



# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

## Contact Information

Mailing Address: We Can Ride  
P.O. Box 463  
Maple Plain, MN 55359

Phone Numbers Office: (952) 934-0057  
Instructor/Cancellation: (612) 268-2735  
Fax: (952) 974-9688

Volunteer Coordinator: [volunteers@wecanride.org](mailto:volunteers@wecanride.org)

Web Site: [www.wecanride.org](http://www.wecanride.org)

We Can Ride connects humans and horses to transform the lives of people with disabilities and meet the evolving needs of the greater community.

## Contents

Programs Offered.....	3
About We Can Ride .....	4
Funding Sources for We Can Ride.....	4
Policies and Procedures .....	5
Safety in the barn.....	6
Emergency Plan.....	6
Volunteer Requirements.....	7
Sidewalker Duties .....	7
Additional Volunteer Opportunities .....	8
COVID 19 Policy.....	10

## Programs Offered

### ***Therapeutic Riding***

As defined by PATH International, Therapeutic Riding uses equine-assisted activities for the purpose of contributing positively to cognitive, physical, emotional and social well-being of people with disabilities. Therapeutic riding provides benefits in the areas of health, education, sport and recreation and leisure.

Throughout the world, there are thousands of individuals with special needs who experience the rewarding benefits of horseback riding. A disability does not have to limit a person from riding horses. In fact, experiencing the motion of a horse can be very therapeutic. Because horseback riding rhythmically moves the rider's body in a manner similar to a human gait, riders with physical disabilities often show improvement in flexibility, balance and muscle strength. In addition to the therapeutic benefits, horseback riding also provides recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities to enjoy the outdoors.

At We Can Ride, equine-assisted **Therapeutic Riding** is for individuals from six years old to 70 years young. These classes are taught by PATH International Certified Therapeutic Riding. Along with the many therapeutic benefits of being on a moving horse, our goals are to teach horsemanship skills. Clients may also learn to groom, lead, saddle and mount their horses. Class sizes are from one to four and include the use of one to three volunteers per client.

### ***Hippotherapy***

The American Hippotherapy Association, Inc. defines hippotherapy as a physical, occupational or speech and language therapy treatment strategy that utilizes equine movement. This strategy has evolved over 30 years. Through education and clinical experience, physical, occupational and speech and language therapists continue to refine the use of hippotherapy as part of an integrated rehabilitation approach. Using the movement of the horse as the strategy of choice has resulted in improved functional outcomes for a wide variety of patients. These positive results ensure that hippotherapy will continue to be used in treatment for many years to come.

We Can Ride's hippotherapy program involves a credentialed and licensed physical or occupational therapist working one-on-one with the client to reach traditional therapy goals without teaching specific riding skills. The therapist works with a certified instructor to create the type of movements from the horse to meet the specific treatment goals. Trained volunteers also help with balance and postural corrections.

### ***Equine Activities of Learning***

Equine activities of learning allows clients to learn to work with and about horses in a group setting. They are led by a certified instructor with the help of volunteers. Clients are in groups ranging in ages, disabilities and special needs. Clients work on the ground, learning about horse behavior, how to take care of a horse, how to catch and groom a horse, etc...

## About We Can Ride

### The History of We Can Ride

We Can Ride began serving the Twin Cities area in 1982 with only six clients. Today we serve hundreds per year. We Can Ride is a PATH Premier Accredited Center and is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. The Board of Directors includes parents of clients, program volunteers, and professionals in the areas of health care, education and business.

PATH [www.pathintl.org](http://www.pathintl.org)

PATH is a non-profit organization that:

- Promotes the well-being of people with disabilities using equine facilitated activities.
- Investigates the effects of therapeutic riding.
- Provides training and certification for instructors.
- Sets national standards and accredits programs.
- Sponsors regional and national workshops for instructors, administrators, therapists and volunteers.

### We Can Ride Location

We Can Ride moved from Minnetonka to Medina in 2017. The Medina site is located on the grounds of Three Rivers Baker Park Reserve. This site offers all types of programming year-round. It has indoor and outdoor riding arenas and uses We Can Ride owned and leased horses.

