

# Inspire Equine Therapy Program



## Volunteer Manual

Updated June 2021

Main Telephone: (727) 348-7104

[volunteercoordinator@inspireequinetherapyprogram.org](mailto:volunteercoordinator@inspireequinetherapyprogram.org)

[www.inspireequinetherapyprogram.org](http://www.inspireequinetherapyprogram.org)

1743 Doncaster Road, Clearwater, FL 33764

Welcome new volunteers, we are delighted to have you join us!

Volunteers drive the Inspire Equine Therapy Program, are indispensable at all levels of the organization and need not be equine oriented. Some do bring skills in horsemanship, others bring leadership skills, and others simply bring understanding and acceptance in helping others to seek fuller, more satisfying lives. Volunteers also bring many new ideas and insight to the program and frequently enlist their friends! Ask any Inspire volunteer and they will readily state that they gain as much, or more, than they give.

As a volunteer, you will learn and achieve, as well! The information in this manual is designed to assist you in understanding some of Inspire's policies and procedures. This handbook is not all-inclusive and does not include every policy or protocol relating to volunteers at Inspire. Please feel free to ask staff members or seasoned volunteers if you have further questions or concerns. Thank you for your interest in Inspire Equine Therapy Program!

### **Volunteering at Inspire Equine Therapy Program**

Inspire Equine Therapy Program could not operate without dedicated volunteers – they are the backbone of the program. Without the extra sets of hands to help riders sit tall, to groom and care for horses, or to help in the office, it would be difficult to operate the program. Inspire Equine Therapy Program takes considerable care and effort to find, train and keep excellent and motivated volunteers. Inspire Equine Therapy Program offers an ideal volunteer opportunity for adults and young people

- ❑ An outdoor activity
  - ❑ A service that results in joy and growth for people with disabilities
  - ❑ Physical work and exercise
  - ❑ Interaction with animals in a farm setting
  - ❑ An expanded circle of friends
  - ❑ Rewards in smiles, progress in skill and enthusiasm from everyone involved
  - ❑ A chance to help others
  - ❑ Community service hours from some schools
  - ❑ Service hours for service learning students
  - ❑ Activities for clubs and professional organizations

### **Team Approach**

At Inspire Equine Therapy Program, we practice a team approach. No matter what job you choose to volunteer for at Inspire Equine Therapy Program, you are an integral part of the team. For instance, different professionals from the areas of Equine Assisted Service will work together with our volunteers during class to provide a team approach to services. A PATH certified professional will always be present to oversee the safety of equestrian interactions no matter what volunteer job you chose. If you choose to work in the barn, the office, whatever you are part of the Inspire Equine Therapy Program team and are greatly valued.

### **Volunteer Jobs Available at Inspire Equine Therapy Program**

At Inspire Equine Therapy Program there is a job for everyone. It may come as a surprise to you that not all volunteers are experienced equestrians. Certain tasks require horse experience, but that is not necessary in many other volunteer roles. Many of our volunteers begin with little or no experience, but through Inspire Equine Therapy Program's hands-on educational opportunities, have gone on to become fine horse handlers. Volunteers need to be a minimum of 14 years old.

### Side walker:

The side walker (either 1 or 2) walks to the side of the rider during class. The side walker's primary responsibility is for the safety of the student during class.

### Horse Leader :

The primary job of the horse leader is to deal with the horse, not the student.

Horse Leader requires special testing. If you have extensive horse experience and want to be a horse leader, please contact the volunteer coordinator.

### Barn Care:

Volunteers assist the Barn Manager or Assistant Barn Manager with keeping the barn and horse paddocks safe, clean and organized.

### EFL Volunteer:

Volunteers assist EFL Facilitator in the area of safety for all involved.

### Carriage Driving Team:

Volunteers assist with carriage driving lessons, including the wheelchair accessible carriage.

### Agricultural Job Training Volunteer:

Volunteers assist with teaching job skills to adults with disabilities.

