



Therapeutic Riding and Animal Assisted Therapy

# Client Handbook

## **Our Purpose**

To provide persons with physical, cognitive, psycho-social and emotional disabilities as well as those being impacted by potentially life altering illness or injury the opportunity to experience the power of the human/animal bond through therapeutic intervention in order to promote improved health and wellness.

## **Our Mission:**

To bring a smile to a face or laughter to the heart where sadness, pain and fear existed.

## **Our Motto**

"Where Joy Blooms" comes from a revelation that Sheri Holmes had after the devastation of Hurricane Harvey. Choosing to follow God and His will for her life, Sheri made the decision that she would no longer be controlled by her circumstances or fear, but would choose joy in all areas of her life, including developing a therapy program.

## **Client Handbook**

Welcome to Cheerful Hearts Therapeutic Riding and Animal Assisted Therapy, a PATH Intl. member center. Our PATH, Intl. certified instructor teaches basic riding and horsemanship skills to clients of all ages and disabilities as a means of helping them to gain independence in daily living. Our programs are designed to benefit our clients physically, socially, and emotionally with the help of horses and volunteers who are trained to work with clients of varying abilities.

The purpose of this handbook is to share our policies and procedures so that CHAT can provide the most effective therapeutic sessions possible and make your experience with us the best it can be. By reading this handbook and being an active participant in your classes, you will get the most out of your therapeutic riding or Animal Assisted Therapy experience. We look forward to working with you!

The following forms are required to be completed before you begin your experience with CHAT.

- Client Information Form
- Client Health History Form
- Client's Medical History & Physician's Statement
- Liability Waiver
- Authorization for Emergency Medical Treatment
- Acknowledgement of Receipt of Privacy Practices
- Policy and Procedures for the Rights of Clients

**Client forms must be complete before participating and updated annually.**

## **Program Information**

### **New Client Evaluations**

These are scheduled after receipt of the application fee and completed forms, including the medical release that must be completed, signed, and dated by the client's physician. A new client evaluation is a very important part of our program. It allows our staff to determine a client's base skill level, abilities, appropriate horse, volunteer needs, and the most suitable class time available in our schedule. It also allows us to determine if the potential client would benefit from therapeutic riding and can be safely mounted on a horse or if ground activities are more appropriate. It is only after we complete an evaluation that we can determine if there is a place in the schedule for a new client.

### **Scheduling**

Once an evaluation is complete, the Program Manager will take scheduling preferences of the client into account when placing him/her into a time slot. However, we cannot guarantee the day and/or time that he/she prefers will be available. Clients at CHAT are placed into the most appropriate private or group lesson according to their abilities, goals, needs, and ages.

If there is not an opening that fits a client's needs, he/she will be placed on a waiting list. The Program Manager will contact him/her as soon as a space becomes available.

### **Therapeutic Riding Lessons**

Lessons are taught by PATH, Intl. certified therapeutic riding instructors and provide each client a unique experience. Teams of 1-4 trained volunteers per client assist during each class. Clients participate in tasks and games that encourage physical strengthening, cognitive improvement, and socialization while learning basic riding skills. CHAT reserves the right to teach a unmounted lesson when deemed necessary to address a specific skill, goal, or due to inclement weather.

Instruction is tailored to fit each of our client's specific needs and to help improve his/her level of strength, balance, mobility and confidence during the riding experience. The emphasis is on developing riding skills in a safe environment that is both therapeutic and fun. Specific goals are set for each client based upon input from the client, his/her parents or guardians (if applicable), his/her physician, and his/her therapists.

### **Hug a Horse Program**

Igniting passion, purpose and possibility in those that riding is contraindicated or prefer to stay out of the saddle. Great for all ages including senior adults.

Our vision is to provide a beneficial social activity for clients allowing the opportunity to connect with others, enjoy nature in a rural atmosphere, and interact with horses in a safe environment. We are committed to providing our "Hug a Horse" clients an experience that will benefit them physically, emotionally, and cognitively.

### **Big Hearts-Mini Hooves Program**

This program is developed for individuals of all ages, schools, as well as community and youth organizations.

Big Hearts, Mini Hooves purpose is to introduce participants to basic horsemanship involving various aspects of its health, grooming, and handling of the miniature horse.

### **Continued Participation in the Program**

Instructors perform ongoing assessments to determine if the client is showing progress from therapeutic riding or equine assisted activities or if classes are now proving beneficial for the client. During these assessments the instructor, staff and care givers will also determine if a client is demonstrating progress from our specialized services or if it is time to discontinue or change type of class the client is participating in.

