



**MYHEROES, LLC.**

“Overcoming obstacles, one hoof at a time”

**VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

Updated 2016

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678-984-7774**

Welcome to the My Heroes Volunteer Program!

We are so glad to have you with us. You have just joined an extraordinary group of volunteers who love special needs individuals and horses. We realize that the volunteer orientation program covers a lot of information in a short period of time, so we have provided this Volunteer Handbook for you to keep. In this manual you will find all of the information covered in our orientation program as well as other useful information designed to help you increase your skills and feel more confident in whatever role you choose to serve during your time as a volunteer here at My Heroes.

**REMEMBER:** Working with horses is a risk activity and attention to safety is our first concern for all individuals involved. There are as many ways to do things as there are horse people. When you are here with My Heroes, we ask that you do things the way they are outlined in this training manual.

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### **First things first:**

- There is absolutely no smoking or solicitation at the My Heroes Center. Smoking is prohibited in all of our buildings or paddock areas.
- All volunteers must have their completed liability and release forms signed and turned in to the Volunteer Coordinator or Instructor on duty BEFORE beginning any volunteer activity at the center.
- Volunteers must sign in when volunteering! Volunteer sign in sheet is located on the tack room door.
- All volunteers must wear a nametag while volunteering.
- For program safety and consistency, we ask that all volunteers attend at least one volunteer orientation during their time here at the center.

### **Barn Conduct and Safety Rules**

For the safety and well being of all individuals and program animals at My Heroes, we ask that you abide by the following set of guidelines when in our barn. These safety rules are posted in various visible locations throughout the barn.

1. If you take it out, put it away.
2. If your horse makes a mess, clean it up.
3. All riders must wear a helmet when riding My Heroes horses.
4. No running, yelling, jumping or screaming in the barn or observation areas. "Horsing around" can harm riders in the arena.
5. Know the horse "danger zones" and avoid them (directly behind, in front of and under the necks of horses).
6. Close-toed shoes must be worn when working with the horses (NO sandals or clogs). No

bare feet inside the barn at any time.

7. Always use a lead rope when moving a horse.
8. Never lead a horse under another horse's occupied crossties. Have someone unhook the horse before leading your own horse through.
9. Students/visitors may not be INSIDE occupied horse stalls without an instructor or volunteers' permission. If you are in a stall with a horse, the stall door must remain halfway open.
10. You must be at least 15 years old and have permission from the instructor/therapist on duty to bring horses out or in from the paddocks.
11. Riders MAY NOT go INSIDE the paddocks except to get a needed horse.

## **What to expect:**

The first time you volunteer at My Heroes, please introduce yourself to either the head instructor and/or therapist(s) on premises. We will then give you instructions on how you can best help for that day or evening. Once you are familiar with how the program runs, you will find yourself jumping in and helping like it's old hat!

## **My Heroes @ CSU Staff:**

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Brendan Roggow: Physical Therapist	(507) 841-1394 <a href="mailto:brendanroggow@myheroestherapy.com">brendanroggow@myheroestherapy.com</a>

## **My Heroes @ Chastain Horse Park Staff:**

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### **Sign in:**

The volunteer sign-in sheet is located on the tack room door. Please sign in and out when you are here. The tracking of volunteer hours is used for grant writing purposes and many volunteer awards given at the end of the year.

### **Name Tags:**

Please wear your nametag when volunteering, you will find it on the tack room door. Please wear it near your neck so it can be easily read. Please leave your tag at My Heroes when you are finished for the day.

### **Attire:**

Correct shoes are required for work around the horses (safety rule #6). We ask that for your own safety you refrain from wearing dangling jewelry, bracelets and necklaces. In warmer months shorts are okay, remember to wear sunscreen and bug spray. In colder months layering your clothing is best as the barn is cold

### **Class Times:**

Class times vary throughout the year. All class time schedules will be posted either online or on the tack room wall. My Heroes runs in three semesters which are generally fourteen weeks in length. We schedule one week or two weeks off between sessions for horse respite. Scheduled breaks are posted one week in advance as a reminder to our riders and volunteers.

