



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***

STARS has therapeutic riding classes in the evening Monday through Thursday. We have 5 six-week sessions throughout the year.

**If you're interested in becoming a STARS Volunteer please contact
Michelle Vondrak
Program Director
michelle@scstars.org
712-239-5042**

Welcome to STARS!

We're excited to have you join our team! The following pages contain important information about our horses and participants. It may seem overwhelming at first, but we're here to support you every step of the way.

You will receive thorough training and be paired with an experienced volunteer to ensure you feel comfortable with every task. We encourage you to express any concerns or insecurities you may have; we want you to feel confident and supported in this positive learning environment.

Your time and dedication are invaluable to us. Thank you for your gracious support—our program wouldn't be as successful without you!

Looking forward to working together!



HISTORY

Since its inception by Dr. Mark and Sue 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 participants 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 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 at STARS are thoughtfully designed to support the educational, behavioral, social, and physical goals of individuals with disabilities. Being around horses provides a rich array of physical, mental, and emotional stimuli, creating a unique environment for growth and transformation.

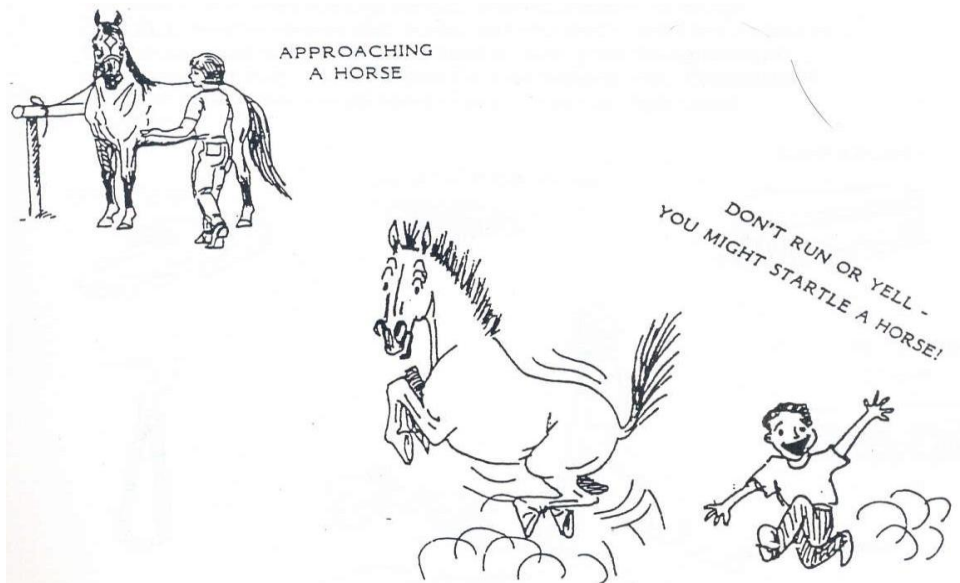
In our supportive setting, participants can move and adjust themselves in ways that lead to meaningful breakthroughs in a short amount of time. The natural interactions with horses encourage participants to take initiative, think creatively, and problem-solve, all while discovering new strengths and strategies. With immediate feedback from these experiences, progress is often faster and more profound.

Since 1984, we have proudly served individuals facing a variety of challenges, including physical disabilities, mental health issues, and chronic illnesses. Our participants include those with conditions such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, brain trauma, stroke, multiple sclerosis, PTSD, and Autism Spectrum Disorder, among others. Our hope is each individual leaves our program feeling transformed, having reconnected with their bodies, minds and hearts in powerful ways.

Approaching the Horse with the Participant

Make sure your participant has their helmet on before going near the horse.

Be aware of where your participant is at all times. It is your responsibility they approach 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 themselves without moving their head. Approach your horse at the shoulder or as near to the neck as possible so they 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 them on the neck or shoulder, thus modeling for your participant how to approach a horse.