## Funding Sources for We Can Ride

We Can Ride is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit and raises funds to ensure that client fees remain low. Client fees only cover 25% of our costs. Our methods of financial support include:

- Annual fundraising events
- Contributions from individuals, groups, corporations and foundations
- Lesson fees

### Sponsorship Opportunities

As a We Can Ride sponsor, you will play an integral role in making our programs possible. You will enjoy many sponsor benefits and help make a difference in the

February 10, 2021 We Can Ride Volunteer Handbook

lives of individuals living with disabilities. Email the development team at [fundraising@wecanride.org](mailto:fundraising@wecanride.org) or call the We Can Ride office for more information.

Please see our website [www.wecanride.org](http://www.wecanride.org) or contact the Volunteer Coordinator for more information.

## Policies and Procedures

### United States Volunteer Protection Act of 1997

President Clinton signed the "Volunteer Protection Act of 1997" in June, 1997. The law grants immunity from personal civil liability to volunteers working on behalf of non-profit organizations. The law provides that volunteers of non-profit organizations cannot be held liable for harm caused by an act or omission of the volunteer provided the volunteer is acting within the scope of his or her responsibilities, is properly licensed or certified by the appropriate authorities and the harm is not caused by willful misconduct.

### Photos

Those wishing to take photographs of clients and other volunteers should ask the instructor before doing so as some clients and volunteers do not consent to having photos taken.

### Confidentiality

All staff and volunteers must adhere to We Can Ride's confidentiality policy, which forbids the discussion of any client, his/her health condition, or family situation outside the boundaries of We Can Ride. If there is a breach of this policy by an individual, he/she will be dismissed from volunteering at all of the We Can Ride sites.

### Sick Policy

[COVID 19 Sick Policy](#)

### Person First Language

Person first language is used at We Can Ride when communicating with others. The basic idea is to impose a sentence structure that names the person first and the condition second, for example "people with disabilities" rather than "disabled people", in order to emphasize that "they are people first".

Here are some more examples:

Say	Instead of
Child with a disability	Disabled/handicapped child
Developmental delay	Slow
Without speech , nonverbal	Mute

### How to Help Effectively

- Treat adults as adults.
- Do not "pat" people with disabilities on the head, shoulder, or any part of their body.
- Only help a person with a disability if they ask for assistance unless they are nonverbal or in danger.
- Always address the person with a disability directly.
- When assisting a person with a disability always ask "how" you can help.
- Do not shout. People who are nonverbal do not necessarily have hearing issues.
- Some people with disabilities need more time to process information so give them time to respond.
- If a person has difficulty speaking, allow them to finish their sentence.
- Do not make assumptions about what someone can or cannot do.
- Allow the person to try to do things before helping them out.
- Respect personal space.

If you have questions about a client, please ask the instructor.

### Cancellation of Classes

The health and safety of volunteers, clients and horses are a priority of We Can Ride. The [guidelines](#) for classes to be cancelled is as follows:

Temperature Extremes: Dangerous temperatures for travel or dangerous wind chills, or above 98 degrees and/or high humidity.

Severe Weather: Heavy thunderstorms with lightening, tornado warnings and snow/ice storms for the immediate area.

Report of Infectious Disease (COVID 19): We may send participants home or cancel a future class depending on the likelihood of spread of COVID 19. See COVID 19 section below.

If these situations arise, every attempt will be made to contact all volunteers by telephone and/or email to cancel class; however, please feel free to call the We Can Ride office at 952-934-0057 to check for cancellations. If a weekly lesson is

cancelled due to inclement weather, we will try to reschedule. Remember these are guidelines and not rules.

## Disabilities and Special Needs

Disabilities and special needs are not always apparent, making the job of giving directions and taking precautions somewhat more complex. Please ask the instructor or therapist if you have any questions about how to help your client. Also, let the instructor know if you do not feel comfortable with the job you are assigned.

Volunteers help facilitate improvement in the following areas:

Attention span	Normalizing Tone
Auditory learning	Posture
Balance	Self control
Cooperation Dexterity	Self esteem
Directionality	Sensory integration
Gait	Spatial relationships
Memory	Speech development
Mobility	Strengthening muscles
Motor Skills	Visual learning

## Safety in the barn

- All volunteers must have a completed emergency form on file with We Can Ride to be in the arena, barn, and paddocks. (This includes parents/siblings/PCA if they assist in class.)
- See requirements under COVID 19 section as well
- Volunteers are required to stay in the designated areas before, during, and after class.
- If there are horses in stalls, clients, parents, and caregivers must wait for a We Can Ride assigned volunteer or staff to escort them to the arena.
- Clients must have their side walkers with them upon entering the arena.