Other Jobs: Because Inspire Equine Therapy Program is primarily a volunteer program, if you have any special skills, talents, please let us know – you never know what help we might need. Some of these jobs include:

- Office help
- Accounting & Legal support
- Fundraising & Computer skills
- Facility repairs & maintenance; General Contractor
- Artistic work & Photography
- Serving on Advisory Boards or Committees
- Musical skills & Entertainment
- Public Relations, Grant writing
- Special Projects from individual staff members

### **Attendance**

**Volunteers must be willing to commit themselves to a regular day and time for a full session (12 to 15 weeks) so that our students are able to participate.** They must also commit to notifying the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible if illness or time conflicts prevent them from performing their assigned duties. This notification is necessary so that a substitute may be found in time. Do your best to contact someone and not just leave a message. **DO NOT** send an email to cancel unless you are pre-arranging an absence. Understand that cancellations cause an enormous ripple effect. **We request that you notify the Volunteer Coordinator with as much notice as possible—at least 48 hours prior to your scheduled time if you have to cancel.**

## Attire

Remember that you will be working in a professional setting. It is expected that volunteers will use good judgment in selecting appropriate clothing. When choosing your clothing – consider “Safety First” –inquisitive hands can pull off your jewelry, excessively baggy clothes can get caught on things, etc.

### What to Wear:

- ❑ Inspire Equine Therapy Program Volunteer T-shirt or Polo
- ❑ Comfortable clothes-appropriate to the season-that you don't mind getting dirty
- ❑ Sneakers or boots
- ❑ Sunscreen, bug repellent, sunglasses, hat or visor
- ❑ Inspire Equine Therapy Program Name Tag
- ❑ Long hair needs to be tied back

### What NOT to Wear:

- ❑ Jewelry (necklace, bracelet, hoop/dangling earrings) – stud earrings are ok
- ❑ Excessively tight or baggy clothing or short shorts (need to be mid thigh)
- ❑ Perfumes that can attract stinging insects
- ❑ Bare midriff or other revealing clothing
- ❑ Open toe shoes, sandals, clogs
- ❑ Clothing with inappropriate slogans, decals, etc. Please no political statements.

## Barn Rules

**ATTENTION! The following rules apply to all program participants, staff members, volunteers, and anyone who visits Inspire Equine Therapy Program. These rules are designed to insure safety, a primary concern here. Please help us to enforce these rules!**

- No abusive, threatening, or violent behavior towards people or animals will be tolerated.
- Alcohol, illegal drug use, and firearms are prohibited.
- Absolutely NO smoking is permitted in the barn, or anywhere except on the dock.
- There will be NO RUNNING OR SCREAMING in the barn or around the horses.
- No one is permitted at the stables, in the barn, or in the adjacent paddocks and pastures, unless a staff member is with them.
- No one may enter a pasture containing horses unless accompanied by a staff member.
- No one is allowed to handle program horses, feed, or pet horses, unless supervised by a staff member.
- No one may ride an Inspire horse unless authorized by the Executive Director.
- **All riders and Drivers must wear an ASTM-approved helmet** while mounted and use safety stirrups or wear hard-soled shoes with heels.
- Children must be supervised at all times. Volunteers must leave children at home.
- Dogs **MUST** be on a leash and have prior approval by the Executive Director – this includes Service Dogs.
- Barn aisles must be kept clean and free of obstruction.

## Cell Phones

Please turn off or mute all cell phones when in the barns or riding arenas, as they can startle the student or the horse.

## **Confidentiality**

We are a professional organization. Inspire Equine Therapy Program is bound by a policy to maintain confidentiality of information regarding our students, staff, and volunteers. Any personal information you may become privileged to through your work at Inspire Equine Therapy Program must not be shared with others.

## **Commitment of Volunteers**

At Inspire Equine Therapy Program we are committed to strengthening the relationships between the volunteers and the organization. We have found that taking the time and care in training and supervising volunteers results in “repeat” volunteers. We believe it is important to develop and maintain a relationship of mutual respect with our volunteers. Inspire Equine Therapy Program would not exist if we did not have our volunteers!

To each of you that agree to commit time, intelligence, energy, and talent to Inspire Equine Therapy Program we ask that:

- ❑ you keep your commitment and are on time for your commitment,
- ❑ you listen to us and understand that the Instructor is in charge in the class environment.
- ❑ You accept feedback from staff regarding your work and understand that their goal is to offer the best and safest experience for all,
- ❑ you stay alert, listen, and learn from the other volunteers, instructors and staff,
- ❑ you give us your best effort, maintaining enthusiasm and goodwill at all times and
- ❑ you let us know if we are not recognizing you for your efforts as a volunteer.

