



Miracles in Motion

Therapeutic Riding Center

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Volunteer Handbook

Experience a “Miracle” from a horse...

As a rider, as a volunteer

Our Mission

Miracles in Motion is dedicated to providing the “Miracle” of therapeutic horseback riding to improve the physical, emotional, cognitive and social lives of individuals with special needs.

Welcome to Miracles in Motion (MIM)!

You are a great asset to Miracles in Motion! It is because of *you* that that MIM riders can participate in our program at all. Your time is graciously appreciated and we *cannot thank you enough* for giving of yourself!

Every volunteer has a different reason for getting involved. Some desire more experience and time around horses, others enjoy working with the riders and families, some like to get away and spend time with the wonderful people at MIM, yet others come to enjoy the weekly exercise! Whatever your reason, we hope you will find your 8 week commitment with MIM a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

This handbook is designed as a reference for your orientation to our program. Volunteer duties, tips on working with horses and the disabled and specific information about Miracles in Motion are included. Please keep it to reference back to in the future.

Thank you for your dedication to Miracles in Motion.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Jacques

Program Director

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Overview

Purpose

Horseback riding helps mentally and physically challenged people achieve a quality of life that is improved, enhanced and enriched. It is proven that the benefits of horseback riding are threefold:

- **Physical:** The three-dimensional motion of the horse provides the rider hip and back action that stimulates natural walking. Riding relaxes and strengthens muscles and improves body tone, posture, balance, joint mobility and coordination.
- **Emotional:** Contact with horses provides a non-competitive setting for learning and builds self-confidence and self-discipline while developing new skills.
- **Social:** Riding nurtures a positive self-image. Riders may, for the first time in their lives, experience some independence and a sense of being part of a team.

The MIM community requires one key ingredient, a Team Approach! The Team includes our horses, our riders and their families, our donors and supporters, our staff and instructors, our Board of Directors and *YOU*, as volunteers!

History

Miracles in Motion (MIM) was founded in 1999. Hundreds and hundreds of volunteer hours by incredibly devoted people were necessary for MIM to grow into the program it is today, serving 25 riders or more each week and growing! In 2005, MIM purchased its new home here on 18 pastoral acres at 118 Wyman Road in Keene, New Hampshire.

Today, MIM has 4 horses, four instructors, a barn manager, a 7 member Board of Directors and a vision to reach out to more riders within our community with the support of its volunteers. **If you like our program, please help us spread the word so that we may grow our MIM community!**

Accreditation

Miracles in Motion is fully accredited by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). NARHA supplies therapeutic riding programs across the country with insurance, technical assistance and training in safety and teaching techniques. There are several hundred NARHA operating centers in the US. All of the MIM instructors are NARHA certified instructors.

Volunteer General Information

What to Wear

- Close-fitting clothing that is weather appropriate (remember it's always cooler in the barn)
- Layers so you can shed clothing as you warm up (you will be moving steadily for at least 30-45 minutes)
- No loose or dangling jewelry that you can lose, get tangled in horse or rider gear, or that might scare a horse
- Comfortable shoes that are sturdy and close-toed, no Crocs or sandals.
- Maintain a professional appearance and that includes proper language and behavior for a public setting.

Inclement weather

Before leaving your home to volunteer for a class, check the weather. **Extreme cold temperatures are difficult for riders, horses and volunteers. This means that if temperatures drop below 20 degrees, especially if there are high winds, a class may need to be cancelled. Extreme heat and humidity are also a challenge for everyone; therefore it is wise to call the barn office within 2 hours of your lesson time to check about any cancellations.** Though we may not ride during extreme heat, it's likely we will need your help with unmounted activities such as bathing the horses or for helping with barn chores. On occasion, we may even need to cancel a ride due to snow falling off the metal roof as it may "spook" the horses and present a potentially dangerous situation.

Because MIM is fortunate enough to have an indoor arena, classes will rarely be cancelled due to weather conditions. If driving conditions become unsafe, be **sure to call the office 603-357-7282 during the day of your class, preferably within 2 hours of the class.** This will allow us enough time to assess serious weather as it happens, such as upcoming thunderstorms. If your call is not answered, leave a "checking in" message with your number and your call will be returned with confirmation. On some occasions you will receive notification ahead of time. Please be sure we have your day and evening phone numbers to make this possible.