Basic Grooming and Tacking

GROOMING: Grooming is a very important part of a horse's health. A rubber curry comb and brush will remove mud, dander, and dirt which could cause saddle sores. Grooming also gives horses coat's a good shine, and makes them feel good. Not only is grooming important to the horse but it is also very therapeutic for the participants as they will work on fine motor skills, range of motion, following directions and much more. It also gives the participant and horse a chance to bond. Be sure to encourage the participants 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 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 use a side-pull bridle. 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. The noseband should be up and cross-under straps down, slide over the horses mouth so noseband sits on the nose. Gently fold one ear forward and slide headpiece over the ear, then fold other ear gently forward and slide headpiece over. The headpiece will be around the back of the ears and the browband in front of the ears. 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 participant to do as much as possible. One of our main goals is to work on independence for our participants.



Bareback Pad

Saddles are rarely used at STARS, we prefer using a bareback pad as it allows the participant 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 participant 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

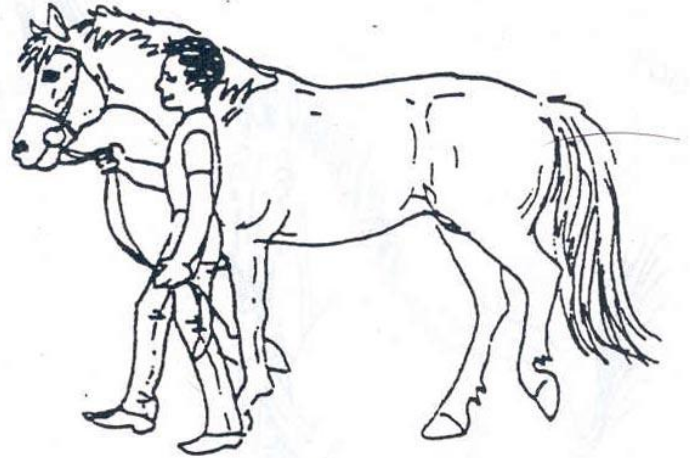
The instructor will ask the leader to bring the horse into the ramp room and position the horse close to the ramp/block by gently pulling horse's head towards the ramp/block and then stop the horse when the instructor asks. The off side (right side) volunteer will assist the instructor with the mount. 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 participant the whole time and never assume any thing.

The Leader

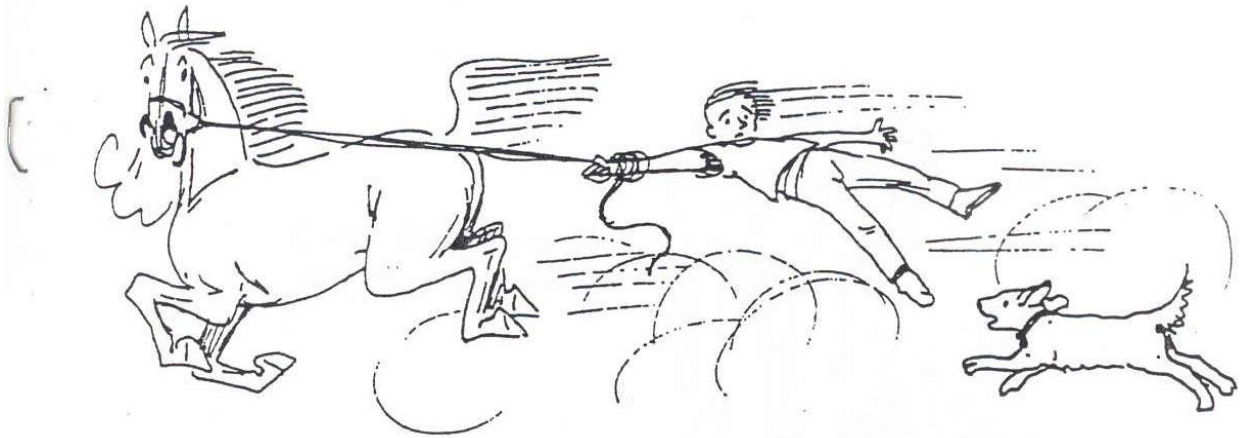
As a leader you are responsible for the horse, their comfort, wellbeing, and behavior. A leader's first responsibility is the horse, but they must also be aware of the instructor, the participant, the positions of the side walkers and any potential hazards in the arena. Be patient and maintain concentration. 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 participants time to fulfill commands. Some participants 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 the lead is not over the top of the reins, but 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 "Walk on." 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 on 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 speed of the horses varies. You will have to adjust your steps accordingly, so you are not pulling them forward or pulling them back.
7. Encourage the participants to do as much steering 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 participants to be as independent as possible. ***Remember, independence for our participants is one of our goals.***
8. Always keep at least two horse lengths between your horse and the other horses. If you find yourself too close to the horse in front of you, make a large circle towards the center of the arena, cut across the arena, or slow or stop the horse. Make sure you let your participant and side walkers know what you are doing.
9. Pay attention to your horse, your participant, 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 participant is not thrown off balance. Also inform your side walker of what you are doing.
11. 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 participant.
12. Praise the horse often; **NEVER** punish or discipline. If your horse fails to follow your directions, lead them into the center of the arena and allow the instructor to handle the situation.