## **Contact Information & Email Communication**

Please keep all of your contact information current (email, phone number, address, etc.) The primary means of providing written information to all volunteers is email and Facebook. If you do not have email, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator frequently for updates.

## **Dismissal Policy of Volunteers and/or Guests**

Inspire Equine Therapy Program relies greatly on volunteers as important members of the team that provides services to and assists our clients. We also recognize the extreme importance of the safety and wellbeing of our clients, volunteers, staff, guests, and animals.

All volunteers and guests are expected to follow Inspire Equine Therapy Program 's rules and policies and may not engage in disruptive, unsafe or inappropriate behavior. In the event a volunteer or guest does not comply, **the following actions may be taken:**

### **Level 1 Verbal warning**

Breaking of Inspire Equine Therapy Program 's rules and/or policies and procedures may be followed by a verbal warning from the Executive Director and be documented in the incident report book.

### **Level 2 Written warning**

Breaking of Inspire Equine Therapy Program 's rules and/or policies and procedures for a second time will be followed by a Personnel Committee meeting for discussion regarding the infraction. The purpose of the meeting is to determine the exact reason the infraction occurred for a second time and discuss with the volunteer/guest how to avoid the circumstance ever occurring again. This meeting

will be documented and placed in the incident report book.

### **Level 3 Dismissal from organization**

Immediate dismissal from the property and organization will occur for:

- Endangering the safety of others
- Inappropriate use of the facilities, mailing lists or monies
- Disruptive or abusive behavior to the animals or people at Inspire Equine Therapy Program
- Repeated disregard of the organization's rules, policies and procedures.
- Possession of a weapon
- Is under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Consistently missing scheduled volunteer times.

### **Dogs**

For the safety of the horses, riders, and other animals on property only preapproved dogs are allowed to be brought to the property. Service dogs are always welcomed, but Executive Director must be notified that they will be attending at least 48 hours ahead of visit.

### **Emergencies**

An emergency is defined, for our purposes, as any unexpected occurrence or set of circumstances resulting in a real or potential safety hazard, demanding immediate attention.

Before there is an emergency, be sure you are familiar with general safety procedures. Also, know the locations of the following:

- Telephone for emergency use is located in the main office.
- Human First Aid Kit is located in the main office on top of the cabinet by main door
- Equine First Aid Kit is located in the cabinet in the tack room.
- Fire extinguishers are located in the barn aisle, house by front door and maintenance room.

Important- The Emergency Information card is posted near the emergency phone in the office. It is the policy of Inspire Equine Therapy Program to call an ambulance if there is any doubt as to the seriousness of an illness or injury without delay.

### Emergency During Class

- The word "STAFF!" is called out alerting everyone in the arena to HALT.
- The Instructor proceeds to the emergency situation and assesses the incident. If necessary, the Instructor designates a volunteer to call 911. If injury should involve a horse, the Instructor designates a volunteer to call the Vet.
- If the incident is not serious, the class resumes.
- If the incident is serious, the Instructor designates trained volunteers to dismount the remaining students with the assistance of parents, if needed, and stays at the incident site until Emergency Personnel arrive.
- REMEMBER: If an emergency occurs during class, the Horse handler is responsible for the horse and the Side walkers are responsible for the student.
- REMEMBER: **NO ONE** including PARENTS are allowed in the ring until the Instructor says so.

### Emergency Dismount

If you are side walking next to a horse that becomes involved in an emergency, shout "STAFF!"

to alert your Instructor and horse handler of the situation. If an emergency dismount becomes necessary, the side walker the rider is falling away from needs to remove the stirrup and reins from the rider, while the side walker towards whom the rider is falling needs to remove the stirrup then hug the rider around the trunk and under the arms, pulling the rider off and away from the horse. If the side walker feels he cannot bear the full weight of the descending rider, a controlled fall can be initiated, taking care to protect the rider and side walker's heads and roll with the fall as much as possible. It is important that the side walkers break the rider's fall and does not fall on the rider.

### Universal Precautions

Universal precautions are used to minimize contact with blood and body fluids by taking steps that may prevent non-intact skin exposures of individuals to specific organisms such as Hepatitis B and Human Immune-Deficiency Virus (HIV/ AIDS). When you follow universal precautions, you assume that all persons are potentially infected with blood-born pathogens.