Substitutes

If you've been with us before you will understand when we tell you that your riders depend on you to ride in their class. They become accustomed to seeing your face besides them while they ride, and they grow to trust you. In the unfortunate event you must miss a class, please take the following steps:

1. please **use the substitute list** to find a sub to replace you
2. call MIM (603-357-7282) to let us know that you will not be attending, the day/time of your class, and your substitute's name so that we know your slot is covered and your rider may plan to ride that day
3. **if you are unable to find a sub**, please call us immediately and let us know so that we may plan accordingly
4. if you are to miss several classes or can no longer attend, out of courtesy, please let us know as soon as possible

Minimum Age Requirements & Insurance, Liability Release

No one under the age of 14 is allowed to work directly with our horses and riders due to insurance restrictions; however, underage youth are welcome to clean tack, sweep the stable area, etc. Because working with horses can be potentially dangerous, we ask that all prospective volunteers sign a liability release form.

Sign-in Procedures & Recording Hours

Your volunteer time is important to us for grant writing purposes and for recognizing outstanding volunteers. Please be sure to record your hours each time you come. Sign-in sheets are kept on the volunteer table at the barn entry.

*Include your drive time and round off your hours to the nearest half hour.

Safety Rules

- No pets.
- No unaccompanied children in the barn please.
- Smoking is allowed in the parking lot away from the barn, hay, paddocks, tractor and grassy fields. No littering on MIM grounds please.

- All children should be supervised by an adult when on the premises.
- Volunteers should not bring children to class.
- Mounted persons must wear ASTM approved helmets at all times. Our lesson riders must also wear the helmets when groom/tacking/untacking the horse.
- Only instructors may mount/dismount a rider.
- No bridling unless you have received prior approval (either you have extensive horse experience or have received proper training).
- Only approved Schoolers will be permitted to ride the horses (“school the horses”) and may only do so by appointment scheduled while a staff member is present. No one other than MIM clients may ride during lesson times.
- Unauthorized personnel are not allowed in the fields, stalls or paddocks.
- No soliciting in the main office.
- No running or yelling on MIM grounds. Horses are easily spooked and especially fearful if they cannot see something they hear outside of the barn. Please be conscientious while you are in the parking lot.
- Observe and obey all safety signs posted.

Emergency Medical Procedures

- A. Plan 1 (major injury)
 - a. Instructor appoints someone to:
 - i. Telephone the emergency number and read directions to the farm that are by the phone in the office.
 - ii. Remain at the barn area to direct emergency vehicle and reassure people in the area.
 - iii. Get the Emergency Medical Release Form of the rider out of the file and give it to the instructor.
 - b. Instructor appoints a volunteer to:
 - i. Go to the road and wait for the emergency vehicle to arrive.
 - ii. Stop driver and have lights and sirens turned off so the horses will not be frightened.
 - iii. Tell the driver where the accident is and how to get there.
- B. Plan 2 (minor injury)
 - a. The needs of the individual should be met, i.e. band aids, ice, taken in our out of heat, etc.
 - b. If the rider is injured, have the horse taken back to the barn and properly attended to.
 - c. If the person in need shouldn't walk, have a car driven to the area.
 - d. The rest of the class should continue in an orderly manner.

Some Requirements of a Good Volunteer

- ✓ Reliability- Regular attendance or the provision of a reliable substitute
- ✓ Punctuality- Late arrival can be very frustrating to a student who has looked forward to his weekly ride
- ✓ Physical Fitness- Within reason☺
- ✓ Relaxed- An anxious volunteer contributes to a nervous rider and a tense horse
- ✓ Alertness- Despite your outward relaxation, always anticipate an unexpected emergency
- ✓ Empathy- Avoid false sentimentality. It's important to have empathy and genuine regard toward riders.
- ✓ Horse Knowledge- Knowledge of horses is helpful, but many excellent volunteers have little previous experience.
- ✓ Patience- Endless patience is necessary to adjust to the often painfully slow movements and reactions of the severely disabled.

