feel free to contact us at any time.

## POLICY

### Code of Conduct

Thoughtful conduct and self-control play a factor in the safety and enjoyment of all participants. All persons at STARS will be expected to adhere to the following code of conduct:

- Respect all persons and horses--- no abusive language or actions.
- Respect all STARS property.
- Refrain from abrupt noises, actions or behaviors which may startle horses.

### Riding Schedule

Our riding schedule starts as early as January and will go until mid-December. We do take part of the hot summer months off, usually mid-July and August. We ride mostly in the evening on weekdays, but some day time classes are also available. The riding schedule is subject to change, and if that happens, STARS staff will inform everyone as soon as possible.

### Cancellations

Summer time classes will be cancelled if the temperature is 92 degrees or heat index is 92 degrees at 3:00 P.M. In winter riding if temperature is below 15 degrees by 3:00 p.m. classes will also be cancelled. In any threatening weather such as tornado warning, snow or ice storms classes most likely will be cancelled. Before coming out to ride please call the riding center at 712-239-5042. We will also post it on KTIV, KCAU, and Facebook.

### Attendance

Please arrive 15 minutes before your scheduled time. If you have to miss class for any reason call the riding center as soon as possible. If we do not answer please leave us a voice mail. Do not e-mail, Facebook, or text. We may not have time to get the message. Please understand that if you do not call us, the rider may not be able to ride if we do not have a volunteer to take your place.



## Attire

For Volunteers safety, appropriate footwear for horse work is important. Closed toed shoes must to be worn when around horses. If volunteers show up with inappropriate shoes they will not be able to participate in the class. Wear comfortable shoes as you will be walking most of the class.

## Cell Phones

The use of cell phones is not permitted during class. You may have your cell phone with you during class but it must be on silent (not vibrate) and in a safe location. If for any reason you need to have your phone accessible please inform your instructor.

**Safety Rule** STARS strives to provide the safest possible environment for every client, volunteer, family, staff, and visitor. Horses, however specially-trained, can react unexpectedly. Working around and riding a horse is a risky activity. Everyone that rides must wear an ASTM/SEI approved riding helmet. The following rules MUST be followed at all times:

- No smoking anywhere on the premises.
- No pets allowed except STARS K-9 certified dogs.
- Closed toed shoes are required in the barn area.
- No running, pushing, yelling, climbing on the fence, or any other actions that might frighten a horse.
- Volunteers are NOT allowed in the horse pens. Instructors will bring horses in for class.

## Equine Liability Law

*Iowa passed a law effective July 1, 1997. IOWA CODE CHAPTER 673 WARNING; Under Iowa law, a domesticated animal professional is not liable for damages suffered by, an injury to, or the death of a participant resulting from the inherent risks of domesticated animal activities, pursuant to Iowa Code Chapter 673. You are assuming inherent risks of participating in this domesticated animal activity.*



## Events

Since STARS is a non-profit, we have fundraising events throughout the year. We ask all volunteers and families that participate in the program to try to help us out with the different events. Please contact STARS staff at 712-239-5042 to find out how you can help.

Each year we host a fun Horse Show for all the clients that participate in the current year. This is a time for them to come and show off their talents. The Horse Show is usually hosted in June at the STARS riding center. Please ask your instructor for the dates. We are always needing volunteers to help with this big event!

# OUR PROGRAMS

## Therapeutic Riding

Here at STARS we use the movement of the horse to benefit our clients that participate in our equine program. Their three-dimensional gait benefits a wide variety of disabilities. We serve a range of different disabilities such as physical, cognitive and emotional. All of our classes are provided by PATH Int. certified instructors. They set detailed goals for their clients, individually and as a class. We will have anywhere from two to four clients in a class at one time. They will be grouped according to age and goals. All clients will need to have paperwork filled out before they can participate in our program. Please contact our Program Director for those forms at 712-239-5042.





### **Equine Assisted Therapy (EAL)**

Through the unique power of our equine assisted learning classes, clients at STARS are learning better communication skills, team work, responsibility, forgiveness, good decision making skills and even how to grieve after a loss. Classes are unique and custom formed to each individual or group.

The horse activities used for EAL are mostly unmounted activities using the horses' non-verbal communication. We work to build relationships, trust, and respect. These are all building blocks necessary to ride! STARS has worked with clients from Dismas Charities, Camp Courage (Hospice) youth, and private individuals.



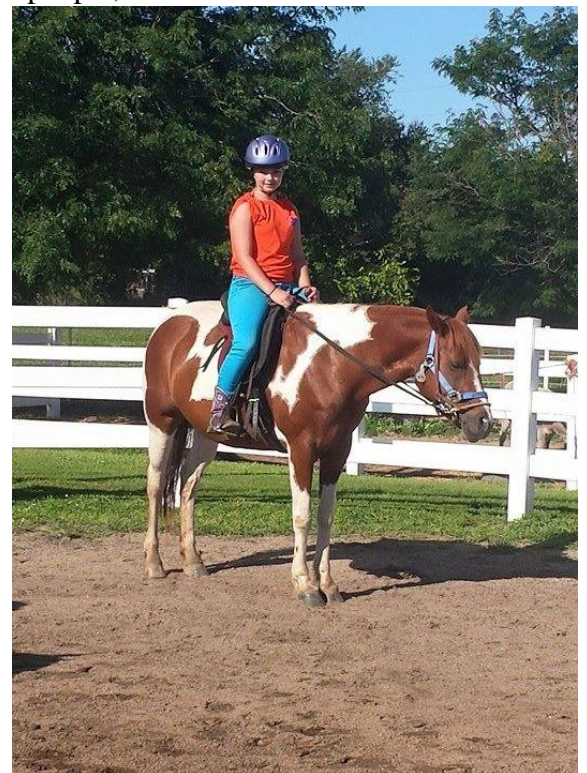
### **Team Building**

Participants engage in 2-3 non-riding activities held inside an arena. The group is assigned a task to get the horses through a series of "challenges." Like in the office, a set of rules are given to which participants must adhere. In these workshops, one rule is non-verbal communication only! The Horseplay arena sets the stage for the individuals to think and communicate "outside of the box" independently and collectively. Each activity works on team communication, cooperation, and adaptation. Horses are ideal teachers. They are responsive and have acute awareness and sensitivity to their surroundings. Similar to people, horses have their own personalities, physical abilities, and limitations. Horses can sense a person's level of trust, confidence, awareness, and interpersonal skills. No horse experience is needed. No riding is involved.

### **Private Lessons**

As part of non-therapeutic equine programs, certified instructors teach riding lessons, which can be arranged privately or in groups up to 4. Students need to be at least 6 years of age to participate. We offer lessons at various times throughout the week in our year-round heated facility.

All proceeds from riding lessons go to support and supplement the STARS therapeutic riding program for riders with disabilities. Private lessons are \$45 and group lessons are \$40 per rider for an hour lesson. Please contact riding center at 712-239-5042.





## **Horse Camp**

STARS offers a week long horse camp to those that don't need physical assistance in learning how to ride a horse. We have two different levels for riders. Beginners that have little to no horse experience to intermediate for those that have been to our beginner or have had some horse experience. For more information please contact the riding center.



## ***THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING.***

*The rewards are great. The opportunities are many. We appreciate each and every minute of your time.*

***STARS CANNOT SHINE  
WITHOUT YOU!!!***

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