- ❑ Wear disposable latex or vinyl gloves when it is likely that hands will be in contact with bodily fluids. Always change gloves between clients.
- ❑ Protect clothing with an impervious material when it is likely that clothing will be soiled with bodily fluids.
- ❑ Wear masks and/or eye protection when it is likely that eye and/or mucus membranes will be splashed with bodily fluids.
- ❑ Wash hands often, before and after client care, paying particular attention to around and under fingernails and between the fingers, even if gloves are worn. If unanticipated contact with these body substances occurs, washing is done as soon as possible.

### **Feeding the Horses**

Hay and grain are only to be fed by the designated Inspire Equine Therapy Program staff or authorized volunteers. Horse treats are to only be fed by participants if the instructor has included it in the lesson plan. Treats are to be fed out of the horse treat buckets. Staff may be seen using treats in training; however, no one else is authorized to do so.

### **Gates**

All gates are to be kept closed and latched. If you see an open gate, please close it.

### **Helmets**

A safety-riding helmet is the single most important piece of equipment. It is important to understand that posture and balance of a rider will be directly affected by the fit of the helmet. An ill-fitting helmet will make proper balancing more difficult and will fail to protect the head during a fall. Overly large helmets are dangerous and uncomfortable. They may slip, obscure vision or fall off. A properly fitted helmet should be snug. The well-fitted helmet should stay on the head when harnessed without rocking or moving. A good way to check a helmet's fit is to have the rider bend down at the waist and shake his/her head. With the manufacturer's suggested adjustment, the helmet should feel secure to the rider.

All participants in classes are required to wear a helmet once they enter the mounting/tacking area for riding and driving programs. All personnel and volunteers are required to wear helmets when mounted or driving.

### How to Help a Student with His or Her Helmet:

- ❑ Place the helmet on the head sliding it front to back. It should sit level on the head at above the eyebrow level. Allow it to rest so there are two fingers between the eyebrows

and the edge of the helmet.

- ❑ Make sure the helmet is centered correctly and fasten the chinstrap. Just be sure it's tight enough so the helmet doesn't slip or fall.
- ❑ If there is a laced harness at the back, undo it before fitting the helmet and re-adjust it after the helmet is on. Place the harness below the small bump at the back of the rider's head.
- ❑ If the harness is U shaped, adjust the neck or chin strap firmly so the helmet doesn't rotate on the head when pushed up at the front or back edge.
- ❑ Practice fitting a helmet on a fellow volunteer first.
- ❑ Ask the rider how the helmet feels. For the rider whose head is a difficult size, try placing the foam spacers inside the helmet at the trouble spots.

### **Horse Leaders**

The horse leader's responsibility is the horse (not the rider). All handling of the horses outside of the classes must be cleared through the Executive Director and Barn Manager.

### Prior to Class

- ❑ Arrive 30 minutes earlier than class time to locate your horse, groom, tack, and warm up for class.
- ❑ All horses must be haltered with a lead rope attached when being led into and out of pastures, or stall
- ❑ All horses are to be tied using cross ties in the barn aisle, except for Daisy Mae, she must be held by the lead rope.
- ❑ Use grooming tools only for the horse intended - no sharing please
- ❑ Tacking - Check class chart to see what tack is to be used for the class. Check the saddle fit tags above each horse's tack area for any notes about the tack to be used (lollipop pad or riser with certain saddles on certain horses). Place the saddle on the horse behind the shoulders. The seat of the saddle needs to be level. Always pull the saddle pad up into the gullet of the saddle. Put all Velcro and keepers on saddle pads through the billets and girths (when possible). If girth has one elastic side, it goes on the horse's left side. Girth should be a couple of holes higher on the right side. Girth should be only as tight as needed to keep the saddle from sliding.
- ❑ Girth will be tightened **by INSTRUCTOR** (for class) prior to rider mounting.
- ❑ **INSTRUCTORS or APPROVED VOLUNTEERS** (see name badge) are allowed to put on bridles. Once the bridle or reins are on: **DO NOT LEAVE THE HORSE UNATTENDED.**
- ❑ For Horse headers in driving, they are to only groom the horse. The instructor will harness the horse.