- ✓ Sensible and comfortable clothing- No sandals or high heels. Expect to get a bit dirty so wear your outdoor shoes.
- ✓ Common sense- Always!

Getting to Know the Disabled Rider

It's important to remember that every child or adult is an individual and wants to be treated with that understanding, regardless of having a disability or not. No one wants to feel different, yet we each have our own unique learning style and personality.

You may be overwhelmed at first with things you have never seen or do not understand. This is natural for most people. Allow the team (horse, instructor, caregiver of that rider and other volunteers) to help you see this rider from a new perspective. Most volunteers discover themselves developing a unique bond with their rider after just a few sessions. It's ok to talk about it afterwards with an instructor if you find yourself in an uncomfortable situation and wish to switch roles.

Suggestions to Help You Relate to a Person with a Disability

- Be yourself
- Smile and relax
- Talk about horses
- Speak directly to the person rather than to the person with them
- Don't stare, but do look them in the eye when speaking with them
- Don't be afraid to ask them to repeat themselves if you did not understand
- Appreciate what the rider can do
- Choose your words with dignity:
 - Avoid: "crippled"
 - Instead: "person with physical disabilities" "person who is physically challenged"
 - Avoid: "confined to a wheelchair"
 - Instead: "person who uses wheelchair"

Some Pointers for Handling the Horse

Horses are herd bound animals with a strong flight reflex. They know they are safer with a group of horses. In the wild, they are prey animals- not predator- and constantly on the defense to protect themselves from dangerous wild animals. **Just think about what they are volunteering to do for us here: hold a human atop their back, accept equipment on their body, be led and surrounded by non-equines while leaving the comfort of their herd. This is quite a "Miracle", don't you agree?**

In a scary situation, the horse may initially want to revert back to an instinctual "flight" reaction. If you are leading a horse who becomes "spooked", stay calm and don't yank on the lead rope. Don't pull the horse's head down or it will pull back in fear of being restricted. Hold onto the lead rope with your left hand while releasing with your right hand (the hand closest to the horse) and breathe calmly. Talk to the horse. Side walkers may be asked to "emergency dismount" a rider if it is necessary (see page 10 for more information on emergency dismounts). The instructor should

be notified immediately if there is a situation that is making you uncomfortable and you need advice on how to handle it. Never be afraid to speak up when you have a question that could involve safety.

Other tips:

- No running in or around the barn or arena
- Be kind, we practice ethical, humane animal treatment
- **Your horse wants to please you as his team member as long as he understands what you desire. Because our horses are handled by several people daily, we must be consistent with how we communicate and handle so as not to confuse them. We know it's not the only right way, but it's the "Miracles" way.**
- Breathe and relax, it really will help the horse relax
- Minimize extreme joy or excited vocalizations, noises make horses anxious. Use quiet voices.
- Approach a horse calmly from its side, not from its rear
- If you must go around a horse from behind, speak to it loud enough so it can hear you before you go behind (so you do not startle the horse)
- Horses can learn to understand the sounds of different words
- Horses enjoy being pat gently or rubbed on the neck or shoulder
- Horses move away from pressure. If you get stepped on, push the horse's shoulder until he lifts his foot (rather than trying to pull your foot away)
- Do not abuse the horse. Never punish our horses. If there is a behavior problem, please come and get a staff member right away to explain the situation.
- Horses are gentle animals who will accept you as their leader.

The Riding Lesson

As a volunteer, you will be involved in every aspect of the lesson from grooming and tacking, through the class itself, and clean up afterwards. Each rider will have individual goals to work toward. As a part of the rider's team you will be given instruction from the instructor on how to best work with this rider and horse in a lesson.

Your Role:

It is important to arrive at least 30 minutes prior class time to groom, tack up, assist in arena set-up, and to gather a rider's supplies for class. You may be asked to greet the family as they arrive and guide them through the barn to our viewing and waiting area. You may also meet with the instructor and your team before the lesson to discuss rider goals and explain roles and expectations for the class. This is also a good time to ask questions if you have any. When there is something you aren't sure of, always asked an experienced person for help, especially when it involves a horse.