### **Cancellations:**

My Heroes cancels classes during severe weather. In the winter months, cancellations for CSU are posted on Facebook. During the warmer months, we will cancel classes for severe thunderstorms or fires, etc. Instructors will do their best to contact all volunteers before they

leave their homes to come to the barn if classes are cancelled. Again, if you are with the CSU program check Facebook to see if there are any cancellation updates.

*If you are unable to come to your session, please call and leave a message via voice mail as soon as possible. Most classes and their occurrence is dependent on your presence so the earlier we know the earlier for finding a possible replacement.*

### **Promptness and Reliability:**

We ask that all our volunteers arrive at least 15 minutes before a scheduled class time and volunteer at least once a week for two hours per session. Your consistency helps our organization deliver the highest quality program to our riders. If you are unable to volunteer due to illness or other reasons, please do your best to find a replacement. If you can't, then call the instructor on duty so that we may secure a replacement. In many cases your attendance is critical for a client's safety during a lesson.

### **Safety Day:**

My Heroes Center holds several Safety Days throughout the year. The purpose of a Safety Day is to allow our volunteers to not only show the skills they have mastered, but also to learn new skills and to learn what is expected of them during an emergency situation.

### **Leader:**

You must be at least 15 years of age or older and be approved by Stef Viktora to be a My Heroes horse leader. Extensive horse experience is not a must, but is a huge benefit. As a leader during a therapy class your only responsibility is the horse. You must pay careful attention to what the instructor says during class, for cues for turning the horse around, halting and games.

- How to lead a horse: The proper position for leading a horse is to stand on the left side of the horse, between his shoulder and eye. Hold the clasp end of the lead rope in your right hand (closest to the horse's halter) to lead. The slack of the lead rope should be held in your left hand, looped in a figure eight. DO NOT let the end of the lead rope drag on the ground or wrap the lead rope around your hand at any time.
- Do not drag the horse or let the horse drag you. A quick pull and release on the lead rope is the most effective way to get a horse to cooperate. Use voice commands such as "whoa" (stop), "walk", "trot" and "easy" (slow down) to communicate as well.
- Spacing while leading the horses in the arena is very important. Generally you should be at least one horse length away from the horse in front of you. If you find yourself too close, it is recommended to walk a small circle towards the center of the arena and then continue on. ALWAYS inform your side walkers that you intend to make a small circle for spacing between the animals so that they can prepare the rider for the change in direction and balancing.

- At the mounting ramp: If you are to lead a horse to the mounting ramp, pay close attention to the instructor's directions on where to position the horse. You'll want to position the horse as close as possible to the side of the ramp on which the student is mounting. When leaving the mounting ramp area, pay special attention to any tack or the student's feet in the stirrups to ensure nothing gets caught on a railing during departure.
- Your responsibility while the rider is mounting is to keep the horse as quiet as possible. Stand in front and slightly off to the right of the horse with both hands on the sides of the horse's halter. If the horse is wearing a bridle, DO NOT HOLD THE BIT, this will cause the horse to toss his head. If you are having horse trouble, alert the instructor. It is better to avoid a potential problem than not say anything.
- Do not attempt to help the student mount the horse. The instructor/therapist will do all the mounting unless the rider is instructed to go ahead without help.
- Once the lesson is underway, please pay close attention to the therapist/instructor. Try as much as possible not to interfere with the rider's attention on the therapist/instructor. Many of our riders are easily distracted and may often initiate conversation; please try to direct the student's focus back on the lesson when appropriate. Unless you are told to help give specific direction to the rider by the instructor, please do not instruct the client to move or to do anything. Too many voices disrupt our client's concentration.
- If another horse is having trouble in the arena, stop your horse and stand in front of him, slightly to the right (as in the mounting ramp procedure). Stay stopped until the instructor gives permission to walk on.
- If your horse is having problems...remain calm. If you cannot control your horse, ask for an emergency safety dismount.
- Should a horse get loose during class, every leader in the ring must halt their horse and stay with their horse. The instructor will catch the loose horse.
- If there is a fall, the leader is to remain with the horse. Do not let the horse go to assist a fallen rider. The instructor will take over to help a rider down.
- Horses communicate with body language, please refer to the section of this manual on "horse sense" for cues on how to interpret horse language.