### When leading a horse:

- ❑ Hold the lead rope about 6-8 inches from the snap with your right hand
- ❑ Fold the excess rope in a butterfly loop with your left hand. Never wrap the rope around your hands. Be sure the lead rope dangles between the reins.
- ❑ Maintain your own space
- ❑ Look up to where you're going, do not look at the horse
- ❑ Keep the horse at your side with their eye about even with your shoulder
- ❑ Do not allow the horse to get ahead of you
- ❑ Do not allow the horse to fall too far behind you
- ❑ Do not allow the horse to walk right behind you



## During Class

- ❑ The Instructor always mounts and dismounts the rider. Pay attention to the Instructor. The Instructor will address the rider, but as the horse leader you need to know what the instructions are as well.
- ❑ Whenever your horse is stopped, stand at an angle in front of the horse's shoulder. Your body language will tell the horse to stay put. This is during mounting, dismounting, emergencies and or anytime the horse is stopped for extended periods.
- ❑ Maintain a steady, even pace. Avoid sharp turns or abrupt changes of gait. Follow the rail unless directed otherwise. Maintain two horse lengths between horses.
- ❑ Allow the horse's head freedom of movement! As they walk, all horses bob their heads up and down. This rhythmical movement starts at the head and moves all the way down the horse's spine. This movement is what makes horseback riding beneficial.
- ❑ Reinforce the rider's attempts to control the horse. Keep an eye and ear on your rider's commands. Don't give a free ride!
- ❑ Don't drag the horse along. Encourage the horse to move out with the energy in your upper and lower body.
- ❑ Remember: with side walkers your horse is much wider. Be sure to leave enough room around barrels etc. for the side walker to pass without running into items in the arena.
- ❑ When the rider is controlling the horse, you may allow a little slack in the lead, do not influence the horse. (The horse may get confused if he feels tugs on both the reins and the lead). This may, at times be difficult if the horse tends to follow you. Allow the horse's head to point forward, not pulled towards you. Especially important at the trot.
- ❑ Allow the rider time to process the information given by the Instructor and to make an effort to comply – be patient and listen to the instructor's directions as to what to do when.
- ❑ Be aware of the rider's uncontrollable body movements, vocalizations, and behaviors.
- ❑ Manage the horse to avoid problems. NEVER discipline a horse with a rider mounted.
- ❑ Bring the horse to the center of the arena anytime the rider or side walkers need to make any adjustments. Avoid stopping on the rail.
- ❑ At the end of class, wait for the Instructor to dismount the rider. After all of the students have left the arena, lead the horse to the tacking area.
- ❑ If an emergency occurs with your rider or horse, such as: the rider having a seizure, the rider is falling off, the horse is frightened, or any other emergency requiring an emergency dismount: Stop your horse (turn him towards the wall, if necessary, as an aid for a quick stop) and stand at an angle in front of the horse to keep him stopped, then soothe him while the side walkers assist the rider. Do not leave the horse or let go of the lead rope for any reason. When the rider is off of the horse, pull the horse's head towards the student, which will cause the horse's hindquarters to move away from the student. When the horse is away from the rider, halt the horse and wait for instructions.

## After Class

- ❑ Un tack and groom horse; placing everything back in its proper location.
- ❑ If the horse came to class with a fly mask on, please make sure they go back home dressed with these items
- ❑ Bridles and saddles should be wiped down (not taken apart) after class/ride
- ❑ After grooming is complete, please return grooming kit to tack room

## **Logging Volunteer Hours**

- ❑ Please be sure to sign in and out on the tablet in the Volunteer Room. Tracking volunteer hours is very important to our organization. The information assists us in applying for grants and recognizing your contribution to Inspire Equine Therapy Program .

### **Nametags**

Nametags should be each time you are volunteering. Nametags will be kept in your designated holder in the Volunteer Room. Please return them there before you leave so you have your nametag for your next volunteer time.

### **Parking**

Parking for volunteers is located in the gravel parking lot by the garden or by the pastures. Do not park in the gravel parking lot area near the house where the disabled parking is or in the designated participant parking areas.

### **Side walkers**

The side walker's responsibility is the rider (not the horse). Be prepared to give the rider your undivided attention. Get to know him/her! If you ever feel your rider is "not himself or herself" or are concerned about him or her, notify the Instructor privately. At every lesson, reinforce what has been learned. Ask the student to share what they remember.