- Please do not feed treats to the horses. This includes placing treats in stall feed bins, buckets, or by hand.
- Clients and other children must be supervised at all times by an adult. If this is not possible, we kindly ask parents and caregivers not to bring other children to class.
- Running near the horses or in the barn is not allowed. Sudden movements can easily spook or upset the horses.
- Climbing on anything—including gates and hay—is prohibited.
- No pets are allowed except companion or helper animals. We ask prior consent be given as some horses may become excited.
- Clients, families, caregivers and volunteers are required to remain in the barn area or parking area during class.
- Clients, families, and volunteers may not visit the site during non-class times without the approval of the We Can Ride staff. Remember, we do not own these sites.
- There is no smoking allowed at any of the We Can Ride sites.
- We Can Ride is a drug and alcohol free facility.



## Emergency Plan

The following guidelines should be followed in the event of an emergency:

### Fire

Clients will be dismounted if they are riding in the indoor arena if there is a fire in the barn. The instructor will direct you to a safe area outside the barn.

### Client Falls

The teaching assistant stays with the group while the instructor checks on the fallen client. The instructor will help the client up and have him or her remount if appropriate. Should the client need medical assistance, the instructor will call for help or instruct the nearest volunteer on the emergency procedure.

## Severe Weather

In the event of severe weather, clients will be dismounted and everyone will seek shelter in the tack room.

## Seizures

If the client has a seizure when on the horse, the leader will keep the horse calm and the side walkers will make sure the client is safe on the horse. An emergency dismount will be performed by the side walkers, instructor, or TA if the client needs to be dismounted.

Your instructor will review the emergency procedures each session.

## Volunteer Requirements

- Volunteers must be at least 14 years old to participate in classes and 18 to feed.
- A class volunteer should be able to walk for at least one hour without fatiguing, be able to jog for very short distances, be able to walk with his/her arm (one at a time) above shoulder height and be able to support a modest amount of weight.
- Volunteers do not need to have horse experience or experience working with individuals with special needs or disabilities, as we provide training.
- We ask volunteers to generally commit to one eight-week session. By committing to a regular class, you are assigned to work with the same client every week, thereby creating a good working relationship and a strong team.
- If you are unable to commit to volunteering every week, we encourage volunteering as a substitute. As a substitute you are able to pick when you help depending on when we need it which is a great choice for people who have fluctuating schedules.
- Volunteers are required to complete one eight-week session in order to be invited to have the opportunity to attend training to be a barn aide or leader.

## Volunteer Schedules

- If you have to cancel last minute, please call the instructor line at (612) 268-2735.
- If you know ahead of time you are unable to volunteer at your designated time, please email the Volunteer Coordinator.

- Mileage to and from a volunteer job may be tax-deductible. Volunteers are responsible for keeping track of mileage.

## What to Wear

- Wear long pants and good sturdy shoes or boots (closed-toe shoes). Low cut shirts, revealing clothing, clothing with inappropriate graphics/logos, and spaghetti strap tank tops are not allowed. If you arrive to the barn in inappropriate footwear or clothing you may be asked to change or leave.
- Do not wear dangling earrings/jewelry or anything that could get caught or pulled on by the client.
- See also COVID 19 section on masks

## When you Arrive

- Volunteers should arrive at the barn at least 15 minutes before lessons start.
- When you arrive, please sign in and check the barn sheet.
- The instructor will provide you with information about your volunteer tasks for the class.
- If you have questions, concerns, new ideas, or thoughts about your client, please do not hesitate to talk with the instructor. Communication between volunteers and instructor is not only encouraged, it is vital.

## General Information

- Classes depend on volunteers so please communicate any absences early to the volunteer coordinator.
- Volunteers may be dismissed if they are not able to provide appropriate support to the client, demonstrate unsafe behavior in the barn or classes, or if they continually no-show for their assigned times.

## Sidewalker Duties

From the time the client arrives until he or she leaves, the sidewalker is responsible for the client and for the client's safety.