### **Side walker:**

You must be at least 15 years of age or older and have been oriented by a My Heroes therapist/instructor. As a side walker, your only responsibility is the safety of the student and making sure they stay centered on the horse.

- The proper position for a side walker is parallel to the rider's leg about 8-10 inches away from the horse and rider. Do not walk too far behind the rider or too far in front of the rider or you will not be able to be effective if there is a situation where the rider becomes unbalanced. If you walk too far behind the rider you also risk being in one of the danger zones of the horse.
- Please keep conversation to a minimum and redirect the student's attention back to the instructor. In many cases, too many voices, even if the student initiates conversation, is an "over stimulation" and can have negative effects on the student after they leave the center.

- Thigh hold: Once in a while the instructor may ask the side walkers to use a “thigh hold” method of stabilizing the rider. Using your arm closest to the rider, place your forearm across the top of the rider’s thigh and hold the surcingle handle with your hand. The pressure of your forearm will stabilize the rider during walking or trotting.
- At the walk or trot, if the rider starts to slip, please tell the leader to halt the horse and gently push the rider back into the correct centered position.
- It is better to push a rider back into the center of the horse rather than to let him or her fall. Accidents, although infrequent, can and do happen. Please do not underestimate the importance of paying attention to the rider, no matter how comfortable you have become in your role as a side walker.
- Emergency Dismount/Safety Dismount: If the leader or instructor asks for an emergency dismount, the side walker will wrap their arms around the rider’s waist and ask the rider to clear their feet from the stirrups (if applicable). If the rider is unable to communicate, the other side walker should clear the rider’s feet on that side. The rider is then pulled off the horse and moved to safety.
- Know your limitations.
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### **Emergencies in brief:**

The leader takes control of the horse. One side walker stays with the rider at all times. At the therapist’s request, the other side walker may call 911 from the office or barn phone, if the need arises. In the case of a “rider down” situation, all horses in the arena must halt. The instructor is the only individual responsible for assisting the fallen rider. All instructors at the My Heroes Center are trained and certified in CPR and First Aid from the American Red Cross and should be the only individuals assisting a rider down.

### **Tacking, Grooming and Barn Maintenance:**

Many individuals who are unable to help in the arena during class are able to help groom and tack the horses as well as participate in the daily cleaning and maintenance of the barn.

### **Tacking and Grooming:**

It is helpful to become familiar with tack and grooming tools as well as the anatomy of the horse before you begin working with the animals in the barn.

### **Helpful tips:**

Do not use quick, jerking or excessive movements around horses.

Be mindful of a horse’s sensitive areas: Face, flanks, girth area, tummy, mane and tail. Think about how you would like to be groomed or touched and apply this to the horse. Remember: horses can feel even a tiny insect alighting anywhere on their bodies...for large animals they are very sensitive creatures!

DO NOT go underneath a horse's belly or neck/chest. A horse's first instinct is to go forward when startled, it will not matter if you are in the way of that.

Do not stand directly in front of a horse in the crossties or let the horses rub you with their heads. Many horses would love to use you as a scratching post and a nudge from a 1200 lb animal is enough to knock you down or break a bone. It may seem cute or affectionate if a horse wants to nudge you, but please be mindful that the very same horse, if allowed to have that habit, will not discriminate between you and a child or a child with a disability walking with crutches or a walker. If a horse wants to rub you with its head, simply move out of its range or push its head away out of your space. You may have to repeat this as horses are great "negotiators" of what they want and will test you to see if you "mean it."

Please put away all tack and grooming equipment after you are finished with it.

### **Barn Maintenance:**

Because it is a home to our therapy animals as well as a university teaching facility, we strive to keep the facilities property clean and well maintained at all times. There is always an area that needs tidying up or a floor to be swept. The farm is a large area with many different areas to be maintained. Instructor/therapists and the instructor on duty are in charge of making sure all barn duties are completed at the end of each night of lessons. Please check with them if you are looking for something to do.