13. When preparing to trot alert your sidewalkers and participant. 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 them to slow, say “walk” calmly and gently pull back on the lead until he walks.
14. Use common sense. If you have any concerns, immediately bring the horse to the center of the arena, halt, and signal an instructor for assistance without alarming the participant.



The Side Walker

1. Assist the participant in getting their helmet on.
2. Assist the participant in grooming and tacking the horse.
3. When the instructor calls for your participant, bring them to the mounting block or ramp.
4. Stand on the right side of the horse to assist the participant 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 participant the opportunity to gain strength and balance on their own.
6. Stay right beside the participant. If they drop a beanbag or anything 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 participant, you may startle the horse and unbalance the participant.
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 participant 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 participant or the horse’s back. Make sure you don’t pull the knee or ankle out.



9. If back support is necessary for your participant, place an open hand on the middle of their 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 participant.
10. Instructor may ask you to retrieve crutches, walkers, or wheelchairs prior to dismounting a participant.
11. After instructor has dismounted the participant, assist them with the removal of tack and help them put tack in its proper place, and assist them to the waiting area.
12. Encourage, calm, praise, and reassure the participant. 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 participant and the other volunteers.
14. If the participant wants to "chat", try to get them to redirect their attention to the instructor. An example might be: "Good listening, Jillian" or "What is Jerusha (instructor) saying?"
15. Be involved and have FUN with the participant. 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 participant in steering or stopping, place your hands directly over theirs on the reins and help them appropriately.

Dismounting

The instructor will dismount the participants. Horse leaders will keep the horse calm while participants dismount. Side walkers assist participants in removing tack and returning it to the tack room. Leaders take the horses back to the pasture with the instructor after class is finished.

Additional Thoughts

Falls are rare, but they can and do happen. In the event of a fall the leader stays with their horse. Carefully and slowly move the horse in a safe direction away from the participant. 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 participants and volunteers composed and focused. The instructor will remount the participant on the horse immediately, if possible. Our goal is to create a safe and fun environment.

Do not let go of your horse for any reason. If you are leading another participant, focus your attention on your horse and them. Keep calm and positive, while distracting your participant away from the fall and towards you. The participant may become fearful if they know you are upset or frightened. Humor or praise for the participant 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, compliments, 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 the hot summer months off, usually mid-June, July and August. We ride mostly in the evening on weekdays, but some daytime 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

Summertime classes will be cancelled if the temperature is 90 degrees or heat index is 90 degrees by 3:00pm. In winter, if the temperature is below 15 degrees by 3:00pm classes will also be cancelled. In any threatening weather such as tornado warning, snow or ice storms classes most likely will be cancelled. We will notify all participants and volunteers by text message.

Attendance

Please arrive 15 minutes before your scheduled time. **If you have to miss class for any reason, please text 712-239-5042.** Please understand if you do not contact us, the participant 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 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.



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 us at 712-239-5042 to find out how you can help.

Safety Rule

STARS strives to provide the safest possible environment for every participant, 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.
- 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.

OUR PROGRAMS

Therapeutic Riding

Here at STARS we use the movement of the horse to benefit our participants 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 taught by certified instructors. They set detailed goals for their participants, individually and as a class. We will have anywhere from two to four participants in a class at one time. All participants need to have paperwork filled out before they can join our program. Please contact our Program Director for those forms at 712-239-5042 or email michelle@scstars.org



THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING!

“To ride a horse is to fly without wings.” Anonymous

STARS, Inc.

Special Troopers Adaptive Riding School

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Sioux City, IA 51108

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