- Greet your client when he or she arrives.
- Watch your client carefully when working around the horse. Always lead your client around the front of the horse. Do not allow the client to pass behind the horse.
- Assist the instructor ONLY if asked during the mounting or dismounting.

- The instructor or teaching assistant will adjust the length of the client's stirrups before and during a lesson.
- Assist the client during class as directed by the instructor.
- The instructor will inform you if your client has a seizure disorder and what to do in the event that a seizure occurs.
- Encourage clients to complete their tasks. If you have questions about the client's riding goals, ask the instructor.
- When there are two side walkers, one will be designated as the coach. Too much input from volunteers can be confusing to some clients.
- Talking to other volunteers during classes can be very distracting to some clients. Please converse with others before and after classes.
- Be aware of the client at all times. Anticipate balance problems and be prepared to assist your client. Provide enough assistance to maintain safety, but don't take the challenge out of the lesson for your client. When in doubt, always consult with the instructor.
- Help the client understand the instructor's directions and praise his or her good work and effort.
- Keep in mind that the client is present when you are talking with others, even if he/she does not seem to be engaged.



9

## Additional Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers who have completed one eight-week session may be invited to have the opportunity to attend training in the following:

### Barn Aide (BA)

- Arrive 1 hour before class
- Bring horses in from pastures
- Groom & tack horses
- Learn more about the adaptive equipment

- Stay after class to clean up and put tack away

### Feeder

- Setting up feed and hay for the horses
- Leading horses in and out for feed
- Mucking paddocks and stalls

### Leader

- Warm up the horse before class
- Maintain control of the horse during class
- Control the horse during mounting and dismounting
- Keep the horse quiet and focused during the class

### Teaching Assistant (TA)

- Assist instructor during class
- Learn more about various disabilities
- Assist with mounts and dismounts
- Help write lesson plans
- Teach a portion of the lesson

### Sanitation Manager

- Prepares sanitation materials before class
  - bucket of water for toys
  - Set up appropriate number of saddle racks, soapy buckets of water, rags and leather cleaner on left side of the aisle
  - Fill hand washing station jugs and check that sinks are connected and working correctly
- Sanitize the main areas before first class and after each class is mounted
- Helps with sanitizing materials after a lesson
  - Help TA sanitize all reins and toys used class
  - Help BA sanitize saddles
- Helps close down the sanitization activities for the block of classes
  - Help TA sanitize and put away large props
  - Help BA sanitize and condition any remaining saddles or tack
  - Empties buckets, etc.
- If trained on grooming, can help groom a horse for next class



## Other Opportunities

These are available year-round and don't require completing an eight-week session:

- Office Volunteers
- Fundraising
- Barn Maintenance
- Special Events
- Special Projects
- Tack Cleaning



## Special Events

During the course of the year, We Can Ride is involved in numerous special events where we are in need of extra help. We welcome your smile and extra hands on deck as we spread the word about We Can Ride.

## COVID 19 Policy

We Can Ride has modified its existing volunteer roles and policies during the COVID 19 pandemic. This section summarizes those changes.

### Policies

Our detailed policies for cleaning, roles, and safety protocols will be sent after your application is reviewed and training scheduled.

Our Business Preparedness Plan, as required by Minnesota, is available in the office and upon request.

### Volunteer Roles

Each role has been modified to reduce the chance of spread of the virus and to increase sanitation and physical distancing procedures.

[Summary of role changes](#)

Sanitation Manager – available role during the pandemic

- Prepares sanitation materials before class
  - bucket of water for toys
  - Set up appropriate number of saddle racks, soapy buckets of water, rags and leather cleaner on left side of the aisle
  - Fill hand washing station jugs and check that sinks are connected and working correctly
- Sanitize the main areas before first class and after each class is mounted
- Helps with sanitizing materials after a lesson
  - Help TA sanitize all reins and toys used class
  - Help BA sanitize saddles
- Helps close down the sanitization activities for the block of classes
  - Help TA sanitize and put away large props
  - Help BA sanitize and condition any remaining saddles or tack
  - Empties buckets, etc.
- If trained on grooming, can help groom a horse for next class

### Required Additional Training

We Can Ride has added a training video covering COVID 19 procedures. You will receive a link to this video prior to your first shift. You must view it in order to volunteer.