1. Record your volunteer hours, including driving time, and pick up your name tag (which must be left with us after each class)
2. Check the lesson board at the barn entry to see what your role will be, what horse, tack and lesson information the instructor has left for you to prepare before the lesson
3. Leaders:
 - a. 30 minutes before lesson: gather up your horse's grooming tools and tack **before** getting the horse.
 - b. 25 minutes before lesson: safely lead the horse into the barn and, with permission before entering the arena, warm up the horse at the walk in the arena for 5 minutes before grooming and tacking. Be sure to bend the horse and walk them in circles as well as in both directions along the rail.

c. 15 minutes before lesson: groom and tack the horse. If the rider is able to assist and has proper supervision of their instructor or side walker, they may assist with grooming and tacking.

*Never allow a rider to perform grooming and tacking without the instructor's prior approval. Never allow a rider to walk behind the horse or pick a horse's hooves.

**Unless you are approved for bridling, allow the instructor to bridle a horse because, done improperly, this can hurt or scare the horse.

4. Side walkers:

a. 15 minutes before lesson: gather up rider supplies, greet riders and their families as they enter the barn and let the instructor know they have arrived. If rider is capable of assisting with grooming and tacking the horse, you may be assigned to supervise the rider while he/she assists the Leader with grooming and tacking. Side walkers are to stay with their rider before mounting for the lesson.

Safety Rules (for Horse Handling)

- Do not kneel around a horse when you are picking their hooves. If they move suddenly, it is too difficult to move out of the way quickly if you are on your knees.
- Always talk to the horse before, if you must walk behind.
- Never duck under the horse's neck. Instead, walk around the front of them when they are on cross ties.
- All riders must wear ASTM approved safety helmets that have been properly fitted before grooming and tacking a horse.

Leader Guidelines

1. Hold lead rope in right hand 6-12 inches from the snap to allow natural head movement. Extra rope should be held in your other hand neatly folded, never wrapping around your hand.
2. Always lead from the left side just by the horse's nose.
3. Keep 2 or more horse distances away from other horses. If you must, cut across the arena to find more space or walk the horse in a wide circle. **Always inform your rider before changing directions or speed so they can adjust their balance.**
4. Make turns slowly and do so only at the walk. Be sure your rider and the entire team are aware you are planning a turn.
5. To stop, say "ho" or "whoa" followed by a gentle tug backward on the lead rope, then release. If the horse does not respond immediately, respond with several small tugs. Slow your walk or stop and face the horse to **show them with your body language** that you are requesting a halt.
6. When horse is stopped, stand in front of and slightly to one side of the horse facing it. From this position you can see their right eye. Allow them to turn their head but keep them quiet by softly speaking to them or petting them.
7. When the rider is controlling the horse, allow more slack in the lead rope (12 inches or as directed) so you will not influence or confuse the horse.
8. When the instructor asks the rider to give the horse a command, give the rider 10 seconds to process the instruction before asking the horse to do it.
9. When changing pace, set the pace rather than following the horse's pace. So the rider is not thrown off balance, move from a walk to a fast walk into a trot to accelerate. To slow, move from a trot to a fast walk, then to a walk.

10. Be sure to hold the horse's head straight and not pull at their head when you are leading them at a walk or trot.
11. Never hit a horse, esp. while a rider is mounted.
12. Allow enough room for side walkers along the wall.
13. When passing a rider going in an opposite direction, stay on the right side as if driving a car, passing left shoulder to left shoulder.
14. If the horse is frightened by an object, let him stop, face the object, look at it and sniff it. Give him time to overcome his fear and not flee from it. Use a calm, slow voice.
15. After the lesson, run the stirrups up and loosen the girth a few holes until the horse is used again or is unsaddled. Some riders may assist you with this step but be sure they walk in front of the horse, not behind.