## **Policies and Procedures**

### **Rider Limitations**

CHAT has a client rider weight limit of 220 pounds. The weight limit may be less for clients requiring a full transfer and will be at the sole discretion of the instructor. There is no weight limit for Hug-a-Horse or the Big Hearts- Mini Hooves Programs. Therapeutic horseback riding or equine assisted activities may not be a suitable activity for certain individuals and therefore it is necessary for every client to have his/her physician complete and sign the Client's Medical History and Physician's Statement. Should the physical condition of the client change at any time (for example because of surgery, a new injury or diagnosis, pregnancy, etc.), CHAT must be notified immediately and an updated Physician's Statement form must be completed and turned in to the Program Manager. **All forms must also be updated annually.**

Certain conditions require additional precautions to be taken when on or around horses and **some conditions are contraindications to riding.** We follow the guidelines established by PATH Intl. A list of these conditions is found on the Medical History & Physician's Statement Form. Most activities have some type of precautions and guidelines for participation and therapeutic horseback riding is no exception.

### **Clothing**

For both evaluations and lessons, riders and participants in unmounted activities should wear long pants such as riding breeches, jeans, or leggings to prevent leg chafing. Skirts or shorts may NOT be worn for classes. Boots with a rounded, closed toe and a small heel are the safest form of footwear. However, any shoe with a closed toe and heel are acceptable. If a client arrives without a closed toe shoe, they will not be allowed to participate that day. Tennis shoes are acceptable for unmounted activities.

Clients should avoid wearing jewelry. Long dangling necklaces and earrings will not be allowed during lessons. Safety helmets that meet ASTM-SEI requirements must be worn by all clients and, if necessary, will be provided, but purchasing your own helmet is preferred.

Local tack shops or feed stores, such as Tractor Supply or Arcola Feed, carry appropriate helmets. Helmets can also be purchased online.

### **Inclement Weather**

Please do not assume that lessons will be cancelled due to bad weather. This is Texas; wait a minute and the weather will change! However, we will cancel lessons if the temperature is expected to be below 40°F or above 101°F. Our Program Manager will monitor the weather and email and/or call by 6:00pm the night before, in the event lessons need to be cancelled. Otherwise, we look forward to seeing you at the barn!

If weather unexpectedly does not permit a riding class, an unmounted activity will be substituted.

## **Lesson Cancellations by CHAT**

Although we strive never to do so, CHAT reserves the right to cancel classes or change to an unmounted activity at any time when we feel they could not be conducted in a safe manner. Reasons may include, but are not limited to: adverse weather conditions, an inadequate number of volunteers available to assist, or lack of an appropriate equine to meet the needs of a client.

## **CHAT Calendar**

CHAT operates continuously year-round. We are closed Sunday and Monday and occasionally for horse shows or educational conventions. We are closed for the following holidays: New Year's Day, Easter, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. Sessions run in six week increments with a one to two week break in-between end and start of next session.

## **Safety Rules and Barn Policies**

1. All clients who are not considered responsible for themselves must be accompanied by a parent/guardian or caregiver until the client is escorted by the instructor or volunteer to his/her lesson.
2. A parent/guardian must be on the property during the entire lesson for all clients under the age of 18.
3. A parent/guardian must be on the property during the entire class for all non-verbal clients.
4. CHAT reserves the right to extend the parental/guardian supervision policy to other clients as deemed necessary.
5. A safety helmet that meets ASTM-SEI requirements must be worn at all times during mounted activities. CHAT has helmets available but we prefer you purchase your own.
6. Clients should be properly hydrated and protected from the elements. The barn is neither air-conditioned in the summer nor heated in the winter. Clients may wear cool wrap bands, jackets, hats & gloves as long as they do not interfere with class activities.
7. At CHAT we DO NOT hand feed our horses. Clients wishing to bring treats may give them to the horse in a feed tub at the instructor's discretion and within the time constraints of their classes.
8. Dogs and other pets are not allowed on the property unless a service animal.
9. Any bleeding or open sores must be covered in order to participate in activities.
10. Please be sure to advise the instructor of any medical changes such as recent seizures or illnesses that may affect riding ability.

11. Please refrain from coaching or speaking with clients from the sidelines unless prompted by the instructor. It is important their focus remain on the instructor and volunteers.
12. Please make sure that any visitors you bring (including siblings, other family and friends) remain under your supervision at all times. No climbing/sitting/standing on the fence, no shouting or loud voices, no running around the riding arena, barn, or parking lot, etc.. Guests are subject to the same rules and policies as our volunteers. All guests/parents/guardians and those not directly involved in a class must stay in the viewing area or the gazebo.
13. Our instructors are happy to answer any questions you may have. If they are not available directly before or after the lesson, they can set up a day/time to address your thoughts. Instructors are not able to answer questions during the class as their full attention must be with the clients.
14. If you must use your cell phone, please move away from the class area.
15. SHERLOCK FARMS AND CHEERFUL HEARTS IS A NO SMOKING NO SWEARING AREA.