*If you are feeling particularly creative, go to them with your ideas on getting things done or any special projects you see that we may have overlooked.*

### **Days of Service:**

Many times throughout the year, we are fortunate to have different groups from the community participate in a Day of Service for our organization. If you have a group that would like to do a one-time service project please contact our Volunteer Coordinator.

### **Horse Sense:**

Benjamin Franklin said, "The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man". Many people who work with the horses during their time here at My Heroes say that the bonds made with these special animals is both unique and therapeutic even if they are only brushing and grooming them for class.

Horses do have a "sixth sense" when evaluating the disposition of those around them. They can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good therapy horse is chosen for their gentle and sensitive response to a rider. At times there may exist a personality conflict between horses and handlers. It is important to tell the instructor or instructor/therapist if you are having a difficult time handling a particular horse. Additionally, do

not be embarrassed to tell an instructor that a horse that acts “strong” might intimidate you. It is better to work with a horse that you are compatible with than risk an accident by putting yourself in a situation that is uncomfortable.

My Heroes Center will also schedule one on one training for help on groundwork with a horse if you so desire.

In addition to understanding the horse’s “sixth sense”, we need to appreciate and increase our awareness of the horse’s lifestyle and the way they use body language to communicate. This will assist us in responding appropriately to his reactions to situations and his behavior.

### **Flight as Natural Instinct:**

Horses would rather run away from perceived danger than turn and face it. A horse’s sense of hearing is thought to be so acute that “hearing and not seeing” is often the cause of his fright/flight response.

What this means:

- A sudden movement or noise may cause the horse to “spook” or try to flee. They might try to bolt sideways, or run forwards.
- Remain calm and in control. Speak to the horse in a reassuring manner.
- A horse may get frightened in the crossties or by being held or tied too tightly and he will try to “escape” by pulling back. Often until something gives—usually his halter or the cross ties. The best way to handle this is to relax your hold on him or untie him quickly and calmly and he will relax.
- Horses are herd animals. If a horse gets loose, often times they will run back to the herd for safety. In an arena setting this could be you (if there are no other horses in the arena) or the other horses in the arena.

Most horses in the therapeutic riding setting have less of an instinct to flee and are chosen for this reason. The horse may look to you for reassurance. It is helpful if the volunteer remains calm and talks to the horse in a soothing voice.

Please see the end pages for illustrations on basic horse anatomy, emotions and indications to temperament.

### **Ground Manners:**

Ground-work is a term used to describe working with a horse on the ground, not riding. My Heroes Center horses are chosen, in part, for their proper manners on the ground. This translates into being safe for most people to handle, given the proper instruction. Consistency of handling is the most important part of creating good ground manners in horses. The nature of the program at My Heroes means that horses are handled by many different individuals daily. We ask that if you have trouble with a horse on the ground that you please approach a staff member for the correct way to handle a difficult animal. We try to schedule a Ground Manners Clinic at least once a year that is open to all volunteers. At this clinic we learn in a hands-on method how to work with horses in situations where accidents are most likely to occur or behavior problems can be addressed in a safe and effective manner. Please look for

the clinic dates at the Volunteer Bulletin Board area.

### **One Final Note:**

Did you know that many My Heroes Center students, especially in the beginning stages of their riding, simply could not participate without the assistance of volunteers? Some need as many as three volunteers working together at one time just to ride for a few minutes around the arena. My Heroes Center volunteers collectively donate many many hours per month to help the program run. This translates into everything from helping in the arena for class to working with the horses to keep them fit and sound to sweeping the aisle ways and filling water buckets on a daily basis.

**Thank You!** You are the lifeblood of this program. Without you there would be no My Heroes! Our students would not receive the therapy they need if it were not for your generosity of spirit in the giving of your time and energy. We try to show our gratitude once a session with scheduled volunteer appreciation parties, as well as awards for Volunteer of the Year at the end of the school year. Please join us for these events!

Thank you again!

The Staff at the My Heroes, CSU and Chastain Horse Park.