### Prior to Class

- ❑ Arrive 15 minutes before class so that you can assist the instructor to prepare the arena and activities for the class.
- ❑ When the rider arrives, greet your rider, then the parents/guardians at the carport by the house. Review your rider's attire, check for appropriate and safe clothing, no dangling jewelry or objects, etc.
- ❑ Fit your rider with a properly sized helmet. See Helmet Fitting Guidelines in this manual for more information.
- ❑ Stay at the picnic table at the mounting ramp with your rider until they are called by the instructor.
- ❑ Volunteers can only direct a person to the restroom and can not be alone with a participant at any time or assist in toileting.

### During Class

- ❑ Only the Instructor is allowed to mount the rider. Listen for directions from the Instructor for your rider to mount at the mounting ramp.
- ❑ Never leave your rider's side. If an object falls onto the ground, such as a glove, etc. leave it and tell the Instructor who will then pick it up.
- ❑ The side walker's position is always at the rider's knee.
- ❑ If your rider has only one side walker, it is best for the side walker to be positioned on the rider's weaker side. If both sides are the same, you should walk on the opposite side of the horse leader.
- ❑ Avoid putting a hand on the rider's back (unless told to do so). Encourage the rider to use his trunk muscles.
- ❑ Reinforce the Instructor's directions. When two side walkers are with one rider, they can share the task of communication with the rider, but be careful not to confuse the rider with too much verbal stimulation. Have the rider carry out tasks, allowing time to react to the instructions. Encourage the rider to do the exercises, games and reinforce the use of new

skills.

- ❑ The side walker should ask the rider and the leader to bring the horse into the center of the arena anytime a stop is needed. Some examples are: the rider is off balance and cannot regain balance, the saddle pad has slipped or the girth is loose, the stirrups need readjusting, the rider's helmet needs adjusting, the rider is fatigued, in pain or needs to stop for any other reason (be discreet when discussing a rider in his presence), or if you need to change sides because you are having some difficulty and cannot carry out your job in comfort and safety. When changing sides, please call the instructor over to assist.
- ❑ At the end of class, wait for the Instructor to dismount your rider. Only Instructors can do the dismount.

### After Class

- ❑ Accompany your rider to the parents/guardians. You must stay with them at all times until they are returned to their parents/guardians.
- ❑ Wipe out or spray the helmet and return it helmet bin if the helmet was borrowed.

### Manual Contacts used with Riders

To assist a mounted rider, a side walker often has to touch the rider. Always speak to the rider first, asking permission to touch him/her and giving the location you wish to touch. Most rider assistance can be given from the waist down. The following is a list and discussion of the manual contacts used in adaptive riding.

- ❑ **Ankle Support:** Often riders only need stabilization at their ankles so that they can achieve a balanced riding position. The volunteer grasps just above the rider's ankle from behind using the arm closest to the horse, if that arm is not being used for the Thigh hold. When the Ankle hold is being used in conjunction with the Thigh hold, the volunteer can use the hand farthest from the horse to hold the rider's foot by placing her hand over the rider's arch.
- ❑ **Thigh Hold:** The volunteer uses her arm nearest to the rider and grips the front edge or flap of the saddle in a spot that allows her forearm to rest midway on the rider's thigh. You may even press down and inward when needing to provide greater security for the rider. Do not lean on the horse or rider.

### **Smoking**

For the safety, health, and pleasure of all who spend time at the barn, smoking is not allowed on the property, except on the dock.

### **Spectators**

Family members and friends of riders and volunteers are always encouraged to visit and observe quietly. When lessons are in progress or horses are out, guests are required to remain in the appropriate spectator area and should always enter and exit through the designated area. Parents and guests are not allowed in the barn during lesson time. Please leave children home when you are volunteering

## Suggestions for Volunteers

As an Inspire Equine Therapy Program volunteer, your role is to be a helpful presence and support to the staff. Over time, you will develop friendships and personal relationships with Inspire Equine Therapy Program participants of all ages. This is a wonderful part of being an Inspire Equine Therapy Program volunteer, as it allows you to become part of the lives of a variety of people and lets you share your personal skills and talents. Since Inspire Equine Therapy Program works with many teens and young adults, you will get to know parents, grandparents and siblings of participants who may come along to observe a lesson. You will get to participate in the rehabilitation of participants who may be recovering from injury, or share the progress and setbacks of participants who have particular life challenges.