Side Walker Guidelines

1. The side walker(s) help the ride with balance and reinforce the instructions, if asked, in the lesson. The inside side walker (closest to the instructor) will clarify instructions, if asked by the instructor. Too many people talking to the rider can be confusing.
2. If a rider has a leader and 1 side walker, the side walker should walk on the right side and the leader on the left.
3. Remain aware of your rider at all times while being conscious of the horse, leader, instructor and other activities around you.
4. Do not lean on the horse or set your elbow on him.
5. Do not touch the horse when the rider is using their body and leg aids to ask the horse to move.
6. You may need to reinforce the instructor's directions and, if asked to assist the rider, allow the rider 10 seconds to process the information before you begin to assist. Use a consistent physical cue, such as tapping the right hand, to reinforce the instructor's directions if the rider is confused about an instruction.
7. After mounting from the ramp, watch rider's feet to be sure they are kept up away from the ramp.
8. Do not talk with the rider or other volunteers once class has started. Rapport building conversation is wonderful at appropriate times before the lesson.
9. Let the instructor know when you need to switch sides due to discomfort. There is a procedure for safely switching sides. Always switch sides in the middle of the arena if there are other horses in the arena.

Ways to support the rider:

1. Thigh hold: place arm across rider's thigh and grasp front edge of saddle
2. Belt hold: hold rider's safety belt to assist with balance- **WITHOUT** pulling down on belt. Use other hand to support leg.
3. Leg hold: Walk besides rider's leg to assist when needed, and grasp ankle to keep foot from moving too far forward or backwards. This is sometimes used in combination with the thigh hold.

Special Note on Falls

Falls off a horse are rare but they can happen. Don't panic! Leaders stop all horses and each volunteer tends to their rider or horse to keep everybody calm. The instructor is responsible for the fallen student.

Mounting/Dismounting

Mounting a rider onto a horse and dismounting must always be done by an instructor. The **Leader's role** during mounting is solely to hold the horse calmly still and pay attention to the instructor and rider. The **Side walkers' roles** during mounting will vary though safety of the rider is always the priority. There are different ways to mount a rider and your assistance will be required, as the **side walker**, in different ways to ensure safety of the rider.

1. Off side assistance/Spotter: Side walker slides down stirrup iron and stands on the horse's right side and assists with moving the rider's leg and foot over the horse's rump or withers and neck during the mount, pay careful attention not to hit the horse with the rider's foot. Spotters must position themselves with good balance with feet shoulder width apart and knees bent.
2. Wheelchair assist: Volunteer brings wheelchair up the ramp prior to mounting.

Leaders must attend to the horse only and does not assist the rider. Never pull on the horse's lead rope during mounting as it may scare the horse. If the horse begins to back up, loosen your hold on the lead rope.

Volunteers often assist with **dismounting a rider** by gently guiding the rider's leg either over the rump or the withers and neck of the horse while the instructor attends to the rider. After a rider has dismounted the side walker must stay with the rider. In some cases, the side walker may assist my leading the wheelchair down the ramp and out of the arena.

Emergency Dismounts: Only during an emergency dismount should a volunteer dismount a rider. In some occasions an instructor may ask for an emergency dismount very quickly. At other times the instructor may have time to reach the rider and perform an emergency dismount with or without your assistance. When possible, the inside side walker should perform the emergency dismount, unless they are unable to due to their size or due to the direction the rider is leaning. The rider must be removed from an unsafe scene and protected from the horse. The Leader must remain with the horse unless the horse is loose, in which case the instructor will halt the class (if there are other riders) and instructions will be given at that time.

The most skilled and experienced volunteers will be asked to perform the most challenging roles to assist the instructor. During mounting, a strong, calm volunteer with good common sense and recent volunteer training will be asked to assist. The volunteers are never to mount or dismount a rider, unless performing an emergency dismount.

After Class

The Leader may lead the horse out of the arena for untacking. A rider may assist with leading, in which case the rider would lead from the left while the Leader would walk on the right side to assist. A small rider may lead by holding the tip of the lead rope while the leader holds end the closest to the horse.

1. Place horse on cross ties (remove bridle gently, place halter on and attach cross ties)
2. If horse is not being ridden again, untack horse
3. Return horse to stall or paddock as instructed
4. Put all grooming supplies and tack away in its appropriate location, rinse bit if necessary
5. Sweep up grooming area
6. Note any unusual behaviors of the horse to instructor and remember to sign out!