**Thank you for following our basic safety rules.**  
**Safety is our number one priority!**

### **ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY**

CHAT has a policy of zero tolerance for any of the following behaviors from any of our volunteers, employees, clients, and guests. Any of the following will result in immediate dismissal from the program:

- 1. Inappropriate and/or abusive behavior towards others.**
- 2. Failure to follow established safety procedures.**
- 3. Use of alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs during scheduled classes or being under the influence of.**
- 4. Abuse or mistreatment of equines or other animals at the facility.**
- 5. Theft of anything from clients, other volunteers, Sherlock Farms or Cheerful Hearts.**

If the behavior is of a serious nature, the person involved will also be reported to the appropriate authorities.

## **No-Show and Cancellation Policies**

1. Please a few minutes early for your scheduled class. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late you will be considered a client “no call, no show”.
2. Our instructors and volunteers set aside time in their busy days in order to teach and help. By letting us know that you will be absent, we can let our instructors and volunteers know so that they can plan their days. If you will be absent, please call our Program Manager, Sheri Holmes at 832-221-9066 as soon as possible. If you get voice mail, PLEASE leave a message.
3. There are NO REFUNDS for classes missed or cancelled by the client or CHAT. Classes will be rescheduled to the best of our ability during the same session period as the canceled class. No-call, no-shows will not be rescheduled.
4. Please notify CHAT as soon as possible in the event of illnesses or other unforeseen emergencies.
5. If you will be out of town during a session for more than a week, please contact the Program Manager at beginning of session. You will not be expected to pay for those missed lessons.
6. Excessive absences (3 or more) or no-shows (more than 1) may disqualify the client from being scheduled for the next session and the client may be placed on a waiting list for the next session.
7. Clients who are receiving scholarships or sponsorships and have more than 1 no-show will be subject to forfeiting the scholarship or sponsorship and becoming ineligible for future scholarships or sponsorships. (when scholarships become available. They are not at this time)

### **PLEASE don't be a “No-show, No-call”.**

These cause:

- unnecessary tacking and untacking of horses
- inefficient use of instructor and volunteer time
- open time slots that could have been used by other clients



## **Billing and Payment Policy**

Cheerful Hearts has taken great care in setting client fees for our lessons. Our fees do not even cover our costs for the horses, facility, instructors, insurance, etc. The information below sets forth the billing and payment policies of Cheerful Hearts Therapeutic Riding and Animal Assisted Therapy.

**New Rider Evaluation Fee:** There is a non-refundable fee of **\$50** required at the time of your new rider evaluation.

### **Therapeutic Riding Class Fee:**

Group or private class: Start at \$35 per 30-minute lesson and \$45 per 45-minute lesson.

### **Hug a Horse Class Fee**

Group or private class: \$30 per 30-minute class

### **Big Hearts-Mini Hooves Class Fee**

Group or private class: \$30 per 30-minute class

### **Billing and Payment:**

Class fees are billed at time of registration for session or paid per week. Regardless of paying at beginning of session or weekly, clients are paying for holding the time slot for the session not actual class time. If a class is canceled every effort will be made to provide a makeup class, but not guaranteed. (unless it is a no call, no show) Receipts will be emailed or printed and delivered by hand at farm.

Credit card payments may be made with a \$3 processing fee for weekly payments and a \$15 processing fee for paying for whole 6 week session.

Checks should be made out to Cheerful Hearts and put in the sign in clip board.

Do not give payments to instructors or volunteers.

There is a link to pay for your lessons on the website at [www.cheerfulheartstherapy.org](http://www.cheerfulheartstherapy.org) for your convenience.

### **Financial Assistance:**

We fundraise in order to provide scholarships for clients who would otherwise be unable to afford lessons. A limited number of scholarships are available that cover half the cost of lesson fees. An application must be completed and approved prior to the first scheduled class. Clients will be billed in full for all classes taken prior to scholarship approval. Donors may also choose to sponsor specific riders. This is at the donor's discretion.

### **Returned Checks**

Your account will be assessed a \$25 return check fee for each check that is returned to us. This fee must be paid before lessons may be continued.

## **Sibling Participation in the Program**

CHAT offers lessons to family members of clients through Sherlock Farms able bodied program . Some family will be able to ride with the client in a group lesson if not contraindicated. This option will be evaluated before a family/client lesson is planned.

**Thank you for choosing to ride at CHAT!**

The instructors and volunteers at Cheerful Hearts Therapeutic Riding and Animal Assisted Therapy want to make your time spent with us enjoyable, fun, and rewarding. Please give us your feedback, positive and negative. Let us know how we are doing and what we can do to improve your experience with us. Thank you!

**Please sign and return this form with your other client forms.** Thank you!

By signing below, I agree that I have read and understand the policies and procedures of CHAT.

Client name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Please Print*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Client, Parent or Legal Guardian*

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Return all forms to:  
Sheri Holmes, Program Manager  
CHAT  
7317 Avenue P  
Santa Fe, TX 77510**

Questions? Contact Sheri at 832-221-9066  
cheerfulheartstherapy@gmail.com