Inspire Equine Therapy Program will provide all volunteers with training, where you will be introduced to specific guidelines and rules that we maintain to ensure that the extent of the relationship you have with our participants feels safe and appropriate for everyone. It is important to keep in mind that "boundaries" are an important part of establishing relationships as a volunteer. While you will become a friend to many of the participants, you should also try to maintain a professional relationship. Remaining professional protects both you and the participant. While you may be asked to physically support a rider on the horse, it is usually discouraged to show physical affection to participants through touch. This is especially true of children. There are many ways you can show that you care and that you are happy to see the participants without touching. However, boundaries go further than touch. You must prepare yourself for participants, who due to their disability or personality, may be difficult, possibly rude, or overly dependent and attached to you. Remaining professional will help you deal with those situations. The key to building supportive, safe, and appropriate volunteer relationships is to help where you can, but to keep in mind that you are a volunteer - not a psychologist, counselor, or therapist. Know your limits and role. If you have a question or concern, please feel free to discuss it with a staff member.

Further, for your own safety and the safety of our students, please let Inspire Equine Therapy Program know if you have any medical conditions that might prevent you from working at certain tasks, i.e.: high blood pressure, heart condition, allergies (i.e. bee stings), etc. Heat, deep footing on the trails, combined with these conditions, could create an emergency situation. The volunteers who come to Inspire Equine Therapy Program are a dedicated group. Their love, commitment, and enthusiasm are second to none. But when a volunteer signs up to help at Inspire Equine Therapy Program, there are all sorts of things to think about.

### Tips for New Volunteers

- ❑ Always be on time for your scheduled classes or other tasks.
- ❑ Call if you will miss a class. Otherwise, instructors and participants will be waiting for you.
- ❑ Be a cheerleader for staff, participants and the program.
- ❑ Leave the instruction to the instructor. You may want to yell "heels down, Suzanne", "hold your head up, Billy", but let the professional do his/her job. You are there to assist. What distinguishes effective class volunteers is that they develop a keen awareness of the instructor, the rider and the horse. They know when to interact and speak, but also know when to be quiet. Avoid constant chatting with the rider, do not have side conversations with other volunteers and keep focused on the goal of the class.
- ❑ It is a real skill to be an active participant without becoming a distracting presence.
- ❑ Make sure you follow all Inspire Equine Therapy Program rules. Your example counts and you represent Inspire Equine Therapy Program.

- ❑ If you have a major concern about something (such as an Inspire Equine Therapy Program policy) or would like to have something explained to you, set up a meeting with the Volunteer Coordinator or Executive Director.
- ❑ Don't stew on things and do not participate in the "gossip mill" with other volunteers over something that bothers you.
- ❑ Know that all your support of Inspire Equine Therapy Program at classes, special events and other occasions is appreciated, even if you are not thanked on a regular basis.
- ❑ Food goes a long way - keep in mind that staff members, riders and other volunteers get hungry. Donations of delicious snacks and drinks are always appreciated.
- ❑ Make yourself useful by "finding" jobs, such as sweeping the office, offering to fix fences, getting together a gardening group to do some landscaping around Inspire Equine Therapy Program, etc. Be creative, but always ask before you do something.
- ❑ Don't burn out. Volunteer enough of your time to get enjoyment, but not so much that you will feel overwhelmed and start to resent Inspire Equine Therapy Program. Be prepared that you may be asked to give more and more of your time if you turn out to be a talented volunteer.
- ❑ The Volunteer Coordinator may call you at short notice to sub for another volunteer or to participate in yet another weekend activity or special event. Learn to say "no" if you need a break or if you have other plans and don't feel guilty about doing so. It is the only way to keep your self fresh for years to come.
- ❑ Whether working in the barn or assisting with a class - it gets very hot being outdoors in Florida no matter what time of year. Make sure you drink plenty of fluids to keep hydrated.
- ❑ Again, due to the heat, if at any time during performance of your volunteer tasks, you feel you need a break to cool off - immediately advise a staff member, the instructor, etc. Do not continue if you feel ill.
- ❑ Always sign in upon arrival and sign out when leaving. This way Inspire Equine Therapy Program can keep an accurate record of your volunteer hours.

Inspire Equine Therapy Program believes that every volunteer contribution, whether large or small, is immeasurable in its worth and value for our organization and, ultimately, our riders. Please accept our sincere thanks for your willingness to be a part of our organization! Please inform our Volunteer Coordinator of any questions or concerns you may have. We look forward to meeting and working with all of you!

*Thank you for volunteering  
with us!*